

Facilitation Guide

Restoring the Spirit – Celebrating the Nineteen Day Feast

An Assembly Development Module Workshop



“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization.

“. . . Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counselors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the function of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believer’s capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá’í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.”

*The Universal House of Justice, Ridván message
to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996*



Celebrating the Nineteen Day Feast

Overview for Facilitators

Purpose:

- ★ To create a deeper appreciation of what the experience of Feast is intended to be
- ★ To consult on creative ways to enhance and refine the celebration of Feast

This workshop is equally useful to Assemblies and to individuals. Its objective is to create a deeper appreciation of what the experience of Feast is intended to be and to begin the process of consulting on creative ways to enhance and refine the celebration of Feast. Activities provide familiarity with the framework, purpose, and possibilities of the three parts of Feast. The workshop also focuses on preparation for Feast; integrating the arts into Feast; planning Feasts that meet the needs of children, youth, and adults; incorporating cultural diversity; and uniting hearts through hospitality and fellowship.

When facilitated with a group of 5-9 participants from the same Assembly, this workshop will require approximately 4 hours for the core material plus additional time for each optional extension. A larger or more diverse group will require extra time for group discussion and reporting back.

What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations.** A one-page sheet containing a quotation from a letter of the Universal House of Justice which provides the foundation of the workshops. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators.** This one-page guide (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process.** A one-page description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these workshops within that process, and how to request an Assembly Development Representative to facilitate the workshops. (p. 4)
- ★ **Guidance for Facilitators.** A four-page collection of suggestions for preparation before the session, tips for facilitating during the session, ideas for closing the session, and guidance on what to do with the workshop report form and evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this workshop.** A three-page listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the workshop, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 9-11)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this workshop.** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the workshop. (pp. 12-42)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** A two-page overview of the vision and mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)
- ★ **Evaluation Forms.** A two-page evaluation form for the facilitator to complete and send to the Office of Assembly Development and a two-page evaluation form for the Assembly to complete two months after the workshop. (unnumbered pages at the end of the Facilitation Guide)

Note: You will also want to obtain a copy of the Participant Handouts.

The Assembly Development Process

“...enabling Assemblies to rise to a ‘new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities’....”

The National Spiritual Assembly focuses its Assembly Development initiatives towards facilitating the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.

The development process is designed to be furthered by presentation of a variety of module workshops, each module covering a distinct topic or function. Use of these workshops will help Assemblies to understand more clearly the spiritual nature of their institution, to improve their performance, and to attain an ever advancing level of maturity as the primary institutions of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. When used with the general community, the workshops will heighten appreciation for the station and responsibilities of local Assemblies and deepen the desire to support and assist these institutions in their growth process.

The National Spiritual Assembly highly recommends that each workshop be studied with a Bahá’í facilitator who resides outside the particular Bahá’í community, although these materials may be used by Assemblies on their own. A list of Bahá’ís who serve as facilitators, called Assembly Development Representatives, is available from the Office of Assembly Development of the Bahá’í National Center at (847) 733-3490 or by e-mail to OAD@usbnc.org.

Assemblies may choose to participate in these workshops as an institution or may invite other Assemblies or their own community to join them in exploring the modules. Workshops may also be used at Bahá’í schools or Institutes. If they are used with both Assembly members and other community members, Assemblies are encouraged to set aside follow-up time at one of their future meetings to consider the impact and implications of what was learned on their collective functioning.

Workshops in this program range from two to four hours in length, with the majority averaging just over three hours. They are, however, adaptable to different timing needs. Workshops are divided into separate segments which can be selectively deleted if timing needs require this. Optional supplemental materials are also included for use if more time is available.

Guidance for Facilitators

Before the Session

Personal preparation

- ★ Take time to prepare yourself spiritually and materially to facilitate this workshop. Meditate on your role in facilitating the friends' thoughtful study and consultation. It may also be helpful to reflect on key quotations about Bahá'í consultation and education.
- ★ Read through the workshop and its handouts of quotations in advance of the session and ponder the themes in them.
- ★ Pray for assistance. Feel confident that the Blessed Beauty will guide and confirm you as you endeavor to serve the Faith.

Preparation of the course and its materials

- ★ Become familiar with the workshop and its options and extensions.
- ★ The amount of time suggested for each segment of the workshop is a minimum only. If the number of participants in a workshop is large and many small groups will be reporting back, you will need to allow more time than the minimum to complete some segments.
- ★ If some of the participants are not proficient in English, consider ways to meet their needs. For instance, those who understand spoken English but do not read it easily could be paired with those who can read quotations aloud. These adjustments may affect the amount of time necessary to complete an activity or exercise.
- ★ Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. Determine in advance how many expansions to the module, if any, are appropriate. Some factors to consider are available time, general level of experience and deepening of the participants, and local interest in a particular topic.
- ★ Have materials (such as a few extra handouts, art supplies, extra pens and pencils, small gift item) ready for each participant. It is wise to have slightly more of everything than you anticipate needing in case a larger than expected group of friends attend.
- ★ If the workshop segments you will be using require cards for games or exercises, prepare these beforehand. If segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.
- ★ Select devotional readings, prayers, and music you will want to use and make sure you have the equipment to play any music you might have.

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

Preparation of the meeting room

- ★ If possible, ask to see the meeting room in advance. Arrive early to set up. Adapt the room set-up to meet your needs, if possible.
- ★ Create an inviting atmosphere of beauty, dignity, and warmth to welcome participants. Possibilities include photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, holy places or great teachers, heroines and heroes; framed quotations, decorating the walls with objects of beauty, tablecloths, arrangements of fresh or dried flowers, lighting, candles, music from diverse cultural backgrounds, bowls of potpourri or drops of rose oil, seating arrangements, and refreshments.

Creating and maintaining a spiritual environment

- ★ Warmly greet the participants. Be sure that the spirit of the Faith permeates the room. While conveying the content of the workshop is important, it is equally important that the style of interaction does not feel harsh, nervous, or rushed. Be a bringer of light to the hearts of the group.

During the Session

Facilitating discussion

- ★ These workshops ask facilitators to raise several questions to the group for possible consultation. If one question fails to elicit much response, move on to another one.
- ★ Express appreciation for each participant’s contribution.
- ★ Be mindful of who has spoken and try to give everyone an opportunity to offer a first comment before giving time for individuals to offer second or third comments. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to go around the room, inviting each person to comment briefly in turn.
- ★ As groups are consulting on quotations and focus questions, go from group to group and listen in, without interrupting the consultative process. You may want to note comments or questions that arise and bring them up when the groups reassemble.

Using time

- ★ When small groups are asked to consult or work on an art project in a certain amount of time, give each group a “5-minute warning” when their time is nearly finished. This could be done either by going from group to group as a reminder or by ringing a small bell.

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

- ★ Be flexible and sensitive to the needs and understanding of the participants. If a particular question or point engages the group in lengthy but topic-related discussion, it may be preferable to allow participants to continue to pursue an area that intrigues them rather than to cut off discussion and move on to another point or exercise. Participants often experience exploring less material but in greater depth as more satisfying than a hurried look at many aspects of a topic.
- ★ You may choose to make the decision yourself about whether to let a group spend more time on one area and skip later exercises or activities. You may also choose to involve the group as a whole in the decision: “Since this topic is generating a lot of interest, do we want to 1) spend more time here and not explore a later topic, 2) extend the time of our session and not skip any segments, or 3) move on from this topic, go through all the following segments, and end at our original agreed-upon time?”

Dividing into small groups (*in addition to counting off*)

- ★ Put stickers on participants name cards or leave cards with stickers at their place and have them group themselves according to sticker design.
- ★ Divide into groups by the month/season in which one’s birthday falls.
- ★ In theater/auditorium seating, form groups around where participants are sitting.
- ★ Create funny groupings and ask people to choose the group that best describes them (Example: people who love apples are group A; if your favorite color is blue, join group B; if Casablanca is your favorite movie, join group C; if dogs are your favorite pet, join group D.)
 - If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work together as an Assembly or work in groups composed of different Assemblies, depending on the exercise and their preference.
 - If you have a combination of Assembly and community members attending a session, you may wish to mix the groups together for some exercises and separate Assembly members from community members for other exercises.

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

Closing the Session

- ★ Provide verbal instructions on how to turn the evaluation forms in.
- ★ You may want to give a gift to each participant of a card with a beautifully lettered quotation that pertains to the workshop.
- ★ Encourage Assemblies that went through this workshop in a group larger than their own membership to have a follow-up period at an up-coming meeting to consult on what was learned and how it can be applied to their own functioning.
- ★ Suggest choosing a date and picking a topic for the next Assembly development workshop.

Please note: Have the participant evaluation forms turned in to you and return them with your evaluation form. Be sure to use the machine readable forms and instruct participants on the Bahá'í Locality Code and how to fill in the forms.

- ★ Complete the workshop report form and mail it with the participant evaluation forms to:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the
United States
Office of Assembly Development
1233 Central St.
Evanston, IL 60201
OAD@USBNC.ORG
fax (847) 733-3486
phone (847) 733-3490

After the Session

- ★ Send a follow up letter to the Assembly(ies) to thank it/them for participating and include a copy of it/their evaluation form to fill out two months after the workshop.

Thank you for serving the Cause by facilitating this Assembly development workshop!

Highlights of Celebrating the Nineteen Day Feast

Objectives:

Participants will

- ★ Explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ Become familiar with the framework, purpose, and possibilities of the three parts of Feast
- ★ Identify aspects of preparation of Feast and preparation for Feast
- ★ Consult on creative ways to enhance and refine the celebration of Feast

Agenda outline: (total time: 4 hours)

★ **Introduction** (15 minutes), pp. 12-13

An opportunity to introduce the Assembly development process, familiarize participants with the objectives of this workshop, and present an agenda outline of topics and activities.

★ **The call to “a new state of mind”** (10 minutes), pp. 14-15

A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”

★ **The Nineteen Day Feast** (25 minutes), pp. 16-19

Activities to create a deeper appreciation of what the experience of Feast is intended to be, including sharing participants’ memories of the best Feast they ever attended and considering elements that made those Feasts memorable.

★ **The framework of the Feast** (10 minutes), p. 21

An activity to create awareness of the balance between the portions of the Feast.

★ **Meeting on common ground: Consulting together** (60 minutes), pp. 23-24

Small group study of the Writings to gain a broader understanding of the purposes of the consultative portion of the Feast and to explore how information and suggestions can be most constructively offered.

★ **Feast preparation** (40 minutes), pp. 27-29

Small group and pairs activities to identify specific aspects of preparation by individuals, hosts, and the Assembly that can enhance the experience of Feast.

★ **Room for variety** (40 minutes), pp. 30-31

Group study of the Writings and brainstorming to broaden the sense of possibilities for celebration of the Feast.

★ **Envisioning possibilities** (30 minutes), p. 33

An artwork activity to consolidate learning, coupled with a brief opportunity for participants to write down actions they intend to take to further enhance the quality of Feast.

★ **Closing** (10 minutes), p. 34

Inspirational quotations promising divine confirmations, followed by optional group singing of festive songs.

Highlights, continued

Extension sessions for use if more time is available

- ★ ***Further consideration of the call to “a new state of mind”*** (variable amount of time), pp. 14-15

A guided discussion examining existing assumptions and conceptions and the feelings evoked by the process of change.

- ★ ***Memorization of the Writings*** (5 minutes), p. 18

Recitation in unison of a verse included in the Participant Handouts.

- ★ ***Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast*** (20 minutes), p.20

Examination of the Writings to discover the intended effects of the Feast on the individual and on the community.

- ★ ***Requirements and possibilities*** (30 minutes), p. 22

Small group study of the Writings on various technical requirements and possibilities of holding the Feast, including who may attend, what may be included in the devotional readings, and when and where Feast can be held. An alternative activity of a scavenger hunt is included.

- ★ ***Offering critical thought at Feast*** (30 minutes), pp. 25-26

An opportunity to explore in greater depth the conditions which allow criticism to be shared constructively.

- ★ ***Using Brilliant Star as a Feast resource*** (30 minutes), p. 32

Small group selection of an activity and development of a plan to use that activity at Feast.

Times given above are minimums based on a group of 5-9 participants from the same Assembly. A larger or more diverse group will require extra time for group discussion and reporting back. Material which appears in italics is provided to supplement and extend the session if more time is available. If less time is available, you can skip whatever section seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

Note: You will need to inform the sponsoring Assembly that Participant Handouts for each participant should be ordered directly from the Bahá'í Distribution Service prior to the workshop.

Highlights, continued

Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard or flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of colored highlighters
- ★ Newsprint
- ★ Crayons, colored pencils, or markers for making posters
- ★ Soft music for action planning time
- ★ **Optional:** *a sheet of thick paper, such as butcher paper, on a wall*
- ★ **Optional:** *a mobile*
- ★ **Optional:** *copies of Brilliant Star magazine, especially the Jan-Feb 1993 issue, with activities suitable for use at Feast*
- ★ **Optional:** *Games from the Brilliant Star game kit*
- ★ **Optional:** *A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a quotation from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to give as a gift to each participant (an example suitable for photocopying is at the end of the Facilitator Guide)*

Introduction and Objectives (15 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To introduce the Assembly development process
- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this workshop
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities

Materials needed:

- ★ Butcher paper and a variety of markers

Optional set-up

- ★ *Place a sheet of butcher paper on a wall and have a variety of markers available. As participants arrive, register, and enjoy coffee or tea prior to the start of the workshop, invite them to express their feelings about the Feast in some artistic way – in verse, drawings, or prose. This can continue during breaks.*

Activities:

1. Brief devotions

- ★ Open with brief devotions that you have selected or ask for a volunteer. Consider including the following excerpts from the Hidden Words: “Wouldst thou seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the righteous. . . .” (Persian, #58) and “. . . fellowship with the righteous cleanseth the rust from off the heart. He that seeketh to commune with God, let him betake himself to the companionship of His loved ones. . . .” (Persian, #56).

2. Introduction (1-2 minutes)

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources of the Office of Assembly Development and the Assembly Development Module Workshops (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached toward the end of the Facilitation Guide). Highlight that the purpose of the workshops in the Assembly development process is to facilitate the development of “a new state of mind” on the part of Assembly members and the community, thereby enabling Assemblies to rise to the “new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities” envisioned by the Universal House of Justice.
- ★ This particular workshop focuses on enhancing and refining the celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast.

3. Overview of objectives (1 minute)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this workshop and have them posted.
- ★ See page 9 of the Facilitation Guide for a list of objectives. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added.

Introduction and Objectives, continued

4. Review agenda (3 minutes)

- ★ Go through the agenda for the session, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or previously prepared flip chart.
- ★ See pages 9-10 for an agenda. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added. You may also need to make timing adjustments depending on the audience composition: a full Assembly vs. mixed groups of participants, experienced vs. newly-formed Assemblies, etc.

5. Sharing questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite participants to share questions they have about this topic.
- ★ Make a list of these and, at the end of class, check to make sure that all have been answered or that the questioner has been referred to information elsewhere.

The Call to “A New State of Mind” (10 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind”

Activities:

1. Discussion of quotations (5 minutes)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind” (see Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4).
- ★ Invite participants to share thoughts and feelings about “a new state of mind” and the process of moving toward it.
- ★ Offer the thought that one implication is the need for all of us to listen to “old” quotations with “new” ears in order to find new insights in familiar quotations.

You may also choose to share two other thoughts:

- ★ *First, a new state of mind is not a one-time paradigm shift – a condition of once we “get it,” we will necessarily “have it” forever – as much as a continuing process of reorienting our minds from what is to the vision of what the possibilities are, as described in the Writings and Ridván messages.*
- ★ *Second, it is normal to slide back into “old” states of mind – especially under stress – for quite a while. States of mind are habits, or default settings, which take conscious, deliberate effort and time to change.*

Optional extension: Further discussion of quotations

- ★ *Have participants read aloud the remaining quotations on “The Call to a New State of Mind.” The following questions can be asked in any order, and you have the option to ask them after the paragraph in question or after all quotations are read.*
- ★ *Ask the group as a whole:*
 - *How might “an expansion of thought” be stimulated? (par. 3)*
 - *Where do these assumptions and conceptions come from? (par. 5)*
 - *How do we “clear the ground for new conceptions of social organization”? (par. 4)*
 - *How comfortable is the process of “ever more rapid change”? (par. 7)*

Correlating handout:

- ★ “The Call to a New State of Mind” pp. 3-4

The Call to “A New State of Mind,” continued

- *Is resisting or hiding from this “onrushing” and “quickenning wind” an option for us? for humanity as a whole? (par. 4)*
- ★ *Ask for thoughts on the process of “experiencing the rigorous effects” of an “onrushing” and “quickenning wind” ventilating “the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives.” (par. 4)*
- ★ *Ask for one word descriptions of the feelings that being part of such a process evokes. Acknowledge as a normal part of the change process all the feelings, whether they express excitement or reservations.*

2. Read passage, underline, and share (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read the second quotation, a passage from the Ridván 1996 message from the Universal House of Justice (Participant Handouts, p. 3) silently and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of this module.
- ★ Invite participants to share what they have underlined.
- ★ Comment that in its Ridván 1996 message the Universal House of Justice stated that “. . . the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior” and specifically mentioned “the practice of collective worship of God.” Since the local community is a medium in which every believer can live and work in the presence of the sacred, efforts to improve the quality of the Nineteen Day Feast take on special significance.

The Nineteen Day Feast (25 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To gain a deeper appreciation of what the experience of Feast is intended to be
- ★ To spot gaps between what the Feast is intended to be and how the Feast is currently being observed

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and markers

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast” pp. 5-7

Setting up the activities

- ★ Read aloud the first quotation on the handout “Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast” (Participant Handouts, p. 5):

“The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends. . . and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.” (The Universal House of Justice, August 27, 1989)

- ★ Comment that this workshop will look at the “framework, purpose and possibilities” of the Feast, beginning with the purpose.

Activities:

1. Reading aloud the Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Divide the group in half. Refer all participants to “Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast” (Participant Handouts, pp. 5-7).
- ★ Explain that these quotations will be read aloud. One group will be asked to listen for and underline words or phrases that answer the first focus question [“What metaphors and expressions are used to describe the Feast?”] while the other group will listen for and underline words or phrases that answer the second focus question [“What are purposes of the Feast?”].
- ★ To ensure that participants in the first group understand what to listen for, explain that a metaphor applies a word or phrase to an object or concept it does not literally describe in order to suggest a comparison. An example would be “A mighty fortress is our God.” Metaphors are used often in the Bahá’í Writings.
- ★ Have several readers with strong voices read aloud the quotations.
- ★ Reassure participants that although a large number of concepts were introduced in these quotations, the workshop will provide opportunities to explore them more fully.

2. Group exploration of the Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask those who were listening for metaphors and expressions used to describe the Feast to share what they underlined. If some of the following are not mentioned, share them as well:

The Nineteen Day Feast, continued

- not a meeting
 - a confluence of holy souls
 - a convocation of those who love the Lord
 - a retreat for the people of the All-Merciful
 - a palace-hall for all who sing His praise
 - a mansion of the moon and stars
 - an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members
 - this divine festival
 - a symphony in three movements
 - the culmination of a great historic process
 - the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved
 - the foundation of the new World Order
 - a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact
 - a link that connects the local community in a dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order
 - an arena of democracy at the very root of society
 - this common institution of the people
 - a bringer of joy
- ★ Refer back to the reference to Feast as “an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members.” Mention the uniqueness of this institution: we are not elected or appointed to it – we simply belong to it. Since children are considered Bahá’ís, they also are members of this institution. Making Feast an exciting experience for all members of this institution will be considered later in the workshop.
- ★ Refer back to the reference to Feast as “an arena of democracy at the very root of society.” Ask participants what attributes an arena has. Ask if this image seems an active one or a passive one.
- ★ Ask each participant to select a metaphor or description that has particular meaning to him or her. Suggest that they may want to call this description to mind each month before attending the Feast. *Optional extension: Invite participants to share why a particular metaphor or description is especially meaningful to them.*

The Nineteen Day Feast, continued

- ★ Ask those who were listening for purposes of the Feast to share what they underlined. List these on a flip chart labeled “Purposes of the Feast.”

Note: If you will be using Optional Extension Session One, “Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast,” do so at this time.

Optional extension: Memorization of the Writings (5 minutes)

- ★ Write the following verse (*Participant Handouts*, p. 22) on a whiteboard or blackboard:

“This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind.”

- ★ Have participants recite in union. Remove 2-3 key words after each recitation. Symbols may be placed above the words to aid in memorization.
- ★ Ask participants to individually ponder the question “To what extent is your Feast achieving these purposes?”
- ★ Comment that if the experience of Feast falls short of what the House of Justice describes as a “glorious outcome,” the second quotation on the handout (*Participant Handouts*, p. 5) suggests two possibilities:
 - 1) The House of Justice states that “To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends.”
 - 2) The words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá suggest that if we do not find ourselves “spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world,” then perhaps we are not holding the Feast “in the proper fashion.”
- ★ Point out that these quotations indicate that deepening our understanding of the institution of the Feast and changing the ways in which we observe the Feast will qualitatively enhance the experience.
- ★ Ask participants to individually ponder the question “Does our community tend to simply ‘hold’ Feast or do we ‘celebrate’ Feast?” Mention that both Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice often use the term “celebrate” when referring to the Feasts as well as the holy days.

The Nineteen Day Feast, continued

***Optional:** Mention that we do not “hold” birthdays or Naw-Rúz – we celebrate them. Ask participants what words and emotions come to mind when they hear the word “celebration.”*

Possibilities might include festive, laughing, people want to come, warmth, everyone feels a part.

- ★ Suggest that thinking of Feast as a spiritual celebration may open doors of creativity.

3. Envisioning possibilities (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to remember the best Feast they ever attended – the one that came closest to meeting these purposes and making them feel “spiritually restored, and endowed with a power that is not of this world.”
- ★ Ask for 2-3 word descriptions of elements that made that particular Feast memorable. Write these on a flip chart sheet labeled “Best Feasts.”
- ★ Call attention to the variety of elements mentioned. Share the thought that there is no single, one “right” way to celebrate the Feast. Rather, there is a common set of purposes and a common framework of the three sections, but within these there is room for wide variety.
- ★ Mention the example of snowflakes: all are 6-sided, but each pattern is unique, as each Feast is a unique expression of reverence, joy, and fellowship reflecting the personalities, cultures, and needs of each community.
- ★ Ask participants to hold these elements in mind while we look at the framework and portions of the Feast. We will then consider how we can incorporate a variety of elements into our Feasts to make them richer and more meaningful.

Optional Extension Session One: Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast (20 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To perceive the intended effects of the Feast on the individual and the community

Activities:

1. Individual reading of the Writings (10 minutes)

- ★ Have participants read silently the quotations on the handout “Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast” (Participant Handouts, pp. 8-10).
- ★ Ask them to use two different colored highlighters to identify passages that answer each of the two focus questions:
 - What are the intended effects on the individual believer?
 - What are the intended effects on the community of friends?
- ★ As participants work, create two columns on a flip chart or board. Label one column, headed by a single smiley face, as “individual” and label the other column, headed by a group of smiley faces, as “community.”

2. Group sharing of findings (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to share answers to the first focus question. List these in the appropriate column.
- ★ Ask participants to share answers to the second focus question. List these in the appropriate column.
- ★ Note that several responses fit equally well in both columns.

Materials needed:

- ★ A variety of colored highlighters
- ★ Flip chart and markers

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Effects of the Nineteen Day Feast” pp. 8-10

The Framework of the Feast (10 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To understand the balance between the portions of the Feast

Setting up the activities

- ★ Hold up a mobile for display or ask participants to imagine one.
- ★ Comment that one aspect of the beauty of a mobile is that it is fluid and adapts to changes in its environment but that its elements have a fundamental balance and relationship to each other. Even while moving they retain, or return to, this balance.
- ★ Suggest that the various parts of the Feast have a similar balance and harmony in their relationship to each other and as part of a larger whole.

Activities:

1. Individual reading of Writings (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read silently the quotations on the handout “The Framework of the Nineteen Day Feast” (Participant Handouts, pp. 11-12) and consider the focus questions:
 - What do the various parts of the Feast contribute to the whole experience?
 - Why is maintaining a balance between them important?

2. Sharing of insights (5 minutes)

- ★ Invite comments and insights stimulated by the focus questions.
- ★ Share the observation that while the first portion of the Feast is commonly called the devotional part, the entire Feast, including the consultative and social parts, is spiritual in nature.

Materials needed:

- ★ *Optional: a mobile*

Correlating handout:

- ★ “The Framework of the Nineteen Day Feast” pp. 11-12

Optional Extension Session Two: Requirements and Possibilities (30 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To become familiar with various technical requirements and possibilities

Activities:

1. Group study of the Writings (15 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into three groups. Refer participants to three handouts:
 - “Devotional Readings at Feast” (Participant Handouts, p. 13)
 - “Attendance at Feast” (Participant Handouts, pp. 14-16)
 - “When and Where Feast Celebrations Can be Held” (Participant Handouts, pp. 17-19)
- ★ Explain that each topic explores in further depth an aspect of the framework of the Feast.
- ★ Ask each group to choose a different topic from among the three choices or assign topics to groups. Each group will study the quotations, find answers to the focus questions, and prepare a brief summary of their findings.

Note: The handout on devotional readings is shorter and could be assigned to a group needing more time to work.

2. Groups share summaries (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask each group to share with the others their topic, focus questions, and summary.

Optional: After the group that studied Feast attendance shares its summary, invite comments on the following questions:

- ★ *What would you miss if you did not attend Feast?*
- ★ *What would your community miss if you did not attend Feast?*

Alternative activity

If more time is available, you may choose to use the focus questions of the three handouts as items in a scavenger hunt, with answers found on the handouts. Have groups work as a team to find as many answers as possible within a time limit. Assign each group a different handout as a starting point. When time is up, reassemble the groups and go through the list of focus questions to ensure everyone hears the answer to each question.

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “Devotional Readings at Feast” p. 13
- ★ “Attendance at Feast” pp. 14-16
- ★ “When and Where Feast Celebrations Can be Held” pp. 17-19

Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together (60 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To gain a broader understanding of the purposes of the consultative portion of the Feast
- ★ To explore how information and suggestions can be most constructively offered

Setting up the activities

- ★ Read aloud the quotation from the Universal House of Justice previously studied on the handout “Purposes of the Nineteen Day Feast” (Participant Handouts, pp. 6-7):

“The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting ‘a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.’”

- ★ Suggest that while all portions of the Feast call us to new patterns of behavior, the consultative or administrative portion requires that we develop skill in what the House of Justice has described as “the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá’í consultation.” (*Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 224)
- ★ Share the thought that while some community members have the opportunity to refine their consultative skills through serving on an Assembly or a committee, Feast is the only time when all members of the community can practice and model these skills together.

Activities:

1. Small group review of the Writings (30 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into groups of 3-4. Ask each group to read the quotations on “Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together” (Participant Handouts, pp. 20-22) and answer the focus questions.

2. Groups report back (20 minutes)

- ★ Go through each of the focus questions, one at a time, asking each group to share its thoughts, understandings, and suggestions on each question. Invite a different group to start the sharing process with each question. Answers that have already been mentioned do not need to be repeated.

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together” pp. 20-22

Meeting on Common Ground: Consulting Together, continued

3. Shared reflections on offering “gifts of thought”

(5 minutes)

- ★ Refer back to the phrase used by the Universal House of Justice in the second quotation on the handout describing the Feast as a place “where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought.”
- ★ Invite very brief comments on the following questions:
 - What is characteristic of a gift?
 - How does one choose a gift for a loved one?
 - How does one wrap a gift?
 - How does one present it to the recipient?
 - How does it feel if a gift is ignored or its value minimized?
- ★ Invite comments on how these reflections on gifts relate to the manner of our contributions and their reception during the consultative portion of the Feast.

4. Closing comments (2 minutes)

- ★ As a community collectively improves its mastery of consultative skills, offering and receiving each other’s “gifts of thought,” these become its “group norms,” or the normal way of behaving.
- ★ Improvement helps consultation proceed more smoothly and creates the beneficial results mentioned in the Writings.
- ★ In addition, as the gap between theory (what the Writings call us to do) and practice (what we normally do) narrows, it becomes easier to teach the art of consultation to new Bahá’ís – adults, youth, and children – because their experiences at Feast provide a living model of both the spirit and behaviors of consultation.

Note: If the subject of offering critical thought generates a large amount of discussion, you may want to do Optional Extension Session Three, “Offering Critical Thought at Feast,” at this point.

Optional break: *A short break could be taken at this point. If a break is not taken, it may be desirable to have participants stand and stretch in place.*

Optional Extension Session Three: Offering Critical Thought at Feast (30 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To explore in greater depth conditions which allow criticism to be shared constructively

Setting up the activities

- ★ Invite participants to consider the meanings of critical thinking and criticism. Point out that misunderstandings sometimes arise because the words have both positive and negative meanings and implications.
- ★ Write on a flip chart or board these dictionary definitions:
 - critical = inclined to find fault or to judge with severity; involving skillful judgment as to merit
 - criticism = act of censure, fault-finding; act or art of analyzing and judging quality
- ★ Suggest that having one word convey two such different qualities and behaviors can be confusing. The positive aspect of analyzing and judging merit and quality is necessary to consultation, while the negative aspect of vehement disapproval, harsh reproach, and blaming undermines institutions and creates disunity among individuals.

Activities:

1. Reading guidance from the Universal House of Justice (5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Offering Critical Thought at Feast” (Participant Handouts, pp. 23-24). Tell them that this is a fuller version of a passage just studied.
- ★ Ask a participant to read the entire passage aloud. Ask participants to listen for descriptive or modifying words and phrases and to underline them.

2. Group reflection and discussion (20 minutes)

- ★ Comment that the words “responsibility,” “loyal,” and “intelligent” are applied to those having critical thinking to offer. Clearly, those offering critical thought are not just “humored” but valued and carefully listened to.
- ★ Point out that appropriate criticisms are given for the purposes of improving or remedying conditions. They are constructive rather than negative in character. They are given not to merely point out flaws but rather to see if others perceive the same problem, to actively suggest alternative approaches, or to use the consultative process to uncover possible solutions.

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart or board and markers

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Offering Critical Thought at Feast” pp. 23-24

Offering Critical Thought at Feast, continued

- ★ Invite participants to share examples of modifiers describing the way in which criticism is appropriately given.
Examples include:
 - “fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly”
 - “constructive criticism”
 - offered when “he conscientiously feels he should”
 - “motive, manner, mode” and “love” are “relevant”
- ★ Point out that any comments that may have the result (vs. the intention) of “undermining the authority of the Assembly” should be “strictly avoided” at the Feast. Such a criticism could more appropriately be raised with the Assembly itself in private, rather than at the Feast.
- ★ Point out also that appropriate criticisms concern conditions in the community; they are not personal complaints against an individual.
- ★ Ask for examples of the strong language the House of Justice uses in upholding the importance of criticism and its cautions about the “misuses of the process of criticism” and “ill-directed criticism.” [examples include: vital responsibility, essential activity; baneful, dreadful, schismatic]
- ★ Ask for examples of what might be a “misuse of the process of criticism” or “ill-directed” criticism.

3. Summary comments (1 minute)

- ★ The Administrative Order provides both channels and conditions for expressing criticism.
- ★ Keeping criticism within these channels and conditions makes the power of speech beneficial and keeps this “vital” and “essential” activity from degenerating into a harmful force.
- ★ Expressing criticism outside these channels and conditions can lead to backbiting or undermining the authority of the institutions.

Feast Preparation (40 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To recognize the need for preparation prior to the Feast
- ★ To identify specific aspects of preparation for individuals, hosts, and the Assembly that can enhance the experience of Feast

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and markers

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “Feast Preparation” pp. 25-27
- ★ “Preparation of and for Feast” p. 28
- ★ “Sample Check Sheet of Questions for Feast Hosts” p. 29

Setting up the activities

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Feast Preparation” (Participant Handouts, pp. 25-27). Ask a participant to read aloud the first quotation on the handout concerning preparation of and for the Feast.
- ★ Comment that we will be exploring three aspects of Feast preparation: preparation of the Feast by the Assembly, preparation by the Feast by its host(s), and preparation for the Feast by those attending it.
- ★ Share the observation that in our role as Feast hosts we are generally aware of the need for advance preparation. In our role as Feast participants, however, we may not yet be in the habit of preparing ourselves and our families to attend Feast.

Activities:

1. Small group exploration of the Writings (15 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into small groups. Have each group read through the quotations, answer the focus questions, and use their answers to fill in the lists on “Preparation of and for Feast” (Participant Handouts, p. 28).

2. Groups report back (5 minutes)

- ★ Go through each of the focus questions, asking each group to share its lists. Items that have already been mentioned do not need to be repeated.
- ★ After groups have shared their lists of ways in which individuals can prepare themselves for Feast, refer back to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s admonition to “think how to make happy and pleased” the other members. Invite participants to privately consider how often this is part of their own preparation for Feast.

Optional: Invite comments on what the effect would be if each person attending Feast thought of “how to make happy and pleased” a believer he or she did not know well or did not particularly feel close to.

3. Brainstorming in pairs (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants, working with the person next to them, to engage in some quick brainstorming.

Feast Preparation, continued

- ★ Ask half the pairs to brainstorm ideas to help individuals and families prepare spiritually, emotionally, and physically for Feast. These ideas should help make the Feast day or evening a special occasion and something to look forward to.
- ★ Ask the other half of the pairs to brainstorm what elements a host could use to help children and adults feel they are entering into a sacred time or space, especially when Feast is held in places which are also used for other purposes.

Optional extension: If the community has young children, divide pairs into three groups instead of two. Ask the third group to brainstorm how young children can be included in preparation of the Feast, particular when the Feast will be held in their home.

- ★ *If the following are not included when the third group shares their ideas, mention them briefly:*
 - *Make a welcoming banner with one line from the devotional readings*
 - *Decorate paper plates, cups, or a paper tablecloth*
 - *Memorize a verse that will be part of the devotional readings; sing or chant it*
 - *Help make refreshments that fit with the theme of the devotional readings, such as flower-shaped or bird-shaped cookies for the Ridván Feast, etc.*
 - *Choose favorite Bahá'í music to sing along with to entertain young children during the consultative portion*
 - *Greet each person entering the home; take their coats*

5. Pairs share ideas (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask each set of pairs to share their ideas. Suggest they write down ideas that particularly appeal to them.
- ★ If the following ideas about individual and family preparation do not surface, mention them briefly:
 - Take off work an hour early to spend some family time together before Feast
 - Prepare a candle light dinner or go to dinner at a special place before Feast
 - Dress up in “best” clothes

6. Group brainstorming (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to refer back to “Preparation of and for Feast” (Participant Handouts, p. 28), looking at elements of Feast preparation handled directly by their Assembly.

Feast Preparation, continued

- ★ Ask the group as a whole to brainstorm a few ways the Assembly could handle these responsibilities to qualitatively enhance the results. For instance, in preparing for the consultative portion of the Feast, the Assembly might choose one or two topics on which it would like to receive community input. These topics could be announced in advance to give believers time to thoughtfully consider the subject and formulate suggestions.
- ★ Post the brainstorming ideas on a flip chart. Suggest that the Assembly may want to consider these at future meetings.

7. Take home assignment

- ★ Suggest the following two topics for consultation by the Assembly in its own meeting or with the community at an upcoming Feast. *If extra time is available, one or both of these topics may be done now as an optional extension.*
 1. How can we implement the guidance of the Universal House of Justice regarding “the assignment, in advance, of good readers”? What qualities make a “good” reader? How can we assist one another to become better readers?
 2. How can we implement the guidance of the Universal House of Justice regarding punctuality? How can the Assembly start Feast on time and also make arrangements for late-comers that preserve the reverent atmosphere of the devotional portion?

8. Closing suggestions

- ★ Suggest that the Assembly may want to prepare a sheet of guidelines or expectations to be given to those friends who will be arranging for the devotional and/or social portions of the Feast. The handout “Sample Check Sheet of Questions for Feast Hosts” (Participant Handouts, p. 29) may be a helpful starting point.
- ★ Suggest also that the Assembly may want to take time at one of its meetings to review how it prepares for and organizes the administrative portion of the Feast. Good preparation can ensure that the reporting and consultation is neither rigid nor poorly structured, either of which can diminish the experience of love and fellowship during this portion.

Room for Variety (40 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To broaden the sense of possibilities for celebration of the Feast

Materials needed:

- ★ Flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of highlighters

Correlating handouts:

- ★ “Room for Variety” p. 30
- ★ “Possibilities: Children, Youth, and Adults Enjoying Feast Together” pp. 31-33
- ★ “Possibilities: Incorporating the Arts into Feast” pp. 34-35
- ★ “Possibilities: Uniting Hearts through Hospitality and Fellowship” pp. 36-38
- ★ “Possibilities: Incorporating Cultural Diversity into Feast” pp. 39-40

Note to facilitators:

- ★ Depending on the amount of time available, this segment can be done in several ways:
 - If time is short or the group is small, select only one of the four topics listed below for study. Suggest that going through the other topics with the community during a Feast could be a valuable activity and generate new ideas for the Assembly or its Feast committee. The 40 minute time estimate above is based on this format of the whole group working on one topic.
 - If time is available for four reports and the group is large, divide into four groups by their interest in one of the topics.
 - If a large number of participants want to study “Children, youth, and adults enjoying Feast together,” subdivide into groupings of “children” and “junior youth & youth.”
- ★ Of the four topics “Children, Youth, and Adults Enjoying Feast Together” has the most quotations and will probably stimulate the most discussion. “Incorporating the Arts into Feast” will probably be the shortest to cover.
- ★ If any of these topics stimulates a large amount of spirited conversation, suggest that this conversation might be most appropriate to have at an upcoming Feast. Clarify, if needed, that the purpose of this workshop is not to resolve these issues today but rather to increase understanding that Feast is an appropriate place for community consultation on topics close to the hearts of members.

Setting up the activities:

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Room for Variety” (Participant Handouts, p. 30). Ask a participant to read aloud the quotation at the top of the page.

Activities:

1. Group study of the Writings and consultation (35 minutes)

- ★ Determine in advance how many groups you will have and divide participants accordingly. Topics available:
 - “Children, Youth, & Adults Enjoying Feast Together” (pp. 31-33)
 - “Incorporating the Arts into Feast” (pp. 34-35)
 - “Uniting Hearts through Hospitality and Fellowship” (pp. 36-38)
 - “Incorporating Cultural Diversity into Feast” (pp. 39-40)

Room for Variety, continued

- ★ Explain that each group will read through the quotations on its topic and consult on the focus questions.

2. Groups report back (5 minutes per group)

- ★ Ask each group to share its topic, the answers to its focus questions, and its ideas for enhancing the Feast.
- ★ Suggest that participants write down ideas that they find personally appealing on their handout “Room for Variety” (Participant Handouts, p. 30).
- ★ Post ideas from each group on a flip chart. Suggest that these ideas be given to the Assembly for future consideration.

Optional: If more than one group reports back, invite participants from other groups to add their suggestions to the flip chart sheet.

Optional: If the following ideas for enhancing the Feast are not mentioned, feel free to suggest them:

- *group singing*
- *work on a puzzle with a Bahá'í theme*
- *have children make a presentation of something they worked on in children's classes or during the consultative portion*
- *view the Bahá'í newsreel together*
- *do a puppet show*
- *play a game*
- *do a simple craft project*
- *tell stories of Bahá'í heroes and heroines*
- *tell stories of the early days of the Faith*
- *dance a circle or folk dance together*
- *invite friends to recount how each became a Bahá'í*
- *invite one or more friends to tell about someone who has been a special teacher or inspiration in their spiritual life*
- *invite new believers or believers new to your area to take five minutes to tell the community about themselves and their lives*
- *invite friends to share their favorite story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*
- *choose to seek out someone you do not know well*
- *choose to sit with or seek out someone who is different than you in some way, such as age, culture, or length of time being part of your community*

Optional Extension Session Four: Using Brilliant Star as a Feast Resource (30 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To become familiar with *Brilliant Star* as a resource for Feast activities

Setting up the activity

- ★ Introduce *Brilliant Star* magazine as a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly that contains activities suitable for use at Feast.
- ★ Comment that these activities are designed primarily for children and youth but many activities engage all ages.
- ★ Mention that copies of some, but not all, single back issues of the magazine are available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and/or the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School. Subscription to the magazine is available by contacting Bahá'í Subscriber Service at the Bahá'í Distribution Service.
- ★ The January-February 1993 issue of *Brilliant Star* is filled with activities centered on the Feast. A “*Brilliant Star* Game Kit,” available from Bahá'í Distribution Service (1-800-999-9019), contains four board games and five card games which originally appeared in the magazine.

Activities:

1. Small group work (20 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups of 4-5.
- ★ Distribute copies of *Brilliant Star* that focus on the Feast, copies of the “The Brilliant Star Game Kit,” or individual activities from various back issues.
- ★ Ask each group to select an activity that could be used at a Feast in the near future. The activity may be targeted to one age group, such as use by children during the consultative portion of the Feast, or be intergenerational. It could be used with all of the community together or as one of several options during the social portion of the Faith.

2. Groups report back (3-5 minutes per group)

- ★ Have groups share their plans.

Materials needed:

- ★ Copies of *Brilliant Star* magazine, especially the Jan-Feb 1993 issue, with activities suitable for use at Feast
- ★ Games from the *Brilliant Star* game kit

Envisioning Possibilities (30 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To consolidate learning and record personal intentions

Materials needed:

- ★ Cassette or CD player and soothing music
- ★ Artwork supplies such as newsprint or poster board, crayons or markers

Correlating handout:

- ★ “Personal Reflection and Action Planning” p. 41

Activities:

1. Group creation of a piece of art (20 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups of 4-5. Ask each group to prepare a piece of artwork reflecting a theme from the workshop, such as:
 - how Feast can “promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy”
 - how Feast can empower and sustain a new pattern of community life
 - Feast as “the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of community life—acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togetherness—over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence”

2. Groups share artwork (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask each group to share its artwork and explain its significance.
- ★ Suggest that the Assembly may want to make these pieces of art available to decorate future Feasts.

3. Action planning (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to “Personal Reflection and Action Planning” (Participant Handouts, p. 41).
- ★ Play quiet music as a soothing background while participants write down the ways they will help ensure that the Feast is held “in the proper fashion,” ensuring spiritual restoration for all.

Closing (10 minutes)

Purpose:

- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation for all efforts to enhance the quality of Feast

Activities:

1. Review of initial questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Check to see that all questions raised at the beginning have been answered or that the questioner has been referred elsewhere.

2. Sharing new insights (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite each participant to share one new insight or possibility stimulated by the workshop.

3. Share the following to close the session (1 minute)

- ★ “Do not call it a meeting. Call it a confluence of holy souls; a convocation of those who love the Lord; a retreat for the people of the All-Merciful; a palace-hall for all who sing His praise. For the members of that gathering are each one a lighted taper, and that council a mansion of the moon and stars. It hath been blessed by the Lord of all mankind, and hath made current the Feast as set forth in the Most Holy Book.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 11, #15)
- ★ “In brief, this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends, that it may bring believers into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this centre to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord’s supper. It attracts confirmation of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts. . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 12, #18)
- ★ “Should you act and live according to these behests, know verily, of a certainty, that that Feast is the Heavenly Food. That Supper is the ‘Lord’s Supper’! I am the Servant of that gathering.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Stirring of the Spirit*, p. 12, #17)

Optional:

Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of a quotation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the following page as a gift (a version suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper is included)

Optional:

Choose a joyous, festive song to sing together in closing, such as “We have come to sing praises to our Lord.”

Do not call it a meeting.

Call it a confluence of holy souls;

*a convocation of those who love the Lord;
a retreat for the people of the All-Merciful;
a palace-hall for all who sing His praise.*

*For the members of that gathering
are each one a lighted taper,
and that council*

a mansion of the moon and stars.

*It hath been blessed by the Lord of all mankind,
and hath made current the Feast as set forth in
the Most Holy Book.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá