

Participant Handouts

Builders of Communities: **Fostering Racial Unity**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Builders of Communities: Fostering Racial Unity

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To explore the role of the Assembly in eliminating prejudice and fostering oneness, in partnership with individuals

This workshop explores the role of the Assembly in eliminating prejudice and fostering oneness, in partnership with individuals, and lists resources available to the Assembly to help in this task. It contains an exercise to help Assembly members assess and increase their ability to model racial unity in their own lives. It also includes an opportunity for the Assembly to examine current practices in the community and assess the extent to which diversity is incorporated into various aspects of community life.

What you will find inside your handouts:

- ★ Quotations and worksheets for the various segments of the workshop
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by you
- ★ An evaluation form to be filled out by the Assembly within two months after the workshop

If you would like to have information on additional workshops or other Assembly development resources, ask your Assembly Development representative or contact the Office of Assembly Development at (847) 733-3490, by mail at 1233 Central Street, Evanston, IL 60201, or by e-mail at OAD@usbnc.org.

Note: If time is short for any exercise, focus on the quotations in bold

Oneness: The Context of Diversity

“In origin and intention of creation mankind is one.”

“He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body.”

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 214.

“God, the Almighty, has created all mankind from the dust of earth. He has fashioned them all from the same elements; they are descended from the same race and live upon the same globe. He has created them to dwell beneath the one heaven. As members of the human family and His children He has endowed them with equal susceptibilities. He maintains, protects and is kind to all. He has made no distinction in mercies and graces among His children.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 297.

“Throughout the animal kingdom we do not find the creatures separated because of color. They recognize unity of species and oneness of kind. If we do not find color distinction drawn in a kingdom of lower intelligence and reason, how can it be justified among human beings, especially when we know that all have come from the same source and belong to the same household? In origin and intention of creation mankind is one. Distinctions of race and color have risen afterward.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 38.

“. . . you all are the servants of one God and, therefore, brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers. In the sight of God there is no distinction between whites and blacks; all are as one. Anyone whose heart is pure is dear to God – whether white or black, red or yellow.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of World Peace*, p. 425.

“World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice . . . everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.”

The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, section III.

The Call to a New State of Mind

“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. . . .”

“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.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996.

“. . . 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.

“An expansion of thought and action in certain aspects of our work would enhance our possibilities for success in meeting our . . . commitments.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1990.

“The burgeoning influence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation seemed . . . to have assumed the character of an onrushing wind blowing through the archaic structure of the old order, felling mighty pillars and clearing the ground for new conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening

***Canalize:** to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for

The Call to a New State of Mind, continued

“Change is an evolutionary process. . . .”

wind as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying, and amplifying our perspectives as to the purpose of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1992.

“But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge. . . .”

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 192.

“Present-day conceptions of what is natural and appropriate in relationships – among human beings themselves, between human beings and nature, between the individual and society, and between the members of society and its institutions – reflect levels of understanding arrived at by the human race during earlier and less mature stages in its development. If humanity is indeed coming of age, if all the inhabitants of the planet constitute a single people, if justice is to be the ruling principle of social organization – then existing conceptions that were born out of ignorance of these emerging realities have to be recast.

“Movement in this direction has barely begun.”

Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, in *Prosperity of Humankind*, section III.

“. . . change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time. . . .”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1990.

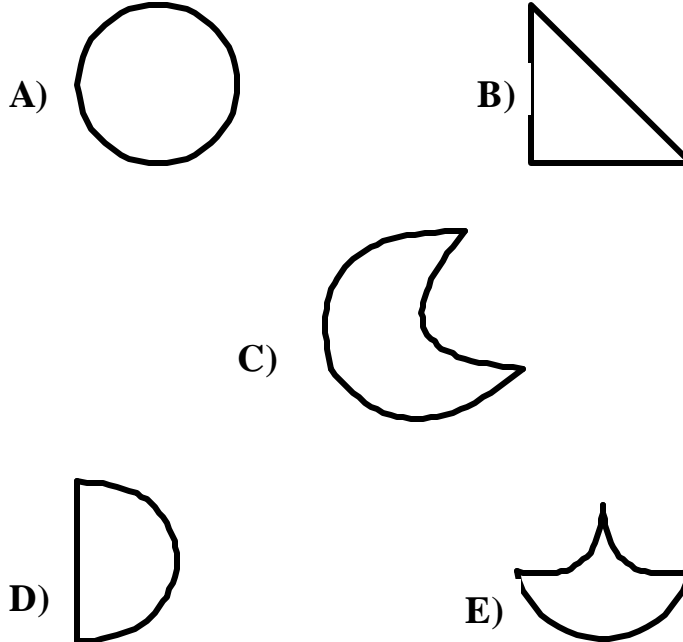
“Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.”

The Universal House of Justice, July 25, 1984, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 634.

Exploring the Diversity Among Assembly Members

Shapes

Which shape is different?



Partnership activity

Find a partner, preferably a person from a different racial or cultural background than your own. If racial and cultural diversity are not present, look for other differences, such as age.

Decide who will speak first. The speaker should briefly (five minutes for each speaker) answer some or all of the following questions:

- ★ Where did your grandparents come from?
- ★ Where did they live?
- ★ What type of work did they do?
- ★ What was an important life lesson handed down to you by your family?
- ★ What is one delightful aspect of your heritage that you really appreciate?
- ★ What is one aspect of your heritage that poses a dilemma or challenge for you?

After 5 minutes, change roles of listener and speaker.

Drawing on Spiritual Power to Create Unity

Focus questions

- ★ How can the Assembly create the spiritual atmosphere necessary to draw races and cultures together as one people?
- ★ How can the Assembly help the friends develop the spiritual qualities required for this task?

“... there is need of a superior power to overcome human prejudices, a power which nothing in the world of mankind can withstand and which will overshadow the effect of all other forces at work in human conditions. That irresistible power is the love of God.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 68.

“There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of the Word of God.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, newly authorized translation attached to letter dated 2/4/85 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, in The Power of Unity, p. 69.

“Thus when that unifying force, the penetrating influence of the Word of God, taketh effect, the difference of customs, manners, habits, ideas, opinions and dispositions embellisheth the world of humanity. . . . then difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for co-ordination.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 291.

“From our point of view, this problem can only be tackled from a spiritual angle, for only by a spiritual awakening can this misunderstanding and prejudice vanish. We are often apt to follow the modern attitude of mind and consider economic issues the common denominator of all our problems. With their spiritual approach, the Bahá’ís could achieve more than any other movement.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, December, 7 1930 to an individual believer attached to letter dated February, 4, 1985 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, in The Power of Unity, p. 43, #51 and also in Toward Oneness, p. 48, #105.

“The disease which afflicts the body politic is lack of love and absence of altruism. In the hearts of men no real love is found, and the condition is such that, unless their susceptibilities are quickened by some power so the unity, love and accord may develop within them, there can be no healing, no agreement among mankind. . . . The spiritual teachings of the religion of God can alone create this love, unity and accord in human hearts.

“Therefore, hold to these heavenly agencies which God has provided so that through the love of God this soul-bond may be established, this heart-attachment realized and the light of the reality of unity be reflected from you throughout the universe.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 171.

Drawing on Spiritual Power to Create Unity, continued

“... the Holy Spirit is like unto the life in the human body, which blends all differences of parts and members in unity and agreement.”

“... the Holy Spirit is like unto the life in the human body, which blends all differences of parts and members in unity and agreement. Consider how numerous are these parts and members, but the oneness of the animating spirit of life unites them all in perfect combination. It establishes such a unity in the bodily organism that if any part is subjected to injury or becomes diseased, all the other parts and functions sympathetically respond and suffer, owing to the perfect oneness existing. Just as the human spirit of life is the cause of coordination among the various parts of the human organism, the Holy Spirit is the controlling cause of the unity and coordination of mankind. That is to say, the bond or oneness of humanity cannot be effectively established save through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the world of humanity is a composite body, and the Holy Spirit is the animating principle of its life.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 321.

“Humanity, torn with dissension and burning with hate, is crying at this hour for a fuller measure of that love which is born of God, that love which in the last resort will prove the one solvent* of its incalculable* difficulties and problems. Is it not incumbent upon us, whose hearts are aglow with love for Him, to make still greater effort, to manifest that love in all its purity and power in our dealings with our fellow-men? May our love of our beloved Master, so ardent, so disinterested in all its aspects, find its true expression in love for our fellow-brethren and sisters in the faith as well as for all mankind. I assure you, dear friends, that progress in such matters as these is limitless and infinite, and that upon the extent of our achievements along this line will ultimately depend the success of our mission in life.”

Shoghi Effendi, Bahá’í Administration, p. 62.

*** Solvent:**
something that solves or explains

*** Incalculable:**
beyond calculation; incapable of being forecast or predicted

“... the importance of the Bahá’í administration is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the requirements of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among the friends.”

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly.

Drawing on Spiritual Power to Create Unity, continued

“If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread. . . .”

“I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. . . .

“If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing stronger and stronger, until it reaches the minds of all men.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 29-30.

Excerpts from a Letter of the National Spiritual Assembly

Written to the American Bahá'í Community dated December 17, 1997

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The followers of Bahá'u'lláh have a central role in the nation's struggle for racial justice and unity. Here the destiny of America and of the Bahá'í Faith are tightly intertwined. The nation needs a model of interracial love and unity, based on the principle of the oneness of humanity, to restore confidence that race unity is possible and to give rise to new approaches to the organization of community life.

Some Bahá'í communities are now in the forefront of America's struggle for race unity. They are doing heroic work in public schools and colleges, police departments and community organizations, governments and neighborhoods. Nevertheless, much remains to be done to achieve 'Abdu'l-Bahá's standard of interracial unity and love within the Bahá'í community itself, and to become a guiding force for our nation.

The Bahá'í Writings assign our community the mission to "demonstrate to our countrymen the ennobling reality of a power that shall weld a disrupted world." The growth and influence of the Bahá'í Faith are tied directly to the manner in which Bahá'ís carry out, among ourselves and in the larger society, "those high standards of interracial amity so widely proclaimed and so fearlessly exemplified to the American people by 'Abdu'l-Bahá." Freedom from race prejudice is the "hallmark of a true Bahá'í character" and the "supreme injunction of Bahá'u'lláh." Sustained action to eliminate prejudice and build race unity will surely attract the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh, invoke a spiritual atmosphere, and stimulate the release of heavenly forces that will stir the growth of the Bahá'í community, and "change the direction of human affairs throughout the planet."

Shoghi Effendi warned that should we neglect this duty, we will "not merely be failing in what is our most vital and conspicuous obligation, but thereby retarding the flow of those quickening energies which alone can insure the vigorous and speedy development of God's struggling Faith."

The National Spiritual Assembly calls upon every Bahá'í to rededicate himself or herself to the glorious task of eliminating the last traces of prejudice and alienation among the races within the Bahá'í community and to spare no effort to bring the healing message of reconciliation and love to our fellow Americans of all races and religions. Our community, which is already interracial

Excerpts from a Letter of the National Spiritual Assembly, continued

*“Our
community . . .
should examine
itself to see how
far we have
come and what
we must now
do.”*

and diversified, should examine itself to see how far we have come and what we must now do. American Bahá'ís, “now but a tiny nucleus of the Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future” must “so exemplify that spirit of universal love and fellowship as to evoke in the minds of their associates the vision of that future City of God which the almighty arm of Bahá'u'lláh can alone establish.”

We appeal to every Local Spiritual Assembly, individual Bahá'í, and community to assert leadership. . . . Our hope is to . . . help America advance toward her God ordained destiny to be the first nation to proclaim the oneness of the human family.

Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility

Focus questions

- ★ What roles does the Local Spiritual Assembly play in race unity work?
- ★ What roles are common to both individuals and Assemblies?
- ★ What specific courses of action are mentioned?

“The Spiritual Assemblies are collectively the most effective of all instruments for establishing unity and harmony. This matter is of the utmost importance; this is the magnet that draweth down the confirmations of God.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 83-84.

“If we allow prejudice of any kind to manifest itself in us, we shall be guilty before God of causing a setback to the progress and real growth of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. It is incumbent upon every believer to endeavor with a fierce determination to eliminate this defect from his thoughts and acts. It is the duty of the institutions of the Faith to inculcate* this principle in the hearts of the friends through every means at their disposal including summer schools, conferences, institutes and study classes.”

The Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 222.

“[Complete freedom from prejudice] should be the immediate, the universal, and the chief concern of all and sundry members of the Bahá’í community, of whatever age, rank, experience, class, or color, as all, with no exception, must face its challenging implications, and none can claim, however much he may have progressed along this line, to have completely discharged the stern responsibilities which it inculcates.”

Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 22.

“How great, therefore, how staggering the responsibility that must weigh upon the present generation of the American believers, at this early stage in their spiritual and administrative evolution, to weed out, by every means in their power, those faults, habits, and tendencies which they have inherited from their own nation, and to cultivate, patiently and prayerfully, those distinctive qualities and characteristics that are so indispensable to their effective participation in the great redemptive work of their Faith.”

Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 20.

***inculcate**: to impress by repeated statement or admonition; teach persistently and earnestly

“Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should . . . be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits. It should be consistently demonstrated in

A Shared Responsibility, continued

“ . . . every organized community . . . should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority . . . within it . . . ”

every phase of their activity and life, whether in the Bahá’í community or outside it, in public or in private, formally as well as informally, individually as well as in their official capacity as organized groups, committees and Assemblies. It should be deliberately cultivated through the various and everyday opportunities, no matter how insignificant, that present themselves, whether in their homes, their business offices, their schools and colleges, their social parties and recreation grounds, their Bahá’í meetings, conferences, conventions, summer schools and Assemblies. It should, above all else, become the keynote of the policy of that august body which, in its capacity as the national representative, and the director and coordinator of the affairs of the community, must set the example, and facilitate the application of such a vital principle to the lives and activities of those whose interests it safeguards and represents.”

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 36-37.

“The first step in eradicating any prejudice is education at the local level about the existence of the problem rather than legislation of a particular policy from afar. As you suggest, the Nineteen Day Feast is a perfect forum for beginning consultation on such matters . . . ”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, in *Toward Oneness*, p. 30, #66; in *The Pupil of the Eye*, p. 128.

“ . . . every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá’u’lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it . . . In the light of this principle . . . it should be the duty of every Bahá’í community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the divers minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Bahá’í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible. The adoption of such a course, and faithful adherence to it, would not only be a source of inspiration and encouragement to those elements that are numerically small and inadequately represented, but would

A Shared Responsibility, continued

“Ultimately, any real progress depends upon the sustained, audacious and sincere efforts of the rank and file of believers . . . working in harmony with their Local Spiritual Assemblies. . . .”

demonstrate to the world at large the universality and representative character of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh”

Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 35-36.

“Ultimately, any real progress depends upon the sustained, audacious and sincere efforts of the rank and file of believers, guided and motivated by the Sacred Writings and the letters of Shoghi Effendi, working in harmony with their Local Spiritual Assemblies, using Bahá’í consultation, to bring about a change in attitude and behavior. Clearly, all elements of the community must eventually be drawn into this activity. The problem did not appear overnight, however, and the process of healing centuries-old wounds will take time, tremendous perseverance and effort.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, in Toward Oneness, p. 62, #139; in The Pupil of the Eye, pp. 130-31.

Resources Available to the Assembly

Several resources exist to help Assemblies fulfill their responsibility to foster racial unity within and beyond the Bahá'í community

1. Race unity training

A program to help Bahá'ís and interested friends of the Faith develop strategies to create prejudice-free communities and to raise up children and youth who are champions of racial unity. Using an interactive approach and a Writings-based curriculum, participants explore their role as race unity workers and begin the process of building a Bahá'í vision of a prejudice-free generation. Participants will learn how to design race unity lessons, projects, and gatherings for children, youth, and the community as a whole.

This 20-32 hour Core Curriculum program is scheduled with local trainers through the National Teacher Training Center, Louhelen Bahá'í School (phone 810-653-5033; e-mail: louhelen@usbnc.org).

2. “The Power of Race Unity” video

Broadcast nationwide on several cable channels, this video is available for purchase from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (1-800-999-9019). It can be used in a variety of ways in the local community.

3. “The Power of Race Unity” workshops

Distributed to all Assemblies in April 1998, this series of six workshops is designed to complement the video “The Power of Race Unity.” These workshops include segments selected from the Core Curriculum race unity trainings. They are an excellent introduction to a Bahá'í perspective on race unity, but they are not intended as a substitute for the race unity trainings.

The first workshop is a day-long session specifically for the Bahá'í community. It constructs the spiritual framework for race unity work, gives a historic overview of what Bahá'ís have done to promote racial equality since the early 1900s, looks closely at how the Bahá'í Writings answer common questions and concerns related to issues of race, provides training in how to lead discussions with sensitivity and wisdom, and concludes with an opportunity to develop specific steps to take for inviting guests to view “The Power of Race Unity” video.

The other five workshops are 90 minutes each and are designed to be used with groups of Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith interested in promoting race unity. These can be used both with large groups and in intimate, home “fireside” settings.

Additional resources

Additional copies of these workshop materials are available from the Education and Schools Office at the Bahá'í National Center (phone 847-733-3495; e-mail: schools@usbnc.org). A suggested donation of \$5 per packet covers the cost of printing and postage.

4. “The Power of Race Unity: Handbook for Neighborhood Race Unity Dialogues”

This handbook, which was sent to all Assemblies in April 1998, offers guidance and support for hosting dialogues in homes. It provides suggestions for whom to invite, samples of invitation letters, agendas for 5-7 sessions, and discussion ground rules. It also includes historical and scientific fact sheets, a bibliography and resource list, and questions and concepts that can be used to get discussions started. Hard copies of this handbook are no longer available, but the text is available on, and can be downloaded from, the National Spiritual Assembly's administrative website: www.usbnc.org.

5. “Brilliant Star” magazine

Many issues of this magazine, a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly, contain activities that promote race unity and the oneness of humanity. The activities are designed primarily for children and youth but are useful for all ages. Many of these activities have been gathered into an activity book, “Oneness of Humanity.” Copies of the activity book and some, but not all, single back issues of the magazine are available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service. Subscription to the magazine is available by contacting Bahá'í Subscriber Service at the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

6. “Toward Oneness: A Compilation on Racial and Cultural Issues”

This compilation, available from Bahá'í Distribution Service, is arranged in an easy to use format of provocative and stimulating questions followed by selections from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice. Assemblies and their training institutes may want to use it for individual or group study.

7. “The Vision of Race Unity: America’s Most Challenging Issue”

The National Spiritual Assembly's powerful statement on the Faith's vision and America's destiny is available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

Leading by Example: Assembly Members as Individuals

“Members of Assemblies . . . must be the first to set a worthy example to their fellow-believers.”

“Members of assemblies, national and local, must be the first to set a worthy example to their fellow-believers.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 1, p. 155.

“I would particularly address my appeal to you, as the Trustees of God’s sacred Faith, to reaffirm by word and deed the spirit and character of the insistent admonitions* of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, so solemnly and so explicitly uttered in the course of His journeys through your land – a trust which it is your privilege and function to preserve and fortify.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, p. 131.

“Let them call to mind, fearlessly and determinedly, the example and conduct of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá while in their midst. Let them remember His courage, His genuine love, His informal and indiscriminating fellowship, His contempt for and impatience of criticism, tempered by His tact and wisdom.”

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 34-35.

“Bahá’u’lláh tells us that prejudice in its various forms destroys the edifice of humanity. We are adjured* by the Divine Messenger to eliminate all forms of prejudice from our lives. Our outer lives must show forth our beliefs. The world must see that, regardless of each passing whim or current fashion of the generality of mankind, the Bahá’í lives his life according to the tenets of his Faith. We must not allow the fear of rejection by our friends and neighbors to deter us from our goal: to live the Bahá’í life. Let us strive to blot out from our lives every last trace of prejudice – racial, religious, political, economic, national, tribal, class, cultural, and that which is based on differences of education or age. We shall be distinguished from our non-Bahá’í associates if our lives are adorned with this principle.”

The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 222.

*** admonition:**

counsel, advice, or caution; a gentle reproof or warning

*** adjure:** to charge, bind, or command solemnly; to entreat or request earnestly

Diversity Assessment and Action Plan

Diversity assessment

Answer the following questions by writing in the columns on the right.

Names	
<u>Diverse</u>	<u>Similar</u>

1. Write down the names of all the people you spoke with on the phone last week. How many of them are of a different race or culture from you? How many of them are similar to you?

2. Write down all the people you have invited to your home for a visit during the past two months. How many of them are different from you? How many are similar?

3. Write down the names of people you have visited in the past two months. How many of them are from backgrounds different from yours? How many are similar?

4. Write down the names of all the people you ask to feed your pet, ask for help when you are in need, or from whom you borrow items. How many are different from you? How many are similar?

Respond to the following questions, considering both the diversity within and beyond the Bahá'í community:

- ★ What deliberate actions can I take in my own sphere of daily activities to cultivate relations with people who are different from me?
- ★ How can I forge new bonds of unity in ways that I have never attempted before?

Action plan

Unity in Diversity

“The perpetuation of . . . cultural characteristics is an expression of unity in diversity.”

“Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá’u’lláh. . . . It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. . . . Its watchword is unity in diversity. . . .”

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 41-42.

“When a person becomes a Bahá’í, he gives up the past only in the sense that he is a part of this new and living Faith of God, and must seek to pattern himself, in act and thought, along the lines laid down by Bahá’u’lláh. The fact that he is by origin a Jew or a Christian, a black man or a white man, is not important any more, but, as you say, lends color and charm to the Bahá’í community in that it demonstrates unity in diversity.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 12, 1949, *Toward Oneness*, p. 15, #36.

“Bahá’ís should obviously be encouraged to preserve their inherited cultural identities, as long as the activities involved do not contravene the principles of the Faith. The perpetuation of such cultural characteristics is an expression of unity in diversity.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 26, 1982 to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities*, 9.31, and also in *Toward Oneness*, p. 14, # 32.

“At the present time, the challenge to every Bahá’í community is to avoid suppression of those culturally-diverse elements which are not contrary to the teachings, while establishing and maintaining such a high degree of unity that others are attracted to the Cause of God.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 25, 1988, *Toward Oneness*, p. 16, # 37.

Demographics of Our Local Bahá'í Community

Identify the different races, cultures, and nationalities currently present in your local Bahá'í community. Determine, roughly, the percentage of each, for example: Whites = 40%, Blacks = 30%, Persians = 20%, Hispanics = 10%.

Groups (list each)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Estimated % of community	_____	_____	_____	_____

Activities

Determine, roughly, the average percentage of participation in the following community activities of each race or nationality, for example: Whites = 75%, Blacks = 5%, Persians = 15%, Hispanics = 5%. Another way of stating these sample figures would be that 75% of those attending Feast are white, on average. As you add the percentages together for any one activity, the total amount should equal 100%.

Groups (list each)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Attending Feast	_____	_____	_____	_____
Hosting/preparing Feast	_____	_____	_____	_____
Attending holy days	_____	_____	_____	_____
Planning/hosting holy days	_____	_____	_____	_____
Teaching events	_____	_____	_____	_____
Deepenings	_____	_____	_____	_____
Children's activities	_____	_____	_____	_____
Service on committees	_____	_____	_____	_____

Analysis

For each activity, compare the participation figures of each group to its percentage figures of the local Bahá'í population listed above. Note any gaps which indicate one or more groups are not involved in some aspect of Bahá'í community life. For example, the sample figures used above – 40% of the community are black but only 5% of those attending Feast are black – might raise questions about why so few black believers are participating in the activity as compared to white believers.

Examining Current Expectations and Practices

“When peoples of different races are incorporated in the . . . community . . . who can doubt that it will possess far greater power and perfection. . . .”

“It is difficult for the friends to always remember that in matter[s] where race enters, a hundred times more consideration and wisdom in handling situations is necessary than when an issue is not complicated by this factor.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Toward Oneness*, p. 29, #64.

“As up until very recently the Bahá’ís of the world were almost exclusively white, it is only natural that their virtues and their faults should have colored the Faith and its community life. It is illogical to suppose that what we have now is either mature or right; it is a phase in the development of the Cause. When peoples of different races are incorporated in the world-wide community (and in local communities), who can doubt that it will possess far greater power and perfection and be something quite different from what we have now? And yet let us ask ourselves frankly if we do not believe that what we North American Bahá’ís, what we Western white Bahá’ís, have is the real thing, practically a finished product, and it is up to the rest of the world to accept it? I think this is our mentality; it was mine up until a few years ago.”

Hand of the Cause Rúhíyyih *Khán*um, letter to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada, quoted in *Bahá’í News*, U.S. Supplement, June 1961, p. 1.

Mindful of the natural tendency of any group to assume, perhaps unconsciously, that its patterns and practices are “the real thing,” examine your community’s current expectations and assumptions using the following questions and consult about any implications these have for reaching, teaching, and retaining believers from diverse backgrounds.

- ★ In your community, in your perception, is there any particular group’s culture or orientation and preferences which determine the way Bahá’í events are planned and conducted? For example, if the dominant group happens to be white middle class Bahá’ís, or Iranian Bahá’ís, are their customary ways of doing things the prevalent pattern in Bahá’í activities?
- ★ Are there expectations by your Assembly regarding appropriate dress codes, music, speech, and patterns of conducting Feasts and meetings? If so, do these expectations reflect local customs and practices of any particular group of people?
- ★ What about the above expectations is based upon the Sacred Writings?

Examining Current Expectations and Practices, continued

Additional expectations and assumptions for consultation

- ★ What about the above expectations appears to be based primarily upon the customs of a particular group?
- ★ Given your community's present set of expectations about behavior, dress, music, speech and ways of conducting Bahá'í meetings, how would people not from the dominant group feel upon first entry into your community? Would they feel welcome? Could they be integrated fully into the community? Is there room for diversity in your community?
- ★ Would new believers from diverse backgrounds feel that they had to leave behind their cultural, racial, national, etc. differences in order to "belong" to your community?
- ★ In light of these points, what adjustments to current practices and expectations could help ensure a Bahá'í environment in which all people feel a sense of welcome and belonging?

Follow up questions for a later consultation:

- ★ Discuss ways your Assembly can encourage social interaction among the friends of different backgrounds.
- ★ Discuss ways your Assembly can utilize diversity as a resource and capitalize on the kinds of diversity available in your community.

Diversifying the Bahá'í Community

Focus questions

- ★ Which racial and cultural groups live in our region?
- ★ Which are underrepresented in our Bahá'í community?
- ★ What activities and services would most successfully introduce these groups to the message of Bahá'u'lláh?
- ★ What steps could the Assembly take to direct teaching efforts towards these groups?

“No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Bahá'í community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races [the Negro, Indian, Eskimo and Jewish peoples]. A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity, and assimilated through the dynamic processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart”

Shoghi Effendí, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 54.

“The Bahá'ís should be all means endeavor to attract to the Faith as many members of the colored race as they possibly can, and thus demonstrate in deeds the universality of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. It is only through this intermingling of races within the framework of His World Order that a lasting and just solution can be found to the perplexing racial issues confronting mankind.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Toward Oneness*, p. 49, #107.

“Efforts to reach the minorities should be increased and broadened to include all minority groups such as the Indians, Spanish-speaking people, Japanese and Chinese. Indeed, every stratum of American society must be reached and can be reached with the healing Message, if the believers will but arise and go forth with the spirit which is conquering the citadels of the southern states.”

The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice: 1968-1973*, pp. 85-86.

“In this wondrous age . . . the commandments of God are not delimited, not restricted to any one group of people, rather have all the friends been commanded to show forth fellowship and love, consideration and generosity and loving-kindness to every community on earth.”

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 21.

The Beauty of Human Diversity within the Context of Oneness

“... diversity will enrich the tapestry of human life in a peaceful world society.”

“Bahá’u’lláh has proclaimed the oneness of the world of humanity. He has caused various nations and divergent creeds to unite. He has declared that difference of race and color is like the variegated beauty of flowers in a garden. If you enter a garden, you will see yellow, white, blue, and red flowers in profusion and beauty – each radiant within itself and although different from the others, lending its own charm to them. Racial difference in the human kingdom is similar. If all the flowers in a garden were of the same color, the effect would be monotonous and wearying to the eye.

“Therefore, Bahá’u’lláh hath said that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of World Peace, pp. 68-69.

“The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 53.

“The Bahá’í Faith seeks to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the unity of all peoples. Indeed, such diversity will enrich the tapestry of human life in a peaceful world society.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 25 1988, Toward Oneness, p. 15, # 37.

“O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.”

Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 218.

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator's Guide

**From “Leading
by Example:
Assembly
Members as
Individuals”**

“Let them . . . supplement these official functions with those opportunities which only a close and intimate social intercourse can adequately provide. In their homes, in their hours of relaxation and leisure, in the daily contact of business transactions, in the association of their children . . . in short under all possible circumstances, however insignificant they appear, the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh should satisfy themselves that in the eyes of the world at large and in the sight of their vigilant Master they are the living witnesses of those truths which He fondly cherished and tirelessly championed to the very end of His days.”

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 130.

“It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.”

Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 43.