

Participant Handouts

*Builders of
Communities:*
**Developing a Strong,
Vibrant Community**

An Assembly Development Module Workshop

Developing a Strong, Vibrant Community

OVERVIEW FOR PARTICIPANTS

Purpose

- ★ To explore the role of the Assembly in the process of community building
- ★ To deepen appreciation of what Bahá'í community life is intended to be
- ★ To introduce elements of a systematic planning process of community development

This workshop explores the role of the Assembly in the process of community building. It deepens appreciation of what Bahá'í community life is intended to be and introduces elements of a systematic planning process of community development. The workshop contains activities to help identify reasons why believers may withdraw from active involvement in the community and to discover ways to lovingly intervene and draw them closer. It also includes activities which an Assembly can use with its community to assess the needs of community members and to identify skills and resources which members would like to contribute to the process of community building. "Take home" assignments help the Assembly examine current activities and processes of community life, envision their preferred future, and select strategies to systematically turn their vision into reality.

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

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

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

“Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one’s self and others. . . .”

conceptions of social organization. . . . Even the Community of the Most Great Name itself is experiencing the rigorous effects of this quickening 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’is 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, January 23, 1995, *Prosperity of Humankind*.

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

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’is 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, letter dated July 25, 1984, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 634.

Bahá'í Community Life

Focus questions

- ★ What is the definition of a Bahá'í community?
- ★ What characteristics does it have?
- ★ What effect does it have on those within it?
- ★ What effect does it have on people in the larger community?

“The Bahá'í community is an association of individuals who have voluntarily come together, on recognizing Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the Manifestation of God for this age, to establish certain patterns of personal and social behavior and to build the institutions that are to promote these patterns.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 2, 1996, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 55.

“. . . those who enter the Faith must be integrated into vibrant* local communities, characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and collective will, environments in which the capacities of all components – men, women, youth and children – are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.”

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated December 26, 1995 to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, sec. 1.3.

“The community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions, assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. . . . A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, sections 3.25, 1996.

“In such a climate [of love and unity], the community is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without losing their individual uniqueness. The possibilities for manifesting such a transformation exist most immediately at the local level. . . .”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 40.

“Wherever a Bahá'í community exists, whether large or small, let it be distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith, its high standard of rectitude, its complete freedom from all forms of prejudice, the spirit of love among its members and for the closely knit fabric of its social life. The acute distinction between this and present-day society will inevitably arouse the interest of the more enlightened, and as the world's gloom deepens the light of Bahá'í

* **Vibrant**: characterized by energetic activity; pulsating with vigor and energy; exciting, stimulating, lively

Bahá'í Community Life, continued

“A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident. . . .”

life will shine brighter and brighter until its brilliance must eventually attract the disillusioned masses and cause them to enter the haven of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Who alone can bring them peace and justice and an ordered life.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August, 1968, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 137.

“A Bahá'í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1984, in *A Wider Horizon*, p. 27.

“. . . as we read in one of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian: ‘Until the public sees in the Bahá'í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers.’ When people embrace the Cause, they should then, through the Teachings, develop their relationships with each other and with their fellow-citizens to gradually produce a truly Bahá'í community, a light and haven for the bewildered.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1994.

“The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory where you can translate into living and constructive action, the principles which you imbibe* from the teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í teachings.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in *The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith*, pp. 36-37, no. 117.

“As the people around you yearn increasingly for a society in which rectitude of conduct prevails, which is animated by a nobility of moral behavior, and in which the diverse races are firmly united, your challenge is to demonstrate the efficacy* of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh in ministering to their needs and in recreating the very foundation of individual and social life. The whole of North America stands in desperate need of the inspiring vision, the dynamic sense of purpose and the idealism, which can be provided only by those who are imbued with the spirit and truths of the Bahá'í Writings.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of North America, section 7.7, 1996.

* **Imbibe:** absorb or soak up, drink deeply

* **Efficacy:** capacity for producing a desired result, effectiveness

The Assembly and the Individual: Partners in the Process of Community Building

“... the three inseparable participants in the evolution of the new World Order – the individual, the institutions, and the community. . . .”

“... the three inseparable participants in the evolution of the new World Order – the individual, the institutions, and the community. . . .”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 31, 1995, to the Bahá'ís of the World.

“... 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.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 39.

“The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service. . . .”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, in *Rights and Responsibilities: The Complementary Roles of the Individual and Institutions*, p. 40.

“The Bahá'í administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 14, 1941, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, pp. 28-9.

“On the one hand is the initiative that it is the duty and privilege of the individual to take in teaching the Cause and in obtaining a deeper understanding of the purpose and requirements of the Faith. Parallel with the exercise of such initiative is the necessity of the individual's participation in collective endeavours, such as community functions and projects. On the other hand is the role of the Local Spiritual Assembly to welcome, encourage and accommodate the initiatives of individual believers to the maximum extent possible; and there is, too, the responsibility of the Assembly to devise or promote plans that will employ the talents and abilities of the individual members of its community, and that will involve individuals in collective action, such as teaching and development projects, institutes, and other group activities. The effects of conscientious attempts at realizing

The Assembly and the Individual, continued

“ . . . each believer is challenged to develop these spiritual strengths which will contribute beyond measure to the evolution of the community. . . . ”

these inseparable requisites will be to expand and consolidate the community and to foster a climate of unified action.”

The Universal House of Justice , Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1995.

“Alone, and aided solely by the power of the Almighty, each believer is challenged to develop these spiritual strengths which will contribute beyond measure to the evolution of the community.”

The Universal House of Justice , Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1994.

“ . . . the Bahá'í community must gather strength, demonstrate more clearly the distinguishing character of its way of life, reach out with confidence to proclaim and teach its message, and draw down in ever-greater measure the confirming assistance of the Hosts of the Supreme Concurrence. In every aspect of this work, it is the individual Bahá'í who holds the key to victory.”

The Universal House of Justice , Ridván Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1994.

“ . . . marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community . . . will ensure a greatly expanded, visibly united, vibrant and cohesive international community. . . . The basic requisites can be summarized as follows.

“The first calls for a vitality of the faith of each believer that is expressed through personal initiative and constancy in teaching the Cause to others, and through conscientious, individual effort to provide energy and resources to upbuild the community, to uphold the authority of its institutions, and to support local and regional plans and teaching projects. The second requires that local and national Bahá'í institutions evolve more rapidly into a proper exercise of their responsibilities as channels of guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. The third, the flourishing of the community especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 31, 1995, to the Bahá'ís of the World.

“Local Spiritual Assemblies . . . should develop as rallying centres of the community.”

“To be able to make a wise choice at the election time, it is necessary for him to be in close and continued contact with all of his fellow-believers, to keep in touch with all local activities, be they teaching, administrative or otherwise, and to fully and whole-heartedly participate in the affairs of the local as well as national committees and assemblies in his country. It is only in this way that a believer can develop a true social consciousness, and acquire a true sense of responsibility in matters affecting the interests of the Cause. Bahá’í community life thus makes it a duty for every loyal and faithful believer to become an intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector, and also gives him the opportunity of raising himself to such a station.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated February 4, 1935, in *Lights of Guidance*, fifth revised edition, 1997, p. 10, # 34.

“A Bahá’í community which is consistent in its fundamental life-giving, life-sustaining activities will at its heart be serene and confident; it will resonate with spiritual dynamism, will exert irresistible influence, will set a new course in social evolution, enabling it to win the respect and eventually the allegiance of admirers and critics alike. These profound possibilities reside in the will of the individual to take initiative, to act in accordance with the guidance offered by Bahá’í institutions, and to maintain such action regardless of the myriad distractions posed by the disintegration of a society adrift in a sea of materialism.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1984, in *A Wider Horizon*, p. 27.

“Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are embryonic Local Houses of Justice, should develop as rallying centres of the community. They must concern themselves not only with teaching the Faith, with the development of the Bahá’í way of life and with the proper organization of the Bahá’í activities of their communities, but also with those crucial events which profoundly affect the life of all human beings: birth, marriage, and death. . . .”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, April 17, 1981, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*.

The Process of Community Building

“... Bahá’ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building. . . .”

“Since Bahá’ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996, section 3.25.

“Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá’í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development.”

Shoghi Effendi, in *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 76.

“The regular holding of Bahá’í children’s classes should be given high priority. Indeed in many parts of the world this is the first activity in a process of community building, which, if pursued vigorously, gives rise to the other developments.”

The Universal House of Justice, December 26, 1995, to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, section 1.3.

“Remember, moreover, that in this process of community building the education of children – without which the victories of a whole generation may be lost – must be given due emphasis.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of Latin American and the Caribbean, 1996.

“Since change, ever more rapid change, is a constant characteristic of life at this time, and since our growth, size and external relations demand much of us, our community must be ready to adapt. In a sense this means that the community must become more adept at accommodating a wide range of actions without losing concentration on the primary objectives of teaching, namely, expansion and consolidation. A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary* effect of the aggregate* on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing. This understanding is important to the maturity which, by the many demands being made upon it, the community is being forced to attain.”

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

“. . . set in motion a systematic process of community development. This process should be one in which the friends review their successes and difficulties, adjust and improve their methods accordingly, and learn, and move forward unhesitatingly.”

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated December 26, 1995, to the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

***Salutary:** beneficial, healthy

***Aggregate:** the sum total

Elements of Community Life

“... the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered. . . .”

“At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: the prosecution with increased vigor of the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies so that they may exercise their beneficial influence and guidance on the life of Bahá’í communities; the nurturing of a deeper understanding of Bahá’í family life; the Bahá’í education of children, including the holding of regular Bahá’í classes and, where necessary, the establishment of tutorial schools for the provision of elementary education; the encouragement of Bahá’í youth in study and service; and the encouragement of Bahá’í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community”

The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Rúz message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1979, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986*, p. 406.

“. . . the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements – adults, youth and children – in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá’í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.”

The Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to the Bahá’ís of the World, 1996, section 3.26.

“The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes 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*. The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved.”

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 27, 1989, in *A Wider Horizon*, pp. 67-68.

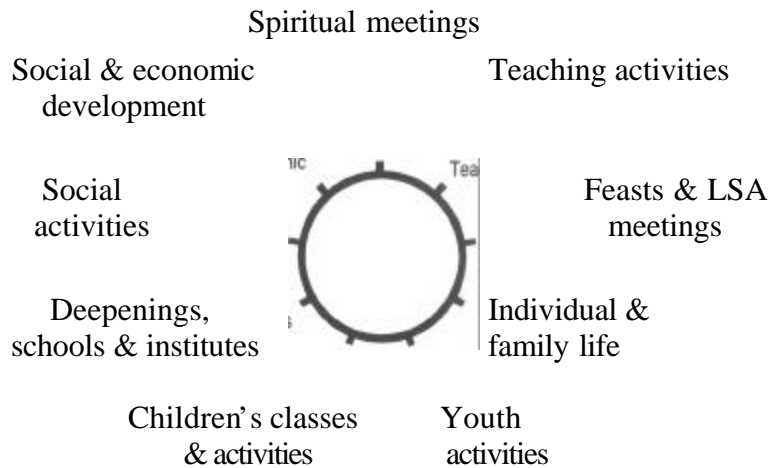
* **Convergence:** the coming together and merging of separate lines

Activities of a Bahá'í Community

“The important thing is that activities be undertaken with love and unity”

Individual progress is complemented by a regular cycle of community life that confirms the individual's faith, provides fellowship and worship, guides individuals and families in the practice of Bahá'í life, and offers an opportunity for service to the Cause. Such sustained patterns of action strengthen individuals and communities at the same time.

Every community has different needs. Hence, the specific activities in each community will vary, and will be different at various stages of a community's development. The following illustration gives an example of activities that make up a pattern of community life; the categories are not exhaustive, nor will every community have activity in each of these areas.



The important thing is that activities be undertaken with love and unity and that they address the community's spiritual, social, expansion and consolidation needs. The activities should combine in an ever-evolving pattern that increases the community's membership, sustains individual spiritual development, and leads to the spiritual conquest of the entire town, city, or region.

Activities of a Bahá'í Community, continued

Building a pattern of community life may include:

- ★ **Spiritual meetings.** Gather Bahá'ís and seekers regularly for music, worship, fellowship, etc., to enable believers and seekers to feel and be uplifted by the spirit of the Faith.
- ★ **Teaching activities.** Hold firesides and activities using other teaching methods suited to the population. Teaching must include more than proclamation alone.
- ★ **Feasts and Assembly meetings.** Hold Feasts and Assembly meetings for Bahá'ís, recognizing that they may take time to develop in some places, but are crucial to the progress of the Cause.
- ★ **Individual & family life.** Help individuals and families obey the laws and develop the distinctive pattern and qualities of Bahá'í life, such as obligatory prayer, fasting, Holy Days, etc.
- ★ **Youth activities.** Use youth to spearhead activities for expansion and consolidation.
- ★ **Children's classes & activities.** Guide children to be effective teachers and servants of the Cause. Children do not have to have Bahá'í parents to learn about the Faith.
- ★ **Deepenings, schools, & institutes.** Offer sustained opportunities for interaction with the Word of God and for acquiring skills to better serve the Faith.
- ★ **Social activities.** Plan social events to provide an avenue for strengthening bonds of love, fellowship, and unity.
- ★ **Social & economic development.** Apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the problems of humanity through such activities as literacy classes and race unity efforts.

What Can I Offer to the Process of Community Building?

“... the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance. . . .”

“In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God ‘has endowed each humble being with ability and talent,’ and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá’í world community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed, and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. For extensive and deep as has been the sharing in the glorious work of the Cause, who would claim that every single believer has succeeded in finding his or her fullest satisfaction in the life of the Cause?”

The Universal House of Justice, letter dated September, 1964, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, p. 43.

“A unity in diversity of actions is called for, a condition in which different individuals will concentrate on different activities, appreciating the salutary* effect of the aggregate* on the growth and development of the Faith, because each person cannot do everything and all persons cannot do the same thing.”

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

***Salutary:** beneficial, healthy
***Aggregate:** the sum total

Strengthening the Bonds of Unity

“Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. . . .”

“Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 1.

“Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. . . . Let each one of God’s loved ones centre his attention on this: to be the Lord’s mercy to man; to be the Lord’s grace.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 3.

“Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another’s projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all. . . .”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Consultation: A Compilation, p. 9, #20.

“. . . the spiritual development of the soul requires not merely prayer and meditation, but also active service to one’s fellowmen in accordance with the laws and principles of the Revelation of God. The reconstruction of human society and the spiritual advancement of individual souls go hand in hand.”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 12, 1984, in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986, p. 630.

“Many of those who drift away from the Cause do so for the reason that they had ceased to go on developing. They became complacent or indifferent, and consequently ceased to draw the spiritual strength and vitality from the Cause which they should have. Sometimes, of course, people fail because of a test they just do not meet, and often our severest tests come from each other. Certainly the believers should try to avert such things, and if they happen, remedy them through love.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated January 8, 1949, in Lights of Guidance, fifth revised edition, 1997, p. 114, #388.

“Turn to your Bahá’í brothers and sisters, who are living with you in the kingdom. Indeed, the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other’s love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to duly draw these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith.”

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 8, 1942, in Directives of the Guardian, pp. 40-41, #109.

Examining Patterns of Community Life

Using the following focus questions, examine various aspects of your community's current patterns of functioning and brainstorm additions or refinements to current practices

“Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are embryonic Local Houses of Justice, should develop as rallying centres of the community. They must concern themselves not only with teaching the Faith, with the development of the Bahá’í way of life and with the proper organization of the Bahá’í activities of their communities, but also with those crucial events which profoundly affect the life of all human beings: birth, marriage, and death”

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated April 17, 1981.

Focus questions:

- ★ When new believers enroll, what is the process, formal or informal, that integrates them into the community and helps them put down roots? What specific steps could be developed as habits in the community?
- ★ When believers move into the community from elsewhere, what is the process, formal or informal, of welcoming them and integrating them into the community? What specific steps could be developed as habits in the community?
- ★ How are birthdays and anniversaries observed?
- ★ Is there a process to recognize and celebrate a Bahá’í child’s attainment of the age of maturity?
- ★ When believers pioneer or return from pioneering, is there a process to celebrate their sacrifice, assess their needs, or offer help?
- ★ What does the community do regularly to create joy? How do its members have fun together? (Shared joy is the social glue that binds a community together!)
- ★ When someone is sick or in need, what is the process to help?
- ★ What happens when a believer, or a relative of a believer, dies? What happens a week later? What happens a month later?
- ★ What is the process of sharing good news?
- ★ What is the process of celebrating births and marriages?

Suggestions for Assemblies:

- ★ Share these focus questions with appropriate committees and ask for their recommendations.
- ★ Share one or more focus questions with your community at Feasts and ask for suggestions.

Case Studies for Consultation

Task:

- ★ Spend 15 minutes consulting about one of the following situations
- ★ Be prepared to share your group's responses to the question regarding your case study

Situation 1

Cesar is the only elderly Bahá'í in a community of young active adults. He is in good health, but no longer feels comfortable driving at night. Unfortunately, when community events take place, he is the last to be informed about them and has even been forgotten on several occasions. Frustrated, he tells himself that he is just not an important member of the local community and stops participating in its activities.

Question: How might the Assembly and the community regain Cesar's participation?

Situation 2

Keneesha has been an active member of the Bahá'í community for many years. Her mother, who lives nearby, was recently diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. Her husband's job requires frequent travel. Worried about how she can manage to care for both her mother and the couple's school-age children, Keneesha consulted with the Assembly about her situation. The Assembly offered to say prayers on behalf of Keneesha and her family. She felt that the Assembly's response was not very helpful and vowed never to bring a problem to the Assembly again.

Question: What might be more helpful responses for the Assembly to make to Keneesha's situation?

Situation 3

Beth, a 16-year-old, eagerly enrolled in the Bahá'í community six months ago. The school friends who enthusiastically introduced her to the Faith now seldom visit her or invite her to join them on social occasions. In fact, Beth has been participating less and less in Bahá'í activities and more and more in the events of a local church youth group.

Question: How might Beth's participation in the Bahá'í community be rekindled?

A Systematic Process of Community Development

Assessing needs

Assessing needs

- ★ What do community members need and want from our community?

Assessing resources

Assessing resources

- ★ What do community members have to offer to the process of community building?

Creating a vision of our preferred future

Creating a vision of our preferred future

- ★ What do we want our community to become during the next year?
- ★ What do we want our community to become during the next 3 years?
- ★ What do we want our community to become during the next 5 years?

Selecting strategies

Selecting short, medium, and long-term strategies to address needs in a sustainable manner:

- ★ What can we get started immediately or in the next 3-6 months?
- ★ What groundwork must be laid to start other strategies in 6-12 months?
- ★ What additional resources, skills, knowledge, or guidance do we need to develop or acquire to make our goals a reality?

Implementing the plan

Implementing the plan

- ★ What will we do first?
- ★ Who will take responsibility for this?
- ★ When should we evaluate the progress of this undertaking?

Reviewing and evaluating the plan

Reviewing and evaluating the plan

- ★ What is the general climate of our community? vibrant? loving? purposeful?
- ★ What successes can be used as a base to build upon?
- ★ What methods need adjustment or improvement?
- ★ What have we learned from difficulties we have encountered?
- ★ What new activities or elements could be added at this time?

Planning our Preferred Future

Focus questions

- ★ What do we want our community to be like in 1 year? in 3 years? in 5 years?
- ★ What can we do to create a community that is warm and loving?
- ★ What steps can we take to move our community progressively closer towards this vision?

Activities:

1. Creating a vision of our preferred future

- ★ As a group, brainstorm responses to the focus questions, considering what is now known about the community's needs and resources, and what has been learned about ways to knit hearts closer.
- ★ A group recorder should write down each element of the vision of what you want your community to become and each step toward your preferred future as it is suggested.
- ★ You may want to refer back to your poster of “Elements of Community Life” or “Activities of a Bahá'í Community” (Handouts, pp. 11-13).
- ★ You may also choose to assess which elements are currently present in the community and consider the following focus questions:
 - How might existing elements be refined to make them even more enriching?
 - Is it timely to add missing elements to the pattern of community life?
 - If so, what might be added?

2. Selecting short, medium, and long-term strategies to address needs in a sustainable manner

- ★ Go through your list of possible steps and flag them as short term (1-3 months), medium term (3-6 months), or long term (6-12 months), based on how long it would take to get them started.

Congratulations! You now have a rough draft of a plan for systematic community development. Share this with your community to gather further input and schedule time on your Assembly agenda for further consultation and refinement.

Consider initiating a “success cascade” by immediately doing the most do-able short-term goals and using the resulting successes to bring energy to other strategies.

Remember: in meeting your own Bahá'í community's needs, you will also be increasing your ability to attract non-Bahá'ís, whose needs for belonging, meaning, and service are the same as ours.

Additional Quotations from the Facilitator's Guide

From “Bahá'í Community Life”

“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 213.

From “What We Need and Want from our Communities”

“The institutions of society . . . [must] assess in an objective manner both the real needs and the aspirations of the communities they serve. . . .”

Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, January 23, 1995, The Prosperity of Humankind, section VI.

From “Closing”

“As a community clearly in the vanguard of the constructive forces at work on the planet, and as one which has access to proven knowledge, let us be about our Father's business. He will, from His glorious retreats on high, release liberal effusions of His grace upon our humble efforts, astonishing us with the incalculable victories of His conquering power. It is for the unceasing blessings of such a Father that we shall continue to supplicate on behalf of each and every one of you at the Sacred Threshold.”

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