

Facilitation Guide

Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles

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*



Application of Spiritual and Administrative Principles

OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

Purpose

- ★ To strengthen the Assembly's ability to apply principles to decision making

The subject of this module is the application of Bahá'í principles to matters within the jurisdiction and function of the Local Spiritual Assembly. Its goal is to strengthen the Assembly's ability to apply principles to decision making. The module clarifies the difference between principles and procedures, and it enhances participants' ability to perceive the unity underlying the seemingly opposite responsibilities of being loving shepherds and upholding justice. The module provides practice in recognizing and extracting principles from text. Use of case studies allows practice in applying principles to the facts of particular situations.

What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotation.** A one-page sheet containing a quotation from a letter of the Universal House of Justice which provides the foundation of the module. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators.** The page you are reading. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process.** A 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 module.** A two-page listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 9-10)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this module.** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the workshop. (pp. 11-49)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development.** A two-page overview of the vision of this office and the services it provides. (unnumbered pages near the end of this Guide)
- ★ **Evaluation Forms.** A two-page evaluation form for the facilitator to complete and return to the Office of Assembly Development and a two-page 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 study these workshops as an institution, may invite other Assemblies in their area to study together, or may invite their 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 five hours in length with the majority averaging about four 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.
- ★ Read through the workshop and its handouts 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. Feel free to duplicate the handouts on colored paper and interleaf them in the Facilitation Guide if this would make facilitation easier for you.
- ★ 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 workshop

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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.

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.

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

During the Session

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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.
- ★ 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 participants into small groups

- ★ 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.)

Guidance for Facilitators, continued

- 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.
- If you have a combination of Assembly and community members attending, you may wish to mix the groups together for some exercises and separate Assembly members from community members for other exercises.

Closing the Session

- ★ Provide 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. Give participants their Bahá'í Locality Code and explain how to fill in the forms.

After the Session

- ★ Complete the workshop report form and mail it with the participant evaluations 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

- ★ Send a follow up letter to the Assembly(ies) to thank them for participation and include a copy of 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 Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles

Objectives:

Participants will

- ★ Explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ Perceive the unity underlying the seemingly opposing principles of justice and mercy
- ★ Understand the difference between principles and procedures
- ★ Improve their ability to identify principles
- ★ Gain skill and confidence in identifying specific principles relevant to a problem
- ★ Gain skill and confidence in making decisions based on the application of principles

Agenda outline: (Total time: 2 hours, 55 minutes)

- ★ **Introduction** (15 minutes), p. 11
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly development program, familiarize participants with the objectives of this module, and present an agenda outline of topics and activities.
- ★ **The call to “a new state of mind”** (10 minutes), pp. 12-13
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”
- ★ **The administration of justice** (25 minutes), pp. 14-16
Examination of metaphors and discussion to help participants gain a deeper appreciation of the Assembly’s roles and responsibilities and perceive the unity underlying the seemingly opposite responsibilities of being loving shepherds and upholding justice.
- ★ **The importance of principle** (15 minutes), p. 17
Discussion focused on establishing a deeper appreciation that administrative functioning is based on principles.
- ★ **Distinguishing between principles and procedures** (15 minutes), pp. 18-20
Review of a chart designed to provide clarity about the distinctions between principles and procedures by highlighting distinguishing features and giving examples of each. Includes an optional self-test to check understanding.
- ★ **Identifying spiritual and administrative principles** (20 minutes), pp. 21-22
An activity to give participants practice in reading passages and identifying the principles they contain so that these will be available to guide consultation.
- ★ **Applying spiritual and administrative principles** (65 minutes), pp. 23-26
A review of the consultative process of identifying and applying principles followed by practice in identifying and applying principles through the use of case studies.
- ★ **Closing** (5 minutes), p. 27
Inspirational quotations to stimulate a desire in participants to continue perfecting the skill of applying principles and to provide assurance of divine confirmation of all efforts.

Highlights, continued

Extension sessions for use if more time is available

★ *Use of authority and administering justice (20 minutes), p. 21*

Offers participants additional practice in reading passages and identifying the principles they contain while familiarizing them with different content. Uses passages from the May 9, 1994 letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States.

★ *The Bahá'í application of justice (30 minutes), pp. 21-22*

Offers participants additional practice in reading passages and identifying the principles they contain while familiarizing them with different content. Uses excerpts from the December 9, 1991 letter of the Universal House of Justice.

Times given above are minimums. Module 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 quotes in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotes may also aid participants who are slower readers.

Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard or previously prepared flip chart and markers
- ★ Highlighters, pencils
- ★ Reference books for case studies, including multiple copies of Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies (1998 edition), Lights of Guidance (the 1996 rev. edition), and Bahá'í Administration
- ★ *Optional: Scotch tape is needed if doing the optional extension on p.19*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of the quote at the end of the Facilitator's Guide to be given as a gift to participants.*

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

Introduction (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To introduce Assembly Development resources
- ★ To familiarize participants with the objectives of this module
- ★ To present an agenda outline of topics and activities
- ★ To determine what questions and issues participants have on this topic

Activities:

1. Brief Devotions

- ★ Open with brief devotions that you have selected or ask for a volunteer.

2. Introduction

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources of the Office of Assembly Development (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached at the end of the Facilitation Guide), highlighting that the purpose of the modules 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. The primary focus of this particular module is the application of Bahá’í principles to matters within the jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly.

3. Overview objectives (3-5 minutes)

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

4. Comment on the limits of what we can accomplish

- ★ Emphasize that this module is not meant to be a comprehensive training session making participants experts after just a few hours. Gaining skill in applying spiritual and administrative laws and principles to human affairs is a “learning by doing” process that is part of the ongoing maturation of Local Spiritual Assemblies and their members.

5. Review agenda (3-5 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

Introduction, continued

optional extension sessions that are added.

6. Invite questions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite participants to share questions they have about this topic.
- ★ Make a list of these and post them. 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”
- ★ To gain a deeper understanding of the Assembly’s roles and responsibilities

Activities:

1. Discussion of quotations (5-10 minutes)

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind” (see Participant Handouts, p. 3).
- ★ 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” quotes 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

- ★ *For an extended session, have participants read aloud the remaining quotations on “The Call to a New State of Mind,” (Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4). 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 quotes are read.*
- ★ *Ask the group as a whole:*
 - *How might “an expansion of thought” be stimulated? (par. 3)*
 - *What might fall into the category of “the obscuring dust of acquired knowledge”? (par. 5)*
 - *What are some of the assumptions and conceptions we have in general about institutions, their authority, and*

Call To “A New State Of Mind,” continued

“what is natural and appropriate in relationships”?
(par. 6)

- *Where do these assumptions and conceptions come from?*
(par. 6)
- *How do we remove “obscuring dust” and “clear the ground for new conceptions of social organization”?* (par. 5)
- *How comfortable is the process of “ever more rapid change”?* (par. 8)
- *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 passage from the Ridván 1996 letter from the Universal House of Justice (Participant Handouts, p. 3, first quote) silently and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of the module.
- ★ Invite participants to share what they have underlined.

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

Loving Shepherds and Local Houses of Justice: The Administration of Justice (25 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To gain a deeper appreciation of some of the Assembly's roles and responsibilities
- ★ To perceive the unity underlying the seemingly opposite principles of justice and mercy

Activities:

1. Examining the metaphor of the shepherd (10 minutes)

- ★ Examine the metaphor of a shepherd by having a participant read aloud the first quotation on the handout "Loving Shepherds And Local Houses Of Justice: The Administration Of Justice": (Participant Handouts, p. 5)

"The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with firm determination to act with justice in all cases which are submitted to them for their consideration." (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 9, 1934, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23.)

- ★ **Ask:** What words and phrases come to mind when you think of shepherds and their aims and motives in relation to their sheep?
- ★ Make a list on the board or flip chart of these words and phrases. (2-3 minutes)
- ★ Make a second list of words and phrases that describe cultural attitudes and popular assumptions about the aims and motives of those who dispense justice. (2-3 minutes)
- ★ Ask for comments about the similarities/contrasts between the two lists.
- ★ Ask for brief comments about how our exposure to these cultural attitudes may affect our feelings about the Administrative Order.

2. Reconciling seemingly incompatible principles (3 minutes)

- ★ Ask a participant to read aloud the second quotation on their handout:

"In all cases submitted for its consideration the Assembly must uphold the standard of justice in delivering its verdict. . . ." (The Universal House of Justice, July 30, 1972, in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, p. 224.)

The Administration of Justice, continued

- ★ Comment that to many people in our culture the responsibilities of being loving shepherds and upholding justice seem mutually incompatible: you can do one or the other, but not both.
- ★ Draw a circle on the board with dotted lines connecting its various points or show some type of sphere and share this quote:

“One might liken Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated July 5, 1947 in “Issues Concerning Community Functioning”— Participant Handout p. 5, fourth quote)
- ★ Share the Guardian’s quote on reconciling seemingly opposite principles:

“Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá’í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor and courage on the other.” (Shoghi Effendi, Bahá’í Administration, pp. 63-64 — Participant Handout p. 5, third quote)
- ★ Emphasize the point that “nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá’í” can reconcile the responsibilities of administering justice and being loving shepherds.

3. Discussion of the meaning of compassion (5-8 minutes)

- ★ Point out that our culture sometimes sends the message that it is “mean” to apply laws and administer punishment, however merited, and “kind” to set the law aside. In contrast, Bahá’u’lláh, after prescribing the punishment for a particular offense, says in His Book of Laws:

“Beware lest, through compassion, ye neglect to carry out the statutes of the religion of God; do that which hath been bidden you by Him Who is compassionate and merciful.” (Bahá’u’lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 45, p. 36-Participant Handout p. 5, fifth quote)

The Administration of Justice, continued

★ **Ask:**

- What do these passages imply about true compassion, mercy, love, and justice?
- If shepherds drive sheep where the sheep do not want to go, are they being kind or cruel?
- If they block them from going in a particular direction, are they being protective or restrictive?

4. Discussion of differing responsibilities of Assemblies and individuals (5 minutes)

- ★ Mention that a letter on behalf of the Guardian points out that sometimes in Bahá'í communities there is a misunderstanding of the different responsibilities given to Assemblies and to individuals regarding love, unity, forgiveness, and justice:

“There is a tendency to mix up the functions of the Administration and try to apply it in individual relationships, which is abortive, because the Assembly is a nascent House of Justice and is supposed to administer, according to the Teachings, the affairs of the community. But individuals toward each other are governed by love, unity, forgiveness and a sin-covering eye. Once the friends grasp this they will get along much better, but they keep playing Spiritual Assembly to each other and expect the Assembly to behave like an individual . . .” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 5, 1950, in The Bahá'í Life, pp. 18-19)

- ★ **Ask:** What would happen in the community if the Assembly behaved “like an individual” and did not administer justice?

The Importance of Principle (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To establish a deeper appreciation that administrative functioning is based on principles

Activities:

1. Discussion of the importance of principle (15 minutes)

- ★ Have participants read aloud the quotations on the handout “The Importance Of Principle.” (Participant Handouts, p. 6)
- ★ **Ask:** What does it mean for two elements to be “indissolubly bound” (as mentioned in the second quote of the handout)?

Suggest the example of table salt (sodium chloride) a compound of two chemical elements. These two elements cannot be separated without losing the properties they have when combined. When separated, a compound which is necessary for life becomes two substances: one is corrosive and poisonous, and the other is a metal so soft it has no practical uses.

- ★ **Ask:**
 - What does “tantamount to a mutilation of the body” mean? (par. 2 of handout)
 - What would happen to the human body if the nervous system or circulatory system were to be separated from the other organs and systems of the body?
- ★ Ask for thoughts, inspired by these quotations, about why it is important to study the application of spiritual and administrative principles to the functions of the Assembly.
- ★ If the following points are not mentioned, share them as summary comments:
 - Shoghi Effendi describes the Bahá’í Administrative Order as an organic system – a system in which all the parts are organized and coordinated for the benefit of the whole. The spiritual teachings and administrative principles cannot be separated.
 - The Local Spiritual Assembly, as an institution of this new Order, has the obligation to operate according to these principles. Therefore, Assemblies must learn to apply these principles to all matters before them. Operating according to these principles enables the power released by Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation to exercise its influence upon the world.

The Importance of Principle, continued

- Learning to operate on the basis of spiritual principle helps decision-making groups discover and implement practical solutions to social problems.
- Mature functioning of Assemblies depends on the willingness of the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies to deepen themselves in the proper application of the principles so that Assemblies can develop to their full potential.

Distinguishing between Principles and Procedures (15 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To provide clarity about the distinctions between principles and procedures

Activities:

1. Definition of terms (10 minutes)

- ★ Refer participants to the Chart on the handout “Distinguishing between Principles and Procedures,” (Participant Handouts, p. 7) explaining that a lack of clarity about the difference between principles and procedures is sometimes a source of confusion or disunity.

- ★ Talk through the points made on the chart:

- **Principles** can be both spiritual and administrative. They are divine in origin, unchangeable, and the same in every Bahá’í community in the world.
- **Spiritual principles** are fundamental truths of the Bahá’í Faith upheld by all believers as tenets of faith.

Examples of spiritual principles include:

- ⇒ the oneness of God
- ⇒ progressive revelation
- ⇒ the organic oneness of humanity
- ⇒ the immortality of the soul
- ⇒ the equality of women and men
- ⇒ the harmony of science and religion

- **Administrative principles** are those basic truths defined by Bahá’u’lláh, expounded on by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and applied by the Universal House of Justice that govern the workings of the Administrative Order, the application of Bahá’í law, and the unfoldment of the Faith. They exist for the purposes of guiding the expansion and consolidation of the Cause and of ordering community life.

A few examples of administrative principles include:

- ⇒ during consultation all have the right to freely express their views
- ⇒ all contributions to the fund are voluntary
- ⇒ teaching the Cause must be given precedence in Assembly meetings
- ⇒ each voter votes according to his/her conscience

Distinguishing between Principles and Procedures, continued

- ⇒ the Cause must not be allowed to center around any particular personality
- ⇒ Assemblies, not individuals, are the bedrock on which the Administration is built

Note that principles cannot be changed. Their application by the Local Spiritual Assembly is, however, flexible according to the circumstances of the case. For instance, an Assembly may take into consideration such factors as knowledge—whether a believer knowingly violated a principle or law—and attitude—whether a violation occurred in a spirit of defiance or whether the believer regrets the violation.

- **Procedures** are orderly ways of doing things that are developed by individual Assemblies to enable them to conduct their affairs in an organized and efficient manner. Procedures may vary greatly from one community to another and may change over time, as they are not set forth in the Writings. It is within each Spiritual Assembly's authority to develop procedures for its own local community, as long as these procedures do not contradict either the spirit of Bahá'í principles or procedures already established by a higher authority.

A few examples of administrative procedures include:

- ⇒ the process by which believers are enrolled
- ⇒ the process by which believers are deepened
- ⇒ how donations to the Fund are collected and acknowledged
- ⇒ how often an Assembly meets

Note that procedures are made to help the Assembly conduct its affairs with greater efficiency, but the Guardian cautions against their overuse.

Optional extension session: Self Test on “Principles and Procedures”

(3-5 minutes)

- ★ *If you are not sure participants have a clear sense of the distinctions between principles and procedures, have them complete the self-test sheet “Principles and Procedures”*

Distinguishing between Principles and Procedures, continued

(Participant Handouts, p. 8) of their handouts. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to work in pairs. Ask for answers on each item and clarify any remaining questions. (Note: The answers to the exercise are that numbers 2,6,9,13,14 are procedures. Answers are also found on the bottom of Participant Handouts, p. 8.)

- ★ *If you want participants to get up out of their seats, give each pair (or group) these sentences cut into strips. Have them paste the strips under the appropriate heading posted on a wall. Compare answers between groups.*

2. Discussion of sources of information (5 minutes)

- ★ **Ask:** Where can Assemblies and believers find information on administrative principles and procedures?

If the following are not mentioned, describe and recommend them.

- **Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies** (revised 1998 edition). A compilation of quotes and guidelines regarding the principles and procedures applicable to various topics and situations.
 - **Bahá'í Administration**. A collection of letters written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the US and Canada in the 1920's outlining the guiding principles of Bahá'í administration. Much of the material from this book has been incorporated into Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities.
 - **Lights of Guidance** (1996 revised edition), compiled by Helen Hornby. A compilation of passages from the Writings, letters of Shoghi Effendi, and letters of the Universal House of Justice.
- ★ **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.*

Identifying Spiritual and Administrative Principles (20 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To give participants practice in reading passages and identifying the principles they contain so that these will be available to guide consultation

Activity:

1. Extracting principles from quotations (10 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into small working groups of 3-4. Have the groups develop a list of principles which can be extracted from the quotations in the handout “Applying Principles and Procedures,” (Participant Handouts, pp. 9-10).
- ★ *Option for large groups: Extracting principles on the use of authority (20 minutes)*
- ★ *If the class is large and extra time is available, ask half the working groups to use the quotations in the section of the handout “Use of Authority and Administering Justice” (Participant Handouts, pp. 11-12) and to extract principles relevant to that topic. For an extended session, have groups extract principles from both sets of quotations.*

2. Small groups report back (10 minutes)

- ★ Have each small group report its findings to the larger group.

A sample list of principles they might have extracted from Participant Handouts pages 9-10 include:

- Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, devotion, and spiritual development; both are essential to the development of the administration.
 - There should be uniformity in fundamentals but diversity in handling local situations.
 - Situations should be dealt with as they arise on a case by case basis, not anticipated and procedures laid down in advance.
 - Over-administration can be worse for the Faith at this time than under-administration.
 - Assemblies should direct their attention to the teaching work rather than issuing rules and regulations.
- ★ **Ask:** How easy or hard was it to identify principles contained in these quotations?

Identifying Spiritual and Administrative Principles, continued

Optional extension session (30 minutes)

1. Small group exercise: extraction of principles (15 minutes)

- ★ *Refer all groups to the handout “The Bahá’í Application of Justice,” (Participant Handouts, pp. 13-17) which is comprised of excerpts from the December 9, 1991, letter of the Universal House of Justice. Have each group extract principles found in selected paragraphs:*

The groups can be divided up to deal with different paragraphs from the letter. Following are listed possible paragraph assignments with a summary of the topic for each :

- **Paragraphs 1-3, 18** -- *The aim of the Assembly in its role of regulating behavior*
- **Paragraphs 4-7** -- *The balance between forbearance and action*
- **Paragraphs 8-9** -- *When rights should be removed*
- **Paragraphs 10-12** -- *Two situations regarding warning individuals whose rights may be in jeopardy*
- **Paragraphs 10, 13-14** -- *Two different situations regarding warning individuals whose rights may be in jeopardy*
- **Paragraphs 15-16** -- *Other factors to consider regarding deprivation of rights*
- **Paragraph 17** -- *Restoration of rights*

2. Small groups report back (15 minutes)

- ★ *Each small group should select an individual to report back their findings to the larger group. Divide remaining time so that each group has the same amount of time to present.*

Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles (65 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To review the consultative process of identifying and applying principles
- ★ To practice identifying and applying principles through the use of case studies

Activities:

1. Reviewing the consultative process (10 minutes)

- ★ Comment that the process of identifying and applying principles to the problems and responsibilities of the Local Assembly requires careful research and reasoning. Any decision made by an Assembly should be grounded in the guidance of the Writings. It should also be the result of a systematic approach.
- ★ Refer participants to the handout page “Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles: Reviewing the Process.” (Participant Handouts, p. 18)
- ★ Mention that in its Ridván 1998 letter the Universal House of Justice highlighted the importance of a systematic approach, which it called “this prerequisite of success.”

“In a general sense, it (systematization) implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá’í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavor . . . it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.”

- ★ Write the following steps (headings only), which are components of the process, on a board or flip chart, commenting on each as indicated below the headings. (shorter versions of these comments are on the handout).

- **Gather the facts from all relevant sources**

This may be done by the Assembly as a body or through delegation. It may require interviewing those involved with the situation. Facts may include emotions, such as the existence of antipathy or repentance. Organize the facts so that they can be presented with clarity. Make sure all Assembly members agree on the facts.

- **Identify and state the problem**

This step provides a common focal point and enables the next steps to be done more efficiently and with greater unity of purpose. This step is often harder than it sounds. For example, if an Assembly is concerned about the low

Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles, continued

attendance of seekers at community teaching events, it may need to decide whether the problem is that the believers are reluctant to invite people they know to investigate the Faith, whether the believers are actively inviting people but have exhausted the circle of their acquaintance, or whether the teaching events are not attractive to seekers.

- **Identify and agree upon which principles are involved**

Often several principles are relevant to the problem. There is no need to be concerned if some principles appear to be in tension with one another as this is natural.

Principles are derived from the Writings. It is helpful but not always necessary to find the specific passages that may apply. The more deepened the Assembly members, the quicker the Local Spiritual Assembly is able to identify those principles.

Depending on the urgency of the problem, the task of identifying principles, like the task of gathering facts, can be delegated to a few Assembly members rather than being done by the Assembly as a whole. The entire Assembly, however, must be satisfied that all relevant principles have been identified and are available to guide the consultation.

Identifying principles helps to focus data gathering questions. At this point, the Assembly may want to go back to the parties involved and ask more questions before continuing its consultation. As can be noticed, this is not a straight linear process.

- **Apply the principles to the facts in a full, frank, and loving discussion**

Principles exist in the abstract, outside of particular situations. The job of the Assembly is to apply the principles involved to the specific situation at hand. This job, the Universal House of Justice notes (in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States dated July 21, 1968), “is not always easy,” requiring “wisdom and a deep understanding of the Teachings” on the part of Assembly members:

“The principles enunciated in the Teachings are certainly very clear to you and to the majority of the believers – what

Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles, continued

is not always easy to discern is the application of those principles in any particular situation, especially one in which a number of different principles appears to be involved. . . . Hence the great need for wisdom and a deep understanding of the Teachings on the part of members of Spiritual Assemblies, both National and Local, so that they can apply the principles to whatever situations arise.”

Remember that while the principles are themselves unchangeable, their application is flexible. The way a principle is applied may vary from case to case.

- **Make a decision based on the principles**

Read aloud the following quotation, a fuller version of a passage read earlier:

“. . . the primary challenge in dealing with issues . . . is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. . .

“There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. . . . all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.” (The Universal House of Justice, “The Promise of World Peace,” in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, pp. 689-90)

2. Discussion of the process (10 minutes)

★ Ask:

- What effects does including spiritual principles have on the decision-making process?
- Why is it important to state the problem?
- What effects might it have on a decision-making group to

Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles, continued

skip the step of identifying principles before beginning to devise solutions?

3. Using the case studies on page 24 (45 minutes total)

- ★ Mention that the last part of this section contains several case studies, supplied by the Office of Community Administration and Development, a department of the Secretariat of the National Spiritual Assembly.
- ★ **Note:** The first study is a sample which models the process of applying spiritual and administrative principles to specific situations. Participants' copies of the other case studies contain only the facts; the facilitator's copy also contains relevant principles for each case.

Case Study Activities

1. Sample case study review (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask a participant to read the sample study aloud (Participant Handouts, pp. 19-20). Ask for comments or questions.

2. Small group case study analysis (30 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into working "Assembly" groups of 7-10.
- ★ Instruct groups that they are to assume that the facts listed in their case study are all the facts that are obtainable. They must go through the process and come to a decision within the next 30 minutes based on these facts and any relevant principles.
- ★ Remind groups of the spiritual qualities required for consultation. Assign each group a different case study (see Participant Handouts pp. 21-24). Make sure that reference materials are available (see Facilitation Guide, pp. 19-20).

3. Small groups report back (5 minutes per group)

- ★ Have each "Assembly" share with the whole group the process they went through as well as a brief summary of their case study, the principles they found relevant, and the decision they made.
- ★ *If time allows, invite questions or comments from the rest of the class after each "Assembly" reports. You may also want to share with the group other principles related to the case, as found in the facilitator's copy.*

Applying Spiritual and Administrative Principles, continued

Optional extension

- ★ Give each “Assembly” a second case study and follow the same procedures as for the first one.

4. Discussion of case study exercise (5-10 minutes)

★ Ask:

- How easy or hard was it to identify and apply principles to specific situations?
 - What can individual Assembly members contribute to this process?
- ★ Encourage Assembly members to consult together at a future Assembly meeting about what their Assembly can do to increase its skills in identifying and applying principles.

Closing (5 minutes)

Purpose

- ★ To stimulate a desire to continue perfecting the skill of applying principles
- ★ To provide assurance of divine confirmation of all efforts

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. Share the following quotations:

“The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behavior and in the conduct of their official responsibilities. . . . By their constantly aiming at improving their performance, the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the increasingly disillusioned members of society.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated Ridván, 1993, to the Bahá’ís of the World)

“These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His Wings. What bounty is there greater than this?” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 6)

Optional:

- ★ *Give each participant a gift of a beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a quotation on page 50 of the Facilitator’s Guide.*

Sample Case Study

Facts

Community A has about 75 members, but many of the believers are inactive. The attendance at Feasts averages about 30, and about the same number participate in elections. The percentage of contributors to the local Fund is also very low. Some of the members have not been seen or heard from for months and years but continue to receive community newsletters and announcements of special events.

Problem

What can or should the Assembly do to clarify the Bahá'í status of the large number of inactive members on its membership rolls? What can the Assembly do to remedy the situation?

Principles Involved

- ★ **The Assembly is responsible for the best interests of the community.**

“[The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for] promoting at all times the best interests of the communities within their jurisdiction.” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 331.)

- ★ **Do not arbitrarily remove names.**

“Your Assembly should not remove the names of Bahá'ís from the voting list just because they do not attend meetings or just because their addresses are unknown. It is hard to make Bahá'ís; and you must try and help them and reactivate them, and find those whose addresses are unknown if you can.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to several National Spiritual Assemblies, dated September 26, 1957, in *Lights of Guidance*, 1996 rev. ed., p. 84, #293.)

- ★ **Ascertain belief in Bahá'u'lláh.**

“Any member of the Bahá'í Community who finds that he does not believe in Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation is free to withdraw from the Faith and such a withdrawal should be accepted. But a Bahá'í who continues to believe in Bahá'u'lláh cannot withdraw from the Bahá'í Community.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 8, 1970, in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies*, 1998 ed., Chapter 6, p. 6.19.)

- ★ **Encourage and love inactive believers.**

“...it is very discouraging to find inactive and unresponsive believers; on the other hand we must always realize that some

Sample Case Study, continued

souls are weak and immature and not capable of carrying on an active administrative burden. They need encouragement, the love of their fellow Bahá'ís and assistance. To blame them for not doing more for the Cause is useless, and they may actually have a very firm belief in Bahá'u'lláh which with care could be fanned into flame.

“If some of these isolated and inactive people gradually turn to other work than the Cause we should not always blame them – they probably needed more help, more stimulating, more teaching and Bahá'í comradeship than they received.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 25, 1947, in Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., Chapter 6, p. 6.20)

Principles applied to the facts

After considering the principles and their application to the facts in this situation, the Assembly decided it had two major tasks before it:

★ **Locate the inactive believers**

Determine if they still live in the community, then contact them to find out whether or not they still believe in Bahá'u'lláh. The principles indicate that even though many of the inactive members have not been seen or heard from in years, their names may not be removed from the membership rolls until the Assembly has done this.

★ **Try to activate them**

The principles also indicate that the Assembly is responsible for the well-being of the community and should encourage active participation in Bahá'í community life. The quotations above state that love, encouragement, comradeship, assistance, and deepening are some of the components needed to accomplish this goal.

Decisions

Here are the decisions made by Assembly A:

★ **Locate inactive believers and determine their membership status based on residency and belief in Bahá'u'lláh. Try to determine the reason(s) for inactivity.**

The Assembly decided that these tasks had to be done with sensitivity, wisdom, and tact. It did not wish to further

Sample Case Study, continued

Decisions

alienate believers who were already outside the mainstream of community life. It appointed a three person task force to develop a plan by which to accomplish decision #1. To address the root of the problem and not just the symptoms, the task force was also given the job of learning, if possible, the reasons for inactivity and collecting suggestions for remedying the problems. This discovery process could include face-to-face or telephone conversation, a confidential mail-in survey form, or some other means. After a plan was developed, the task force was to come back to the Assembly for final approval before proceeding.

★ **Encourage active participation of inactive believers and try to prevent future occurrences.**

To prevent future inactivity, the Assembly decided it was important to ensure that each new believer be deepened, nurtured, and made to feel a part of community life. To accomplish this task, the Assembly plans to match deepened believers with new believers. This system will be used to re-connect inactive believers who need deepening and nurturing. When the task force begins to determine some of the factors leading to inactivity, the Assembly will address other solutions.

Case Study #1 Response Key

Establishing a Year of Waiting

Facts

The date is June, 1998. Mr. John Doe, an isolated believer, has requested from a nearby Assembly that they establish his year of waiting. His wife, Jane Doe, also a Bahá'í, returned to her home in another state in November of 1996. At the time she left Mr. and Mrs. Doe decided not to request a year of waiting because they wanted to leave open the possibility of a reconciliation. Mr. Doe visited his wife early in 1997, and after consultation both decided that harmony could not be restored in their marriage and that, in fact, strong negative feelings persisted between them. Both have now requested to have the year of waiting begin in November of 1997 and ending in November of 1998. They have not been together in over a year. They had no children and were married for only four years. Mr. and Mrs. Doe were both well known to the Assembly during the time they lived in the area and the Assembly is aware of the facts.

Problem

Should the Assembly grant the request for a year of waiting, and should the Assembly back date it to November 1997?

Principles

★ **Reconciliation must be deemed impossible.**

“Regarding divorce the Guardian stated that it is discouraged, deprecated and against the good pleasure of God. . . . Divorce is conditional upon the approval and permission of the Spiritual Assembly. The members of the Assembly must in such matters independently and carefully study and investigate each case. If there should be valid grounds for divorce and it should be found that reconciliation is utterly impossible, that antipathy is intense and its removal is not possible, then the Assembly may approve the divorce.” (Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, July 7, 1938, Lights of Guidance, 1996 ed., p. 393, #1307)

★ **The Assembly must decide if antipathy exists.**

“Irreconcilable antipathy arising between the parties to a marriage is not merely a lack of love for one’s spouse but an antipathy which cannot be resolved. It is for the Spiritual Assembly to decide whether this condition exists before it sets the date for the beginning of the year of waiting, and this it may do on the application of one of the parties. It is not affected by the other party’s not wishing to apply for a

Case Study #1, continued

divorce.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 12, 1979, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., p. 17.2)

- ★ **The Assembly can record a date for the year of waiting if no reconciliation is possible.**

“If no reconciliation is possible, and actual repugnance is found to exist between the parties, then the Assembly may record a date which is the beginning of the year of waiting.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 24, 1972, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., p. 17.7)

- ★ **The year of waiting can be back dated to the time of separation.**

“It is for the Local Spiritual Assembly . . . to fix the date for the beginning of the year of patience which, in any event, cannot be earlier than the date when the parties last separated with the intention of divorce. Thus the date of the beginning of the year of patience normally commences when one of the parties notifies the Assembly that they have separated with the intention of divorce. However, the Assembly may establish the beginning of the year of patience on a prior date provided it is satisfied such prior date reflects the actual date of separation and there is a good reason for doing so.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated August 26, 1965, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., pp. 17.7-17.8.)

- ★ The Assembly had to determine if there was any hope for reconciliation before it established the year of waiting. This implied that consultation had to take place between the Assembly and both parties. If the Assembly concluded that there was irreconcilable antipathy, it would have no alternative but to establish the year of waiting.
- ★ Regarding the beginning date of the year of patience, it cannot be earlier than the date when the parties last separated with the intention of divorce. In this case, their request for a date came even later than the point at which they felt their marriage was irreconcilable and their separation occurred. Although the date normally commences when one of the parties notifies the

**Principles
applied to the
facts**

Case Study #1, continued

Assembly that they have separated with the intention of divorce, it is permissible to backdate the beginning of the year of waiting. Therefore, the Assembly had to decide whether or not to accept the date of separation as stated by the couple.

Decisions

- ★ The Assembly appointed two members to gather the facts in regard to the principles above. It was determined that the couple had indeed tried to reconcile, but so much ill feeling existed from past behaviors and fear of future hurt that reconciliation was impossible. Aversion was felt strongly by both sides. Their last contact occurred before November of 1997. The committee was satisfied that this date accurately reflected the separation and recommended the Assembly grant the year of waiting and back date it to November 1, 1997. After consultation the Assembly concurred.

Case Study #2 Response Key

The Appearance of Drinking

Facts

The Local Spiritual Assembly has received a report that Edward, a member of its community, has been drinking alcohol in an area restaurant. The Assembly invites Edward to consult with it about the report. He informs the Assembly that he often has business luncheons at the restaurant where his associates (non-Bahá'ís) order alcoholic drinks, but he only orders soft drinks. He feels that the person making the report mistakenly believed that his soft drink contained alcohol, since everyone else at the table was drinking alcoholic beverages. The Local Assembly is satisfied with Edward's explanation and, because it has never had reason to question his obedience to Bahá'í laws in the past, decides to let the matter drop.

Later, Edward requests another meeting with the Assembly at which he states that the report about his possible drinking has deeply disturbed him. He is concerned that his integrity as a Bahá'í has been called into question and states that his feelings have been hurt. He believes that if he is not trusted by his fellow believers, it will be difficult for him to participate in community events. He is upset with the actions the Local Spiritual Assembly had taken in this situation and questions their appropriateness.

Problem

How might the Assembly respond to Edward?

★ **Search out the truth.**

“They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion. . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 14)

★ **The Assembly is the shepherd of the community and must act with justice.**

“The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with a firm determination to act with justice in all the cases which are submitted to them for their consideration.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 9, 1934, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23)

Principles involved

Case Study #2, continued

★ **Anyone can bring a matter to the Assembly for consultation.**

“Regarding consultation: Any person can refer a matter to the Assembly for consultation whether the other person wishes to or not. In matters which affect the Cause the Assembly should, if it deems it necessary, intervene even if both sides do not want it to, because the whole purpose of the Assemblies is to protect the Faith, the Communities, and the individual Bahá’í as well.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 25)

★ **Assembly must insure harmony and fellowship.**

“There is no task more urgently necessary than the insurance of perfect harmony and fellowship among the friends, especially between the local assemblies and individual believers. The local assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the local assembly . . .” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, October 28, 1935, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23)

**Principles
applied to the
facts**

- ★ The Local Spiritual Assembly is obligated to investigate a report of a possible violation of Bahá’í law that comes to its attention.
- ★ The Local Spiritual Assembly can determine for itself how it wishes to look into the matter. For example, it can meet with the person as a body or have representatives meet with the person.
- ★ The friends must not only be conscious of wrongdoing but also of conveying the appearance of wrongdoing.
- ★ A believer did not know what to do about a situation and took this burden to the Assembly. Edward himself chose to share the burden of his feelings with the Assembly.

Commentary

- ★ Having met with Edward and satisfied itself that the accusation was unfounded, the Assembly decided to drop the matter. It did not anticipate the potential for hurt feelings in this

Case Study #2, continued

situation, and Edward requested another meeting to resolve this additional issue.

- ★ The Assembly or its representative(s) needs to meet with Edward again with sympathy for his feelings of hurt and help him understand the Assembly's role in situations such as this.

The Assembly may also seek to dispel any doubts or misunderstandings from the mind of the believer who presented the matter to begin with and assure that person that the Assembly has satisfied itself that Edward himself was not breaking Bahá'í law.

In future, recognizing the potential for injured feelings, the Assembly might choose to explain its purpose in its initial meeting with a believer accused of an infraction of Bahá'í law, explaining the underlying principles to increase their understanding and minimize the chances of ill-will developing. It should also let the believer know that it will have to consult after its meeting with him to consider the facts, but that it will contact him promptly concerning any decision it makes, reminding him that its primary purpose, in addition to protecting the integrity and reputation of the Faith, is to dispel misunderstandings and insure harmony and fellowship between the believers.

Decisions

- ★ Meet with Edward to convey sympathy for his feelings and to explain the Assembly's role in these matters and that it was necessary to meet with him to search out the truth. Explain to him that anyone can bring a matter to it for consultation and that it is obligated to investigate all matters brought to its attention which might affect the reputation of the Faith. The Assembly itself had no reason to suspect him of inappropriate behavior but his side of the story concerning this particular situation had to be obtained directly from him.
- ★ Explain that this doubt was the perception of a single party, not of the general community, and that he need not feel that he is not trusted by his fellow believers. No matter how good an opinion the individual members of the Assembly have of him personally, the Assembly itself is duty bound to investigate the matter.

Case Study #2, continued

Decisions

- ★ Assure him that the Assembly will meet with the party who brought the matter to it originally and inform that person that the Assembly has determined that Edward was not violating Bahá'í law.
- ★ Meet with the other individual to inform that person that Edward was not violating Bahá'í law. If they are not familiar with such meetings between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, explain that it is customary and acceptable that Bahá'ís order non-alcoholic beverages when dining with non-Bahá'ís who may be ordering alcoholic drinks. While someone outside of hearing range may not be aware of the difference, those participating in such meetings will be aware that the Bahá'í is drinking a non-alcoholic beverage.

Case Study #3 Response Key

Bahá'í Marriage Without Consent

Facts

Two members of the Bahá'í community – Joe and Jackie – were married in a civil service ceremony by a Methodist minister. A year earlier, the young man's (Caucasian) parents had written their approval for the marriage. Later when he had introduced his fiancée (African American) to his family, the parents withdrew consent. Joe had not kept his parents' original letter of consent. When the couple attempted to get consent again from all parents, Joe's parents adamantly refused, stating that it was on the grounds of religious prejudice, rather than on the fact that this would be an interracial marriage. Not being able to secure the necessary consents, the couple were married in a civil service although both were aware of the Bahá'í laws on marriage and consent.

Problem

What action should the Assembly take towards the couple?

Principles involved

- ★ **The Local Spiritual Assembly is obligated to ascertain compliance with Bahá'í and civil law.**

“The obligation of the Spiritual Assembly is to ascertain that all the requirements of civil and Bahá'í law have been complied with, and, having done so, the Assembly may neither refuse to perform the marriage ceremony nor delay it.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 30, 1967, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

- ★ **The Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for educating the members of its community**

“Local Assemblies are responsible for making certain that the members of their community understand both the requirements of Bahá'í marriage law and the nature of the sanctions which can be imposed when the laws are violated - (It should be noted that this is not a matter of information to be checked at the time of enrollment, but rather represents a continuing Local Spiritual Assembly responsibility for deepening the Bahá'í community.)” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 14, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

- ★ **Consent is necessary.**

“Marriage is conditional upon the consent of the parents of both parties to the marriage, and in this respect it maketh no

Case Study #3, continued

difference whether the bride be a virgin or otherwise.”
(Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 111)

★ **Parents may refuse on any grounds.**

“The validity of a Bahá’í marriage is dependent upon the free and full consent of all four parents. The freedom of the parents in the exercise of this right is unrestricted and unconditioned. They may refuse their consent on any ground, and they are responsible for their decision to God alone.”

(Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 19, 1938, to an individual believer, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., Chapter 16, p. 16.14)

★ **Parents can change their minds.**

“...Concerning...consent to her daughter’s marriage: this must be given in order to be a Bahá’í marriage. Bahá’u’lláh requires this and makes no provision about a parent changing his or her mind. So they are free to do so. Once the written consent is given and the marriage takes place, the parents have no right to interfere any more.” (Letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated June 15, 1954, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., pp. 16.10-16.11)

★ **A law broken knowingly is sanctionable.**

“As soon as the Assembly has evidence satisfying it that a breach of Bahá’í Marriage Law has been committed, and if it is satisfied that the party concerned knew the law, it should not delay deprivation of voting rights beyond a reasonable time. It does not have to wait for a response from the offender.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 20, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., p. 16.24.)

★ **Administrative rights can be restored if a Bahá’í ceremony is performed.**

“At the present state in the development of the Bahá’í Community, Bahá’ís who failed to have a Bahá’í marriage through ignorance of the law are in a different category

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altogether from those who wittingly broke the law. The latter must have a Bahá'í ceremony in order to regain their voting rights; but the former should be treated in the same manner as those Bahá'ís who married before they entered the Faith and those Bahá'ís who married without a Bahá'í ceremony before the law was applied: they should be considered married and not be required to have a Bahá'í ceremony.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 20, 1966, in Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., p. 16.23)

“A delayed Bahá'í marriage, conducted for reasons of fulfillment of Bahá'í law and in the full spirit of the Bahá'í ceremony should not be viewed as a mockery but as the confirmation of a union contracted outside Bahá'í law.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 27, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly)

Principles applied to the facts

- ★ Joe and Jackie knowingly violated the Bahá'í marriage laws and have placed their good standing as Bahá'ís in jeopardy.
- ★ Joe's parents can change their minds after giving their consent to the marriage and can refuse consent for any reason.

Commentary

- ★ While it is sad that Joe's parents suffer from prejudice, they have the right to refuse consent for any reason they choose. The fact that Joe's parents originally gave consent before they discovered that Jackie was African-American is irrelevant. Parents are entitled to change their minds at any time before the marriage takes place, regardless of whether their previous consent was spoken or written, and they are responsible only to God for their decisions in the matter.
- ★ It is not clear whether the Assembly has counseled Joe and Jackie about the consequences of breaking the Bahá'í marriage law. If the Assembly has not informed Joe and Jackie that their rights could be removed as a consequence of breaking the marriage law, the Assembly must counsel them about it. In that case, the Assembly may allow a reasonable time for the couple to try again to obtain consent and to have a belated Bahá'í ceremony. Their other alternative, if they wish to preserve their administrative rights, is to separate and obtain a

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civil divorce until consent can be obtained. If they have already been counseled about loss of their administrative rights, or if they are unsuccessful with a subsequent attempt to obtain consent and are unwilling to separate, the Assembly must make a recommendation to the National Spiritual Assembly that their administrative rights be removed.

Decisions

- ★ Have either the Assembly or its representatives meet with the couple and express sympathy for their plight. Inform them, however, that their marriage without a Bahá'í ceremony has placed their administrative rights in jeopardy and that they must correct their violation or face the loss of their good standing as Bahá'ís.
- ★ Discuss with the couple what loss of administrative rights means (see pages 15.11 and 15.12 in Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies) and be sure they understand how that will affect their relationship with the Bahá'í community. Convey the love and support of the Assembly for them in their spiritual struggles, and its ongoing willingness to assist them in whatever way it can.
- ★ The Assembly may also wish to give the couple a 30-60 day deadline by which time they must correct their violation or the Assembly will be left with no choice than to recommend to the National Spiritual Assembly that they be deprived of their administrative rights.

Case Study #4 Response Key

Homosexuality

Facts

Two young Bahá'í men have been Bahá'ís for approximately six months, and one was recently elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Unfortunately, the two men have a reputation in the town as being practicing homosexuals. They live together in an apartment and had done so for several years before becoming Bahá'ís. One is a faculty member at the college which is located outside the town. The other is a local commercial artist. Both are well known, among the youth especially, as homosexuals, and members of the Bahá'í community frequently receive inquiries about them from their non-Bahá'í friends. Several of the local Bahá'ís have had difficulty accepting the men in the Bahá'í community and have even gone so far as to stop coming to Bahá'í activities to avoid contact with them.

Problem

What steps should the Assembly take in dealing with these individuals regarding their purported homosexuality?

Principles involved

★ **Search out the truth.**

“They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion. . . .” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 14)

★ **Homosexual activity is forbidden, but Assembly can advise and sympathize.**

“Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Lights of Guidance, 1996 rev. ed., p. 365, # 1221)

★ **Love between people of the same sex should not find expression in sexual acts.**

“No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships he looks upon as such, besides being against nature.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Lights of Guidance, 1996 rev. ed., p. 366, #1223)

Case Study #4, continued

★ If violation is flagrant, Assembly must act

“...Whenever it becomes known that one of the believers is flagrantly disobeying the Teachings of the Faith, whether spiritual, ethical, moral or administrative, the Assemblies should not allow such a situation to become a source of back-biting among the friends or deteriorate into either the loss of the dignity of the Teachings in the eyes of the Bahá’ís and non-Bahá’ís, or the eventual inactivity of the believers, as you have observed. The Assemblies, with the encouragement and under the continuous guidance of your National Assembly, should, in the name of protecting the interests of the Faith, themselves initiate action for the solution of the problem, and handle it with love, wisdom and firmness.” (Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 12, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in Developing Distinctive Bahá’í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies, 1998 ed., Chapter 15, p. 15.4)

★ Dealing with homosexual behavior is a process.

“Regarding the question you asked him about one of the believers who seems to be flagrantly a homosexual – although to a certain extent we must be forbearing in the matter of people’s moral conduct because of the terrible deterioration in society in general, this does not mean that we can put up indefinitely with conduct which is disgracing the Cause. This person should have it brought to his attention that such acts are condemned by Bahá’u’lláh, and that he must mend his ways, if necessary consult doctors, and make efforts to overcome this affliction, which is corruptive for him and bad for the Cause. If after a period of probation you do not see an improvement, he should have his voting rights taken away.” (Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Lights of Guidance, 1996 rev. ed., p. 52, #185)

★ Protect the name of the Faith.

“O ye beloved of the Lord! The greatest of all things is the protection of the True Faith of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Cause and service unto His Word.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, p. 4)

Case Study #4, continued

Principles applied to the facts

- ★ The Local Spiritual Assembly must act to determine if a flagrant violation of Bahá'í law is indeed occurring.
- ★ If the Bahá'í law is being violated the Local Spiritual Assembly can be sympathetic to the believers dilemma but uncompromising in its obligation to uphold the laws of the Faith.
- ★ The Local Spiritual Assembly must consider the well-being and good name of the Faith over the personal wishes of individuals.

Commentary

The example does not specify whether the newly elected Assembly member, who is believed to be living in a homosexual relationship, attends Assembly meetings. If he does, he will be a part of the consultations leading up to any decisions. If he does not, he will be approached in the same way as the other young man.

The Assembly must meet with the young men and consult with them concerning the prohibition on homosexual behavior, the requirements for chastity and obedience to the laws of the Faith. It must discover whether they are, in fact, engaging in homosexual behavior, whether they know the laws, and inquire what their intentions are with regard to them.

The Assembly must give them a reasonable period of time in which to readjust their living arrangements and public behavior patterns, and it should be sensitive to the fact that such an adjustment will be stressful and painful to both of the men. It must also be sympathetic to the fact that the burden of readjustment upon Bahá'ís who are homosexual is sometimes greater than it is upon those who are asked to make similar adjustments concerning their heterosexual relationships. While those who accept themselves as heterosexual are asked to cope only with issues of behavior, those who believe themselves to be homosexual are asked to question their fundamental perception of personal identity in addition to altering their behavior. Though the Assembly must require these believers to cease their flagrantly immoral behavior for the protection of the Faith, the fundamental changes in self-perception which are necessary for them to come fully into

Case Study #4, continued

alignment with the Teachings of the Faith will undoubtedly require much longer period of time to evolve.

Recognize that the subject of homosexuality is a sensitive issue about which many people have strong feelings. Members of the Assembly themselves need to remember to “strive to deal with these difficulties in a manner consistent with the spirit of the Cause of God, which is neither harsh and maledictory nor excessively liberal and forbearing.” (Letter concerning homosexuality written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer on March 1, 1992)

Members of the Assembly and community should realize that the existence of homosexual behavior is purely an issue of morality and does not, in and of itself, imply laxity of character in other areas. Individuals with homosexual orientations may be highly ethical and deeply spiritual, active, responsible and contributing community members in every other way, and there is no reason why the friends in the community should remain away from Bahá'í activities to avoid having contact with them.

Decisions

- ★ The Assembly might choose to consult about the issues and deepen with its members on the Writings concerning homosexual behavior. It may meet with the young men and ascertain the facts. If the rumors are true, it can convey sincere sympathy for the difficulty of the situation, but be firm about the need to resolve it in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Faith. If the rumors are denied, it is important to explain to them the need to avoid the appearance of wrongdoing.
- ★ The Assembly could explain that it is not its role to intrude on the privacy of individuals, but it has a duty to protect the reputation of the Faith and the integrity of the community, and that Assembly members have a particular responsibility to uphold the standards of the Faith. Inform them that, because they are both so well known, the openness of their behavior (or its appearance) is causing others who know of the Bahá'í law prohibiting homosexuality to question whether the Faith upholds its own laws. In addition, they should be advised that

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the continuing practice of homosexuality would place their good standing as Bahá'ís in jeopardy. If they do not establish separate residences within a reasonable period of time and (if they have been practicing homosexuals) seek to bring their relationship into accord with the laws of the faith, the Assembly will be left with no recourse than to recommend that the National Spiritual Assembly remove their administrative rights.

- ★ A deepening for the community on the subject of homosexuality could also be planned so that its members will have an opportunity to acquire a more informed understanding of how the issue of homosexuality can be approached within the Bahá'í community, so that the Assembly can help the believers identify and correct misinformed and harmful attitudes which may exist concerning such matters on both sides of the issue, and reinforce and clarify the distinctions between the role of individuals and the role of the Assembly with regard to breach of Bahá'í law. The Assembly is seeking to allay the community's fears, restore its sense of safety, bolster its trust in the institution, and increase its love and unity through better information and deeper understanding.

The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behavior and in the conduct of their official responsibilities. . . . By their constantly aiming at improving their performance, the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the increasingly disillusioned members of society

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