

# **Facilitation Guide**

## **Fostering Racial Unity**

**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*



# Fostering Racial Unity

## OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

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### Purpose

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

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

### What you will find inside your Facilitation Guide:

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations:** A one-page sheet containing quotations from letters of the Universal House of Justice which provide the foundation of the modules. (p. 2)
- ★ **Overview for Facilitators:** The guide you are reading. (p. 3)
- ★ **The Assembly Development Process:** A one-page description of the process of Assembly development, the role of these modules within that process, and how to request an Assembly Development representative to facilitate the modules. (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 listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the workshop, 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. 11-27)
- ★ **Description of the Office of Assembly Development:** A two-page overview of the vision and mission of this office and the services it can provide. (unnumbered pages near the end of the Facilitation 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

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*“...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](mailto: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

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## 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 segments have demonstrations, practice these once or twice beforehand.

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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### During the Session

- ★ 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 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

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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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.)
  - 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.

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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### Closing the Session

- 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.

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

**Please note:** Have the participant evaluation forms turned in to you and return them with your evaluation form. Be sure to use the machine readable forms. 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 Fostering Racial Unity

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## **Objectives:**

### **Participants will**

- ★ explore aspects of “a new state of mind”
- ★ explore the Assembly’s role in establishing racial unity
- ★ become aware of resources available to assist the Assembly
- ★ consider how Assembly members can model racial unity in their

**Agenda outline:** (total time: 3 hours and 15 minutes)

- ★ **Opening devotions and introduction** (15 minutes), p. 11  
An opportunity to introduce the Assembly Development process, 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), p. 12  
A guided discussion to help participants grasp some of the implications of moving toward “a new state of mind.”
- ★ **Exploring the diversity among Assembly members** (20 minutes), p. 14  
A partnership activity to help participants become acquainted with the diversity represented in the group and recognize that all racial and cultural backgrounds provide us with both assets and challenges.
- ★ **Eliminating prejudice and fostering unity: A shared responsibility** (50 minutes), p. 17  
Small group discussion exploring the Assembly’s role in establishing racial unity, followed by the facilitator’s description of resources available to the Assembly to assist in this process.
- ★ **Leading by example – Assembly members as individuals** (15 minutes), p. 21  
Individual use of a questionnaire to help Assembly members privately assess their progress in developing close, informal relationships with members of other races and cultures and to plan how they can model racial unity in their own lives to a greater extent.
- ★ **Building unified and diversified communities** (50 minutes), p. 22  
An opportunity for the Assembly to assess the extent to which diversity is incorporated into various aspects of community life and to consider what adjustments to current practices are needed to help the community become a model of racial unity. Note: If the Assembly has a homogenous community you may want to substitute the optional extension “Diversifying the Bahá’í Community,” pg. 25.

## Highlights, continued

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*Extension  
sessions for use  
if more time is  
available*

- ★ **Living out the vision of racial unity** (30 minutes), p. 26  
An art activity to consolidate what has been learned and to express the joyous vision of racial unity being lived out in the local community.
- ★ **Closing** (5 minutes), p. 27  
A brief reminder of the outcome of our efforts and the promises of divine assistance, followed by optional singing of unifying songs.
- ★ ***Further consideration of the call to “a new state of mind”*** (variable amount of time), p. 12  
*A guided discussion examining existing assumptions and conceptions and the feelings evoked by the process of change.*
- ★ ***Drawing on spiritual power to create unity*** (45 minutes), p. 16  
*Small group discussion leading participants to two objectives: recognizing the potency of spiritual contributions to the process of fostering race unity and identifying ways to more fully use the spiritual power of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.*
- ★ **Using Brilliant Star as a race unity resource** (30 minutes), p. 20  
*Small group selection of a race unity activity from Brilliant Star and development of a plan to use that activity in the community.*
- ★ ***Diversifying the Bahá’í community*** (50 minutes), p. 25  
*An opportunity to consult on how best to introduce the Faith to groups underrepresented in the local community.*
- ★ ***Memorization of the Writings*** (5-10 minutes), p. 26  
*Recitation in unison of a verse included in the Participant Handouts, using signs or symbols with key words as a memory aid.*

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 quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the

## Highlights, continued

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most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

### Materials needed

- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart and markers
- ★ A multi-colored bouquet of fresh, dry, or artificial flowers
- ★ A variety of highlighters
- ★ Newsprint
- ★ Crayons, colored pencils, markers, and other art materials for making a piece of artwork
- ★ Soft music
- ★ *Copies of Brilliant Star magazine or the “Oneness of Humanity” activity book (for the optional extension “Using Brilliant Star as a Race Unity Resource”)*

*Optional: Sample copies of items mentioned in the handout “Resources Available to the Assembly”*

*Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage from the Writings to give as a gift to each participant*

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

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# Introduction (15 minutes)

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## Purpose

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

## Activities:

### 1. Opening devotions (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Decorate the meeting room with a multi-colored bouquet of fresh, dry, or artificial flowers. Open with devotions, using the prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which begins “O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock” (Bahá’í Prayers, pp. 102-03) followed by the selections from the handout “Oneness: The Context of Diversity” (Participant Handouts, p. 3). Cut a copy of these selections apart (in advance) and give passages to various participants to read.

### 2. Introduction (5 minutes)

- ★ Give a brief introduction to the resources of the Office of Assembly Development and the Assembly Development Modules (see the description of the Office of Assembly Development which is attached toward the end of the module). Highlight 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.

A primary focus of this particular module is the Assembly’s role in fostering racial unity, both within and beyond the Bahá’í community.

### 3. Overview of objectives (1 minute)

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this module and have them posted. See page 9 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. Review agenda (1 minute)

- ★ Go through the agenda for the session, writing an outline of topics to be covered on a whiteboard or flip chart.
- ★ See page 9 for an agenda. Make adjustments for any sections that are removed for timing considerations or optional extension sessions that are added. You may also need to make timing adjustments depending on the audience composition: a

## 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

full Assembly vs. mixed groups of participants, experienced vs. newly-formed Assemblies, etc.

### 5. 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.

### 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” (Participant Handouts pp. 4-5)
- ★ Invite participants to share thoughts and feelings about “a new state of mind” and the process of moving toward it.
- ★ Offer the thought that one implication is the need for all of us to listen to “old” quotations with “new” ears in order to find new insights in familiar quotations.

*You may also choose to share two other thoughts:*

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

### **Optional extension: Further discussion of quotations**

- ★ *Have participants take turns reading aloud the remaining quotations on the handout “The Call to a New State of Mind” (Participant Handouts pp. 4-5). The following questions can be asked in any order, and you have the option*

## The Call to “a New State of Mind,” continued

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*to ask them after the paragraph in question or after all the quotations 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 “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.*

*A word in the Participant Handouts:  
\*Canalize: to channel into a particular direction; provide an outlet for*

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

- ★ *Ask participants to read the second quotation, a passage from the Ridván 1996 message (Participant Handouts, p. 4), silently and underline or highlight what they feel are key words or phrases that have particular implications for the topic of this module.*
- ★ *Invite participants to share what they have underlined.*

# Exploring the Diversity Among Assembly Members

(20 minutes)

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## Purpose

- ★ To become acquainted with the diversity represented in the group
- ★ To recognize that all racial and cultural backgrounds provide us with both assets and challenges

### 1. Setting up the activity (1 minute)

- ★ Ask participants to look at the shapes at the top of their handout “Exploring the Diversity among Assembly Members” (Participant Handouts, p. 6).
- ★ Ask: Which shape is different? Answer: All are different from the others.
- ★ Comment that people tend to see themselves as the norm, or standard, and other people as a departure from the norm, or different. This is especially true of members of a majority culture in relation to other cultures. The point of the shapes activity is to bring to our awareness the reality that all of us are different from each other.
- ★ Explain that the following activity will provide an opportunity to learn more about the various kinds of diversity which exist in our Assemblies and communities. It will allow participants to learn something new about other believers and to discover how our heritage or ancestry has provided each of us with both assets and challenges.

### 2. Partnership activity (15 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to find a partner, preferably a person from a different racial or cultural background than their own. If racial and cultural diversity are not present, look for other differences, such as age.
- ★ After partners decide who will speak first, the speaker should briefly (5 minutes for each speaker) answer some or all of the following questions:
  - Where did your grandparents come from?
  - Where did they live?
  - What type of work did they do?
  - What was an important life lesson handed down to you by your family?
  - What is one delightful aspect of your heritage that you really appreciate?
  - What is one aspect of your heritage that poses a dilemma or challenge for you?
- ★ After 5 minutes, remind partners to change roles of listener and speaker.

# Exploring the Diversity Among Assembly Members, continued

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## 3. Closing the activity (4-5 minutes)

- ★ Invite participants to share a few, brief observations about what they learned about each other.

*If more time is available and you have at least a quorum of the Assembly present, do the previous activity as a group instead of as partners:*

***Alternative  
version of the  
previous activity  
(50 minutes)***

### 1. Group sharing (45 minutes)

- ★ Form a circle of Assembly members.
- ★ Allow each person to briefly (3-4 minutes) answer the same questions as above.

### 2. Group discussion (5 minutes)

- ★ After each participant has had a chance to speak, allow a brief time for the group as a whole to share positive thoughts, views, and feelings about what they have discovered about one another.
- ★ Comment that an Assembly may have more diversity of backgrounds and perspectives than is first apparent. This diversity can be a great resource as the Assembly analyzes situations, solves problems, explores possibilities, and generates strategic plans.



## *Optional Extension One: Drawing on Spiritual Power to Create Unity* (45 minutes)

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### **Purpose**

- ★ To recognize the potency of spiritual contributions to the process of fostering race unity
- ★ To more fully draw upon the spiritual power of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Small group consultation** (35 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups of 4-5. Read silently the quotations on the handout “Drawing on Spiritual Power to Create Unity” (Participant Handouts, pp. 7-9), highlighting key words and phrases. Share selected passages as a group and discuss the focus questions:
  - How can the Assembly create the spiritual atmosphere necessary to draw races and cultures together as one people?
  - How can the Assembly help the friends develop the spiritual qualities required for this task?
- ★ As a group, come up with 1-2 recommendations or suggestions.

#### **2. Groups share suggestions** (10 minutes)

- ★ Allow time for each group to share the results of its consultation.

# Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility (50 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To explore the Assembly's role in establishing racial unity within and beyond the Bahá'í community

## Setting up the activities (3 minutes)

- ★ Comment that when we consider the various responsibilities associated with the elimination of prejudice, we often focus on the particular roles Shoghi Effendi set out for whites and blacks. Today we will focus instead on the complementary roles of individuals and institutions.
- ★ Have a participant read aloud excerpts from the National Spiritual Assembly's letter to the American Bahá'í community dated December 17, 1997 (Participant Handouts, pp. 10-11).
- ★ Comment that “the glorious task of eliminating the last traces of prejudice and alienation among the races within the Baha'i community” is itself a weighty responsibility. Coupled with the obligation to “spare no effort to bring the healing message of reconciliation and love to our fellow Americans of all races and religions,” we face a task so large and so urgent that only the combined efforts of individuals and Assemblies can ensure achievement of our twin goals.

## Activities:

### 1. Small group consultation (30 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups of 4-5. Have each group read the quotations on the handout “Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility” (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-14) and consult on the focus questions. Each group will then make a chart, diagram or graphic representation of who (Assemblies and individuals) should be doing what (roles and specific courses of action) in race unity work.

### Focus questions:

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

### 3. Groups share results (3 minutes per group)

- ★ Ask each group to explain its chart/poster to the whole group.

# Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility, continued

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## 4. Describing resources available to the Assembly (10 minutes)

- ★ Comment that several resources exist to help Assemblies fulfill their responsibility to foster racial unity. Refer participants to their handout “Resources Available to the Assembly” (Participant Handouts, pp. 15-16).
- ★ Describe each of these resources and, if possible, hold up sample copies:

### Resources for fostering race unity

#### 1. Race unity training

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

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

#### 2. “The Power of Race Unity” video

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

#### 3. “The Power of Race Unity” workshops

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

The first workshop is a day-long session specifically for the Bahá'í community. It constructs the spiritual framework for

# Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility, continued

## Resources for fostering race unity, continued

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

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

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

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

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

#### 5. “Brilliant Star” magazine

Many issues of this magazine, a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly, contain activities that promote race unity and the oneness of humanity. The activities are designed primarily for children and youth but are useful for all ages. Many of these activities have been gathered into an activity book, “Oneness of Humanity.” Copies of the activity book and some, but not all, single back issues of the magazine are

# Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility, continued

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available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service. Subscription to the magazine is available by contacting Bahá'í Subscriber Service at the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

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

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

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

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

Mention to participants the existence of various national and regional committees and task forces that focus on reaching and meeting the needs of people from a particular cultural background. Encourage participants to check with the National Teaching Committee at the Bahá'í National Center and with their Regional Bahá'í Council for committees and task forces available in their area.

### Optional extension

#### *Optional extension: Using “Brilliant Star” as a race unity resource (30 minutes)*

##### *1. Small group work (15 minutes)*

- ★ *Divide into groups of 4-5.*
- ★ *Distribute copies of “Brilliant Star” which focus on race unity, such as “From Racism to Unity” (March/April 1993), “The First Prejudice-Free Generation” (March/April 1995), copies of the “Oneness of Humanity” activity book, or individual activities from various back issues.*
- ★ *Ask each group to select a race unity activity that could be used at a community event and develop a plan for using the activity in the near future. The activity may be targeted to one*

# Eliminating Prejudice and Fostering Oneness: A Shared Responsibility, continued

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*Optional extension, continued*

*age group or be intergenerational, focused on the Bahá'í community or suitable for use with friends of the Faith.*

## **2. Large group sharing** (3 minutes per group)

- ★ *Have groups share their plans.*

*Optional: 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.*

# Leading by Example: Assembly Members as Individuals (15 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To consider how Assembly members can model racial unity in their own lives
- ★ To privately assess individual progress in developing close, informal relationships with members of other races and cultures

### 1. Setting up the activity (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read aloud the quotations on “Leading by Example: Assembly Members as Individuals” (Participant Handouts, p. 17).
- ★ Comment that all Bahá’ís are committed to bringing about unity. Many of us became Bahá’ís because we were attracted to the teachings about the oneness of mankind. We discuss this subject at firesides and Feasts, yet we sometimes overlook the implications for our own behavior and choices. Often there is a gap between what we believe and what we practice. This may partly be due to the influences of the American society on each of us. For example, many of us find it easier and less stressful to be with people who are more like ourselves than those who are different from ourselves. Lack of a shared language may also be a barrier.
- ★ Refer participants to “Diversity Assessment and Action Plan” (Participant Handouts, p. 18). Explain that this is intended to help participants gain awareness of their progress in developing what Shoghi Effendi described as a “close and intimate social intercourse . . . in their homes, in their hours of relaxation and leisure, in the daily contact of business transactions, in the association of their children. . . .” with people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds (Bahá’í Administration, p. 130). Comment that this would certainly be one element of the “organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced” (World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, pp. 42-43) which Shoghi Effendi said was an implication of living out the principle of the oneness of mankind.

This questionnaire will help each participant analyze his or her daily contacts. It is not meant to be shared with anyone. It is intended to serve as a resource for meditation, deliberation, and commitment to action.

- ★ Share the observation that minorities automatically have greater contact with members of the majority culture. Suggest that minority participants may want to consider their degree of contact with other minority cultures as well as their relationships with the majority culture.

# Leading by Example: Assembly Members as Individuals, continued

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## 2. Diversity assessment and action plan activity (10 minutes)

- ★ Have participants fill out their “Diversity Assessment and Action Plan” sheet. Emphasize that this is solely for their private use and reflection.
- ★ Play soft music as participants fill out their sheets.

### *Optional extension (10 minutes)*

- ★ *After participants have completed the activity, invite volunteers to share one or more of their action plans’ strategies. Help participants to be inspired by the sharing of positive suggestions for changing behavior and not to be discouraged by the slowness of our progress. The Faith acknowledges the evolutionary nature of growth.*



# Building Unified and Diversified Communities (50 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To assess the extent to which diversity is incorporated into various aspects of community life
- ★ To explore how the Assembly can lead the community to develop into a model of racial unity

## Activities:

### 1. Exploring the Writings (3 minutes)

- ★ Have participants read aloud the quotations on retaining cultural diversity from the handout “Unity in Diversity” (Participant Handouts, p. 19).

### 2. Examining local demographics (10 minutes)

- ★ Form groups by Assembly. If non-Assembly members are participating, form mixed groups of 5-7.
- ★ Explain that the groups will be looking at local demographic figures to assess the extent to which diversity has been incorporated into the life of the community. Refer back to the previously read quotation of the Guardian (Participant Handouts, p. 13) about the Assembly’s responsibility to fully involve members of minority groups and use their talents: “. . . its first and inescapable obligation [is] to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it. . . . In the light of this principle . . . it should be the duty of every Bahá’í community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the divers minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Bahá’í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 35-36.)
- ★ Comment that sometimes Bahá’ís are uncomfortable categorizing people as a particular race since we know that we are, at the deepest level, only one human race. Point out, however, that until we look at participation figures by racial or ethnic group, we are unable to assess progress toward our goal of fully involving members from every background in the life of the community. Knowledge of the challenges that still remain before us allows us to plan effectively and “deliberately cultivate” (Advent of Divine Justice, p. 36) freedom from racial prejudice.
- ★ While the precise selection of words and categories to describe racial and cultural groupings can be a sensitive task, encourage

# Building Unified and Diversified Communities, continued

## Each groups' tasks

participants not to dwell on labels during this activity but rather to look at the larger issues of the exercise.

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Demographics of our local Bahá’í Community” (Participant Handouts, p. 20). Ask each group to fill in the data requested on the handout. The numbers can be very general, “ball-park” figures. The group has three tasks:
  1. Identify the different races, cultures, and nationalities currently present in the local Bahá’í community. Determine, roughly, the percentage of each. (Give an example: Whites = 40%, Blacks = 30%, Persians = 20%, Hispanics = 10%.)
  2. Determine, roughly, the percentage of participation of each race or nationality in a variety of community activities. (Give an example of the activity, “Attending Feast,” having the following participation levels: Whites = 75%, Blacks = 5%, Persians = 15%, Hispanics = 5%.)
  3. Compare the participation figures of each group to its percentage figures of the local Bahá’í population, noting any gaps which indicate one or more groups are not involved in some aspect of Bahá’í community life. (For example, the sample figures used above – 40% of the community are black but only 5% of those attending Feast are black – might raise questions about why so few black believers are participating in the activity as compared to white believers.)

### 3. Examining current expectations and practices (40 minutes)

- ★ Ask a participant to read aloud the quotation at the top of the handout “Examining Current Expectations and Practices” (Participant Handouts, pp. 21-22):

“It is difficult for the friends to always remember that in matter [s] where race enters, a hundred times more consideration and wisdom in handling situations is necessary than when an issue is not complicated by this factor.” (written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Toward Oneness, p. 29, #64.)
- ★ Read aloud the comments of Hand of the Cause Rúhíyyih Khánúm from a 1961 letter she wrote to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada:

# Building Unified and Diversified Communities, continued

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“As up until very recently the Bahá’ís of the world were almost exclusively white, it is only natural that their virtues and their faults should have colored the Faith and its community life. It is illogical to suppose that what we have now is either mature or right; it is a phase in the development of the Cause. When peoples of different races are incorporated in the world-wide community (and in local communities), who can doubt that it will possess far greater power and perfection and be something quite different from what we have now? And yet let us ask ourselves frankly if we do not believe that what we North American Bahá’ís, what we Western white Bahá’ís, have is the real thing, practically a finished product, and it is up to the rest of the world to accept it? I think this is our mentality; it was mine up until a few years ago.” (quoted in Bahá’í News, June 1961, p. 1.)

- ★ Ask each group to complete two tasks: 1) to use the following questions to examine their community’s current expectations and assumptions, keeping in mind the natural tendency of any group to assume, perhaps unconsciously, that its patterns and practices are “the real thing,” and 2) to consult about any implications these expectations and assumptions have for reaching, teaching, and retaining believers from diverse backgrounds.

## Focus Questions

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

# Building Unified and Diversified Communities, continued

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## Focus Questions, continued

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

### *Optional extensions or follow up questions for a later consultation:*

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

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## *Optional Extension Two: Diversifying the Bahá'í Community* (50 minutes)

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### **Purpose**

- ★ To consult on how best to introduce the Faith to groups underrepresented in the local community

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Reading the Writings** (3 minutes)

- ★ Have participants read aloud the handout “Diversifying the Bahá'í Community” (Participant Handouts, p. 23).

#### **2. Small group work** (30 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups of 4-5 and answer the following focus questions:
  - Which racial and cultural groups live in our region?
  - Which are underrepresented in our Bahá'í community?
  - What activities and services would most successfully introduce these groups to the message of Bahá'u'lláh?
  - What steps could the Assembly take to direct teaching efforts towards these groups?

#### **3. Large group sharing** (5 minutes per group)

- ★ Groups share their analysis and suggestions.

*Option: This activity could also be done as follow up at a later Assembly meeting.*

# Living out the Vision of Racial Unity

(30 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To consolidate what has been felt and learned
- ★ To express the joyous vision of racial unity being lived out in the local community

## Activities:

### 1. Metaphors of unity in diversity (5 minutes)

- ★ Have participants read aloud quotations using metaphors of unity in diversity from the handout “The Beauty of Human Diversity within the Context of Oneness” (Participant Handouts, p. 24).
- ★ Ask: What does diversity add to the situations described in these metaphors? What would be lost if diversity were replaced by sameness?
- ★ Invite comments on how these metaphors are different from the metaphor of a “melting pot.”

### 2. Small group art activity (15 minutes)

- ★ Divide into diverse groups of 3-4. Using the metaphors just read and ideas inspired by the workshop’s consultation, create a piece of artwork expressing your vision of your own community fully living out the vision of racial unity.

### 3. Large group sharing (5 minutes per group)

- ★ Allow time for each group to present its artwork and explain its significance.
- ★ Suggest that Assemblies may wish to display these pieces of art in their Bahá’í center or have them present in their Assembly meeting room as reminders of their vision.

### *Optional extension or follow up for a later consultation:*

- ★ *Consult on how can the Assembly be a catalyst for the realization of this vision in the larger community.*

### *Optional extension: Memorization of the Writings (5-10 minutes)*

- ★ *Write the following verse on a whiteboard with ample room above the words and between lines:*

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

- ★ *Place signs or symbols over key words similar to those above. Have participants recite the verse in unison. Remove 2-3 key words after each recitation, leaving the symbols, until the verse is memorized.*

## Closing (5 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To call to mind and be strengthened by promises of divine assistance

### Activities:

#### 1. Review of initial questions

- ★ 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

- ★ Read aloud the following passage from a talk given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to an interracial gathering at a home in Washington, D.C. in 1912:

“When the racial elements of the American nation unite in actual fellowship and accord, the lights of the oneness of humanity will shine, the day of eternal glory and bliss will dawn, the spirit of God encompass, and the divine favors descend. Under the leadership and training of God, the real Shepherd, all will be protected and preserved. He will lead them in green pastures of happiness and sustenance, and they will attain to the real goal of existence. This is the blessing and benefit of unity; this is the outcome of love. This is the sign of the Most Great Peace; this is the star of the oneness of the human world. Consider how blessed this condition will be. I pray for you and ask the confirmation and assistance of God in your behalf.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Promulgation of Universal Peace, Pg. 57.)

#### Optional:

- ★ *Give each participant a gift of a beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a quotation such as the one on page 32 of the Facilitator’s Guide.*
- ★ *Listen to or sing uplifting music with the theme of unity in diversity, such as Gordi Munro’s “Unity in Diversity!”*

“When the racial elements of the American nation unite in actual fellowship and accord, the lights of the oneness of humanity will shine, the day of eternal glory and bliss will dawn, the spirit of God encompass, and the divine favors descend. Under the leadership and training of God, the real Shepherd, all will be protected and preserved. He will lead them in green pastures of happiness and sustenance, and they will attain to the real goal of existence. This is the blessing and benefit of unity; this is the outcome of love. This is the sign of the Most Great Peace; this is the star of the oneness of the human world. Consider how blessed this condition will be. I pray for you and ask the confirmation and assistance of God in your behalf.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá