

# **Facilitation Guide**

## **The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1: A Shared Responsibility**

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.”

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

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

“Movement in this direction has barely begun. It will lead, as it unfolds, to a new understanding of the nature of the family and of the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. It will entirely transform the role of women at every level of society.”

*Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information, dated January 23, 1995, in Prosperity of Humankind, section III*



# OVERVIEW FOR FACILITATORS

## The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1

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### **Purpose:**

- ★ To explore the complementary roles of women and men in establishing the partnership between the sexes described in the Bahá'í Writings

This module is targeted to individuals, rather than Assemblies. It explores the complementary roles of women and men in establishing the partnership between the sexes described in the Bahá'í Writings. It surfaces assumptions participants have about women and men and examines the example of Bahíyyih Khánum. The module also contains a visioning exercise and opportunities for individual and group reflection.

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

- ★ **Frontispiece with key quotations:** A one-page sheet containing quotations which provide the foundation of the workshop. (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 workshop. (p. 4)
- ★ **Guidance for Facilitators:** A four-page collection of suggestions for preparation before the session, tips for facilitating during the session, ideas for closing the session, and guidance on what to do with the workshop report form and evaluation forms after the session. (pp. 5-8)
- ★ **Highlights of this workshop:** A three-page listing of the workshop objectives, an agenda outline with times of each segment of the workshop, and a listing of materials needed. (pp. 9-12)
- ★ **Facilitator's instructions for segments of this workshop:** A series of pages that provide the purpose and instructions for each section of the workshop. (pp. 13-34)
- ★ **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 Assemblies 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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- ★ 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.

**During the Session**

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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### 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.)
  - If you have Assembly members from several communities attending a session, you may wish to have them work

## Guidance for Facilitators, continued

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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 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 The Equality of Women and Men, Part 1

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## **Objectives:** **Participants** **will:**

- ★ explore aspects and implications of the change process
- ★ surface assumptions about women and men
- ★ perceive how God intends women and men to interact
- ★ gain awareness of what each sex can do to further the process of partnership

**Agenda outline:** (total time: 3 hours, 20 minutes)

- ★ **Introduction** (15 minutes), p. 13  
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 process of change** (10 minutes), p. 15  
Individual reflection and group discussion of elements and implications of the change process.
- ★ **Expressing appreciation** (15 minutes), p. 16  
An exercise for women and men to express what they most appreciate about the efforts, attitudes, and behaviors of the opposite sex.
- ★ **Surfacing assumptions** (40 minutes), pp. 17-19  
Activities to surface and examine some of the variety of the assumptions participants have about women and men.
- ★ **Working together** (55 minutes), pp. 22-24  
Activities designed to give a clearer sense of how God intends women and men to interact, to create awareness of the consequences of failing to establish this relationship, and to examine what each sex can do to further the process of partnership.
- ★ **Living out the vision of partnership** (25 minutes), pp. 28-29  
A small group brainstorming and visioning activity of what partnership might look like in the local community, with an optional extension artwork activity.
- ★ **Personal assessment** (10 minutes), p. 30  
An opportunity for private reflection and journal writing about what this principle of equality challenges in each participant's own life.
- ★ **Group assessment** (20 minutes), p. 31  
Group brainstorming of steps the community could take to move closer to the vision of partnership described in the Bahá'í Writings.

## Highlights, continued

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*Extension sessions for use if more time is available*

- ★ **Closing** (10 minutes), pp. 30-31

A brief opportunity for individuals to write down actions they intend to take to further the process of equality, followed by reminders of the promises of divine assistance of our efforts.

- ★ ***Marzieh Gail's remembrances of Bahíyyih Khánum*** (15 minutes), p. 20

*A storytelling activity to increase familiarity with the life and character of the Greatest Holy Leaf through hearing a pilgrim's stories about her.*

- ★ ***The example of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*** (variable amount of time), p. 21

*A storytelling activity to help participants perceive what the principle of partnership looks like when translated into behaviors through becoming familiar with stories which illuminate the attitudes of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá toward women.*

- ★ ***Memorization of the Writings*** (5 minutes), p. 24

*Recitation in unison of a verse included in the Participant Handouts, using signs or symbols with key words as a memory aid.*

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

*Small group selection of an activity and development of a plan to use that activity in the community.*

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 may skip whatever section seems to be less relevant to the needs of the group. You may also choose to direct participants to focus only on quotations in their handouts that are bolded, as these are the most vital. Focusing on bolded quotations may also aid participants who are slower readers.

**Materials needed**

- ★ A sheet of blank paper for journal writing
- ★ Whiteboard, blackboard, or flip chart and markers
- ★ A variety of highlighters
- ★ Newsprint

## Highlights, continued

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- ★ Soft music for journal writing time
- ★ Slips of paper and a basket, if needed for the “Expressing Appreciation” activity
- ★ *Crayons, colored pencils, markers, and/or other art materials for making posters (only if doing the optional extension to “Living out the Vision of Partnership”)*
- ★ *Copies of Brilliant Star magazine (only if doing the optional extension “Using Brilliant Star as a Resource”)*
- ★ *Optional: A beautiful card or calligraphy rendition of a passage from Bahá’u’lláh to give as a gift to each participant (see page 33 for a sample). You may also wish to have a photograph of The Greatest Holy Leaf on display.*
- ★ 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.
- ★ While this module does not bring up the fact that women cannot serve on the Universal House of Justice, this issue may arise. Facilitators may want to read a few references in advance to feel prepared to address it. Useful quotations on the topic are found in the 1997 edition of Lights of Guidance (#2073, 2074, & 2076) and in the compilation Women (#27 & 28). Two of these quotations are printed below.

**Notes:**

If this issue is raised, you may want to read these passages to the group, point out that we have not yet arrived at the time when the wisdom of this teaching has been “revealed as manifest as the sun,” and discourage speculation about the nature of that wisdom.

“As regards your question concerning the membership of the Universal House of Justice, there is a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House is confined to men and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed in the future. In the local, as well as the National Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected. The Bahá’ís should accept this statement of the Master in a spirit of deep faith, confident that there is a divine guidance and wisdom behind it, which

## Highlights, continued

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### Notes, continued

will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, December 14, 1940, in Women, A Compilation, #27; also in Dawn of a New Day, p. 86.)

“As regards the membership of the International House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in a Tablet that it is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be revealed as manifest as the sun in the future. In any case the believers should know that, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself has explicitly stated that sexes are equal except in some cases, the exclusion of women from the International House of Justice should not be surprising. From the fact that there is no equality of functions between the sexes one should not, however, infer that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other, or that they are unequal in their rights.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 28, 1936, in Women, A Compilation, #28; also in Directives of the Guardian, pp. 79-80.)

## 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. Brief devotions

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

#### 2. Introduce the Assembly development process (1-2 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 workshop is the complementary roles of women and men in establishing the partnership between the sexes described in the Bahá'í Writings.

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

- ★ Read aloud the objectives of this module and have them posted.
- ★ See page 9 for a list of 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 full Assembly vs. mixed groups of participants, experienced vs. newly-formed Assemblies, etc.

## **Introduction**, continued

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### **5. Sharing questions (3-5 minutes)**

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

# The Process of Change (10 minutes)

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## Purpose

- ★ To provide a brief overview of elements and implications of the change process
- ★ To acknowledge the enormity of effort required of all

## Activities:

### 1. Individual reading (5 minutes)

- ★ Comment that in order to actively participate in the process of change, we must be familiar with its elements and implications.
- ★ Ask individuals to read the quotations on their handout “The Process of Change” (Participant Handouts, pp. 3-4), and underline key points about this process.

### 2. Group discussion of quotations (5 minutes)

- ★ Invite volunteers to share their key points with the whole group. List these on a flip chart.
- ★ Ask participants: How comfortable is the process of change?
- ★ *Optional: You may choose to share two thoughts about the process of achieving a new state of mind:*
  - *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.*
- ★ *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 participants express excitement or reservations.*
- ★ *Underscore the role of patience with oneself and others during the process of change.*

## Expressing Appreciation (15 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To provide an opportunity for women and men to express what they most appreciate about the efforts, attitudes, and behaviors of the opposite sex

### Prepare materials in advance:

- ★ Decide which form of expressing appreciation you will use (see below for options). Have slips of paper and a basket available, if needed. Have enough chairs to set up two concentric circles, if needed.

### Activities:

#### 1. Individual reflection (1-2 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to take a moment to reflect on what they most appreciate about the efforts, attitudes, and behaviors of the opposite sex. Comments could either be in general or specifically about women and men within the Bahá'í community.

#### 2. Expressing appreciation (10 -12 minutes)

- ★ Choose one of the following three methods of expressing the aforementioned appreciation of the opposite sex, depending on the size of your group and the personalities present:
  - Invite volunteers to share a brief reflection.
  - Ask participants to write a brief message of appreciation on a slip of paper and drop the slip in a basket. Ask volunteers to draw a slip and read aloud what is written on it.
  - Create two concentric circles of chairs facing inward. Those seated in the inner circle speak while those seated in the outer circle listen. Ask women to sit in the inner circle while men sit in the outer circle. After all who choose to speak have done so, reverse positions, with men in the inner circle and women in the outer circle.
- ★ After all who choose to speak have done so, invite comments on how it felt to hear words of appreciation.



## Surfacing Assumptions (35 minutes)

### Purpose

- ★ To surface some of the variety of assumptions participants have about women and men
- ★ To perceive both sexes as embodying all the qualities of God

### Activities:

#### 1. Surfacing assumptions as a group (5 minutes)

- ★ Mention the statement in “Two Wings of a Bird” that “The gains for women rest uneasily on unchanged, often unexamined, inherited assumptions.” Comment that implementation of the principle of the equality of women and men necessitates a reexamination of long-held assumptions underlying all human relationships, from the family to society at large.
- ★ Give examples of a few of these assumptions that you have noticed in society in areas such as the following: “women’s work” and “men’s work,” a woman’s capacity to serve as President, pay scales, allocation of household responsibilities, and who should take time off work to care for a sick child or aging parent.
- ★ *Optional: Invite participants to share a few other examples of assumptions and conceptions we have in general about “what is natural and appropriate in relationships” between women and men, about their roles in society, and about their roles in the family.*

#### 2. Examination of a prayer (10 minutes)

- ★ Comment that we will take a brief look at some of our assumptions about masculine and feminine qualities.
- ★ Have a participant read aloud the prayer at the top of the “Examining Assumptions” (Participant Handouts, p. 5).

“O God, my God! Aid Thou Thy trusted servants to have loving and tender hearts. Help them to spread, amongst all the nations of the earth, the light of guidance that cometh from the Company on high. Verily Thou art the Strong, the Powerful, the Mighty, the All-Subduing, the Ever-Giving. Verily Thou art the Generous, the Gentle, the Tender, the Most Bountiful.”  
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 22.)
- ★ Pose the following question to participants: “In looking at the qualities mentioned in this prayer, which qualities did your family or cultural background teach you pertain primarily to men? which pertain primarily to women? which are equally common to both?”

## Surfacing Assumptions, continued

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- ★ Give participants 2-3 minutes to write each spiritual quality under one of these three categories listed on their handout. As participants work, write the following three categories in columns on a flip chart:
  - Primarily masculine
  - Equally common to women & men
  - Primarily feminine
- ★ Record participants' answers on the flip chart.

**Note to facilitators:** Not all cultures assign the same qualities to a particular sex, so variations in answers may be found in multicultural groups of participants. These variations underscore that we are talking about perceptions not facts.

- ★ Have a participant read aloud the rest of the quotations on the page (Participant Handouts, p. 5).
- ★ **Ask:** In looking at the qualities and attributes mentioned in this prayer, what qualities do the Writings say pertain primarily to men? to women? are equally common to both?

### 3. The example of Bahíyyih Khánum (20 minutes)

- ★ Comment that we are all familiar with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station of Exemplar, for men and women believers alike. We may, however, be less aware of the example of Bahíyyih Khánum (the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá) and the function her life serves as a model to all.
- ★ Ask a participant to read aloud the first two passages of the handout "The Example of Bahíyyih Khánum" (Participant Handouts, pp. 6-7).
- ★ Comment that Shoghi Effendi calls the Greatest Holy Leaf "a shining example, an object of emulation for all mankind," holds her up as a "true example" for all her kin – male and female – to follow, and resolves to take her as his own model.
- ★ Make the point that all of us are called to admire in others, and acquire for ourselves, all the qualities and attributes of our common Creator. Spiritually transformed human beings are role models both to their own sex and to the opposite sex as well.

## Surfacing Assumptions, continued

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*NOTE: If you will be using the optional extension session one “Marzieh Gail’s Remembrances of Bahíyyih Khánum” (see Facilitator’s Guide, p. 19), do so now.*

- ★ Ask one or more participants to read aloud the remaining passages of the handout “The Example of Bahíyyih Khánum” (Participant Handouts, pp. 6-7), which describe some of the qualities and attributes of Bahíyyih Khánum. Ask participants to underline or highlight the various qualities as they hear them read.
- ★ Invite comments on the list of qualities and their applicability to both women and men.
- ★ Invite comments about any feelings of having a role model of the same or opposite sex
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*Optional Extension Session One: Marzieh Gail's Remembrances of Bahíyyih Khánum* (15 minutes)

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**Purpose**

- ★ To become more familiar with the life and character of the Greatest Holy Leaf through hearing a pilgrim's stories about her

**Activities:**

**1. Setting up the activity**

- ★ Explain that Marzieh Gail was the daughter of a Persian father, Ali-Kuli Khan, and an American mother, Florence Breed. She was taken on her first pilgrimage by her parents in 1924, where she met Bahíyyih Khánum. Note that she has written her remembrances in the book Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf.

**2. Reading stories of Bahíyyih Khánum**

- ★ Invite one or more participants to read aloud excerpts from Marzieh Gail's book Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf (see Participant Handouts pp. 8-11).

## **Purpose**

- ★ To perceive what the partnership of women and men looks like when translated into behaviors
- ★ To become familiar with stories which illuminate the attitudes of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá toward women

## **Advance preparation:**

- ★ Select a variety of stories which illustrate the attitudes and behaviors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Choose a mixture of stories reflecting Their regard for and confidence in both female family members and women outside the family. An excellent source of such stories is Advancement of Women, (especially pp. 142-161, 172-194). Other sources include:
  - The Chosen Highway (especially the spoken chronicles of three ladies of the holy family, such as on pp. 47, 89-90, 98, 101),
  - Stories of Bahá'u'lláh (pp. 26-27), and
  - Vignettes of the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (p. 32, #47; p. 37, #3; p. 39, #8; p. 43, #12; pp. 44-45, #14; pp. 61-62, #36; p. 87, #75; pp. 97-98, #91; p. 98, #92)

## **Activity:**

### **1. Sharing stories**

- ★ Depending on your own skills, read the stories you selected, tell them in your own words, or give a dramatic reading.
- ★ Ask participants, after each story, what elements of the story had meaning or significance to them.

### **Alternative version of this activity (#1)**

- ★ Duplicate copies of the stories you selected. Make these copies available to participants to read silently.
- ★ Invite volunteers to tell their favorite story, in their own words, to the group and explain why it had particular meaning to them.
- ★ Mention the power of storytelling and example. Encourage participants to tell their favorite stories of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's attitudes towards women to the children and youth of their family and community.

## Working Together (45 minutes)

### Purpose

- ★ To gain a clearer sense of how God intends women and men to interact
- ★ To perceive the consequences of failing to establish this relationship
- ★ To gain awareness of what each sex can do to further this process

### Advance preparation:

- ★ Make one copy of the sheet of quotations from “Establishing Partnership: A Shared Responsibility” on pp. 25-26 of this Facilitator’s Guide. Cut the sheet up into slips.
- ★ Duplicate for each participant a copy of the sheet “Advancing the Process.” A master copy of this sheet is on p. 27 of this Facilitator’s Guide.

### Activities:

#### 1. Individual reading (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask individuals to silently read through the handout “Equality and Partnership: God’s Design for Women and Men” (Participant Handouts, pp. 12-13) and underline key phrases which answer these focus questions:
  - How are women and men intended to relate to each other?
  - What are the effects of not achieving this relationship?

#### 2. Individuals report back (5 minutes)

- ★ Ask volunteers to share their key points with the whole group. List these on two columns on a flip chart.

#### 3. Individual reflection (5-10 minutes)

- ★ Ask participants to read through the handout “Establishing Partnership: A Shared Responsibility” (Participant Handouts, pp. 14-16) and put each quotation into one of following three categories by placing the indicated mark next to it in the margin:
  - Actions and attitudes required of men (mark as “M”)
  - Actions and attitudes required women (mark as “W”)
  - Actions and attitudes required of both men and women (mark as “B”)
- ★ As participants read through the quotations, divide a flip chart page into three columns, headed as follows:
  - Required of men
  - Required of both men and women
  - Required of women

## Working Together, continued

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### 4. Completion of the table by participants (10 minutes)

- ★ Take the cut up slips of quotations and read aloud one quotation at a time. Ask a volunteer to tape the passage on the table in the correct position. If another participant would have placed a quotation in a different column, ask both to explain the reasoning behind their choice.
- ★ When all quotations have been placed, invite general comments from participants about the shared nature of the responsibility of establishing equality and partnership.

### 5. Individual reflection (5 minutes)

- ★ Pass out to participants a copy of the sheet “Advancing the Process” (a master copy for duplicating is on p. 27). Ask each person to fill out the portion of the sheet that corresponds to their gender. Men should only fill out the top of the sheet; women should only fill out the bottom of the sheet. Responses should be specific behaviors or actions, but they can be as large or small scale as participants want.
- ★ Mention that if “advancing the process of establishing full partnership” sounds too large or overwhelming, participants can mentally rephrase the statement as “I would like men/women to be my allies by . . .” Give the following examples:
  - “I would like men to be my allies by not telling dumb blonde jokes.”
  - “I would like men to be my allies by telling me about their feelings more often.”
  - “I would like women to be allies by not saying ‘meeeeennnn!’ in an exasperated voice.”
  - “I would like women to be my allies by treating me like a friend instead of like a big scary guy.”
- ★ While participants are filling in their answers, draw on the board or flip chart a diagram divided into four quadrants with the top labeled “Women’s perspective” and “Men’s perspective” and the sides labeled “Women can help by . . .” and “Men can help by . . .” (See example on the top of the next page).

## Working Together, continued

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	Women's perspective	Men's perspective
Women can help by		
Men can help by		

### 6. Sharing responses (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask two participants, one male and one female, to collect sheets from the members of their sex. Have these two participants alternate in reading responses from their sheet while you write these on the diagram on the board.
- ★ When all responses have been entered on the diagram, invite comments from participants. Ask if there were items on the diagram that were surprises.
- ★ *Optional: Ask if any of these items have implications for change(s) in the local community.*

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

- ★ Write the following verse on a whiteboard with ample room above the words and between lines:  
  
*“The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.”*
- ★ Place signs or symbols over key words using a system similar to that above. Have participants recite the verse in unison. Remove 2-3 key words after each recitation, leaving the symbols, until the verse is memorized.

**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.



**Quotation Slips for “Establishing Partnership: A Shared Responsibility” (see page 22)**

“The greater the patience, the loving understanding and the forbearance the believers show towards each other and their shortcomings, the greater will be the progress of the whole Bahá’í community at large.”

“In brief, the assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman’s aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless.”

“Woman must endeavour then to attain greater perfection, to be man’s equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment.”

“But while this principle of equality is true, it is likewise true that woman must prove her capacity and aptitude, must show forth the evidences of equality.”

“When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights!”

“The Bahá’í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory, where you can translate into living and constructive action the principles which you imbibe from the Teachings.”

**Quotation Slips for “Establishing Partnership: A Shared Responsibility” (continued)**

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“The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God.”

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“Bahá’í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation.”

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“Equality of the sexes will be established in proportion to the increased opportunities afforded woman in this age. . . .”

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“O loved handmaidens of God! Consider not your present merits and capacities, rather fix your gaze on the favours and confirmations of the Blessed Beauty. . . .”

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“The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá’í life.”

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“Those Bahá’ís who devote themselves to promotion of the equality of the sexes, through speeches and articles, should be aware that such a process will be facilitated if it is carried out without disruption to the unity of the believers. . . .”

# Advancing the Process

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**ONLY MEN  
SHOULD FILL  
OUT THIS  
SECTION**

Men can help advance the process of establishing full partnership by:

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Women can help advance the process of establishing full partnership by:

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\* \* \* \* \*

**ONLY WOMEN  
SHOULD FILL  
OUT THIS  
SECTION**

Men can help advance the process of establishing full partnership by:

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Women can help advance the process of establishing full partnership by:

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# Living out the Vision of Partnership (25 minutes)

## Purpose

- ★ To consolidate what has been felt and learned
- ★ To articulate a vision of partnership as translated into the local community

## Activities:

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

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Living out the Vision of Partnership” (Participant Handouts, p. 17) and read aloud the following scenario:

The year is 2080. The lesser peace has been firmly established for several decades. Women have been welcomed into full partnership with men in all areas of life.

Alexis de Tocqueville has spent nearly a year traveling throughout the United States researching a book which will stand as an updated companion piece to the famous essay on America written by her illustrious ancestor in the mid -1800’s. The title of her book is Two Wings of a Bird: The New American Reality.

### 2. Small group brainstorming (15 minutes)

- ★ Divide into groups of 3-4, including both sexes when possible.
- ★ Give the following instructions: As a group compile a list of examples – behaviors, practices, dynamics, and statistics – which led Alexis to believe that equality of the sexes was firmly established in the hearts and life of their local community. Include examples from all areas of life: work life, political structures, social customs, legal statutes, demographics, marriage and family life, forms of recreation and entertainment, etc. Instruct them to let their minds and imaginations roam freely.

### 3. Large group sharing (10 minutes)

- ★ Ask each group to share one item on its list. Make a master list of items on the flip chart. Circle through all the groups until all ideas have been added to the list.
- ★ If they have not already been mentioned, suggest the following: shared decision making, appreciation for male and female perspectives and approaches, equal respect and status given to both sexes, sharing of tasks, and equal opportunities for growth and development.

## Living out the Vision of Partnership, continued

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- ★ Suggest that these specific examples, when combined, are like dots of a pointillist painting, resolving into a pattern and creating a multifaceted vision of how equality between women and men might look. [Note to facilitators: a pointillist painting is one made up of thousands of tiny dots of different colors which, when viewed from a distance, blend into a smooth, rich image.]

### ***Optional extension (variable amount of time):***

- ★ *Invite each group to create a piece of artwork expressing their vision of life in their community when the partnership of women and men has been fully realized.*
- ★ *Allow time for each group to share its artwork and explain its meaning to the whole group*

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## Personal Assessment (10 minutes)

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### **Purpose**

- ★ To allow time for private reflection and journal writing about what this principle of equality challenges in each participant's own life

### **Setting up the activity:**

- ★ Comment that implementation of the principle of the equality of women and men necessarily challenges traditional attitudes and practices.

### **Activity:**

#### **1. Personal reflection and journal writing**

- ★ Refer participants to the handout “Assessing the Challenge” (Participant Handouts, p. 18). Ask them to take 5-10 minutes to reflect on areas of challenge in their personal life. Make clear that this assessment is for their personal use only and will not be shared with others.
- ★ Play soft music while participants reflect and write.

## Group Assessment (20 minutes)

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### **Purpose**

- ★ To consider steps the community could take to move closer to the vision of partnership

### **Activities:**

#### **1. Group brainstorming (10 minutes)**

- ★ Divide into small groups of 2-3. Ask each group to brainstorm steps the local community could take to move closer to the vision of partnership described in the Bahá'í Writings.

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

- ★ Ask each group to share their results. Compile all suggestions on a list. Suggest that the list be shared with the community during a Feast consultation and then be given to the Assembly for further refinement and implementation

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## Optional Extension Three: Using Brilliant Star as a Resource (30 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To become familiar with Brilliant Star as a resource for gender equality activities

### Setting up the activity:

- ★ Introduce Brilliant Star magazine as a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly which contain activities that promote the advancement of women and the equality of the sexes.
- ★ Comment that these activities are designed primarily for children and youth but are useful for all ages.
- ★ Mention that copies of some, but not all, single back issues of the magazine are available from the Bahá'í Distribution Service and/or the National Teacher Training Center at Louhelen Bahá'í School. Subscription to the magazine is available by contacting Bahá'í Subscriber Service at the Bahá'í Distribution Service.

### Activities:

#### 1. Small group work (20 minutes)

- ★ Divide participants into groups of 4-5.
- ★ Distribute copies of Brilliant Star which focus on the advancement of women and the equality of the sexes, such as the following:
  - July-August 1993, the entire magazine is devoted to the role of women
  - November-December 1993, "Expanding Resources," p. 29.
  - January-February 1994, "What Does Mom Do? What Does Dad Do?," pp. 2-3.
  - Special Edition 1994, "The Two Wings of a Bird," p. 27.
  - March-April 1996, "With Two Wings," pp. 8-9.
  - March-April 1999, the entire magazine is devoted to the equality of women and men
- ★ Ask each group to select an 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 age group or be intergenerational, focused on the Bahá'í community or suitable for use with friends of the Faith.

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

- ★ Have groups share their plans.



## Closing (10 minutes)

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### Purpose

- ★ To record personal intentions
- ★ To feel strengthened and assured of success in these endeavors

### Activities:

#### 1. Journal writing time (3-5 minutes)

- ★ Play quiet music as a soothing background while participants write their insights and intentions in response to the statement:  
“The steps I will personally take to bring my family and community closer to full equality include . . .”

#### 2. Check to see if all questions have been addressed (2 minutes)

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

#### 3. Resources for further deepening on this topic (1 minute)

- ★ Mention that, in addition to the Assembly development module “The Equality of Women and Men, Part 2: The Assembly’s Role in Fostering Partnership,” participants can continue their deepening on this topic in several ways. A Core Curriculum program on equality is now available, and several regional training institutes offer deepening programs on this subject. A resource list of books, compilations, and trainings is also available from the Office of Assembly Development.

#### 4. Sharing of closing quotations (2 minutes)

- ★ Select male and female participants to read aloud the following assurances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Universal House of Justice as we engage in the work of establishing full equality and partnership:

“. . . the Bahá’ís . . . should initiate and implement programs which will stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá’í community life, so that through their accomplishments the friends will demonstrate the distinction of the Cause of God in this field of human endeavor.”

(The Universal House of Justice, letter dated May 25, 1975, in Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986, p. 309.)

“As you know, the Bahá’ís are distinguished not by their perfection or their immunity from the negative influences of

## Closing, continued

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the wider society in which they live, but by their acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh's vision and willingness to work toward it.”

(Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 5, 1979, in *Towards Oneness*, p. 65, # 147)

“The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings . . . become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 375.)

### ***Optional:***

- ★ *Give each participant a beautiful card or calligraphy version of the quotation of Bahá'u'lláh on the following page as a gift (an example suitable for photocopying onto attractive paper is included).*

“Women and men have  
been and will always be  
equal in the sight of God.  
The Dawning-Place of  
the Light of God  
sheddeth its radiance  
upon all with the same  
effulgence. Verily God  
created women for men,  
and men for women.”

Bahá'u'lláh