

I. ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



Lights of Guidance

A Bahá'í Reference File

by

Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and Universal House of Justice



compiled by Helen Hornby

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[pg 1] I. ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

A. Administrative Order

1. Established First in America — Not American Production

“The Administrative Order of the Cause, though first established in America, copied as a model by other national Bahá'í communities, is not an American production, but is a universal system based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. It is not simply by coincidence however that it was first initiated and perfected by the American believers.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 29, 1938: Dawn of a New Day, p. 202)

1. Cannot be Identified with Principles of Present-Day Democracies

“... The administrative order which lies embedded in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and which the American believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies. Nor is it identical with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable



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features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It blends, as no system of human polity has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past”

(Postscript written by the Guardian to a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, November 18, 1933: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 26)



B. Bahá'í Administration

1. The Ideal Instrument to Make Spiritual Laws Function Properly

“He hopes you will devote as much of your spare time as possible to the work of the Cause, especially in impressing upon the believers the importance of the Administration and helping them to really understand its purpose and all it can achieve once they get it to function properly. In other words it is a perfect form which must be animated by the spirit of the Cause. It is the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of this world.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 16, 1945)

1. Purpose of Administration

“Your letter of October 19, 1973 giving a comprehensive survey of developments throughout Australia is of great interest and we commend you on your manifold efforts to promote the Faith throughout that vast continent.” ^{pg 2} “We urge you ever to bear in mind that the purpose of Bahá'í administration is primarily to lend strength and direction to the teaching work and to promote the establishment of the Faith. It should never be regarded as an end in itself but purely as a means to canalize and make effective a spiritual vitality generated by the Word of God in the hearts of the believers. “The dedication and zeal with which you promote the Cause of God are highly commendable and we will pray at the Sacred Threshold that the process of expansion and consolidation will be greatly intensified as a result of your efforts.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia, November 12, 1973)

1. Social Order of Bahá'u'lláh

“...To accept the Cause without the administration is like to accept the teachings without acknowledging the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. To be a Bahá'í is to accept the Cause in its entirety. To take exception to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, and therefore is to deny the Cause. The administration is the social order of Bahá'u'lláh. Without it all the principles of the Cause will remain abortive. To take exception to this, therefore, is to take exception to the fabric that Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed; it is to disobey His law.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 30, 1930: Bahá'í News, No. 43, August 1930, p. 3)

1. Relationship of the Cause to the Administration

“Regarding the relationship of the Cause to the Administration: the Bahá'í Faith, as the Guardian himself has repeatedly and emphatically stated, cannot be confined to a mere system of organization, however elaborate in its features and universal in its scope it may be. Organization is only a means to the realization of its aims and ideals, and not an end in itself. To divorce the two, however, would be to mutilate the Cause itself, as they stand inseparably bound to each other, in very much the same relationship existing between the soul and body in the world of human existence.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 19, 1939)



C. Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies

1. Assemblies Ordained by Bahá'u'lláh

“Addressing the nations, the Ancient Beauty ordaineth that in every city in the world a house be established in the name of justice wherein shall gather pure and steadfast souls to the number of the Most Great Name (9). At this meeting they should feel as if they were entering the Presence of God, inasmuch as this binding command hath flowed from the Pen of Him Who is the Ancient of Days. The glances of God are directed towards this Assembly.”

(Bahá'u'lláh: From a newly translated Tablet cited in The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 6, compiled by the Universal House of Justice)

1. Established in Every City — Counsellors to the Number of Bahá (9)

“The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established [pg 3] wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá (9), and should it exceed this number it does not matter....”

(Bahá'u'lláh: Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K 30, p. 29)

1. Purpose of Spiritual Assemblies

“...These bodies have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect and guide the believers in every way within their power when appealed to — indeed they were established just for the purpose of keeping order and unity and obedience to the law of God amongst the believers.”

“You should go to them as a child would to its parents....”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 28, 1941: The Local Spiritual Assembly, compiled by the Universal House of Justice)

1. Their Defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá

"These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His wings. What bounty is there greater than this?... These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions."

('Abdu'l-Bahá: God Passes By, p. 332 and The Local Spiritual Assembly, pp. 6-7)

1. Assemblies Styled Differently in Future

"... Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power...."

(Shoghi Effendi: The Bahá'í World, Vol. III, p. 108)

1. Assembly Operates at First Levels of Human Society

"The divinely ordained institution of the local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá'í society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock."

(Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world, Naw-Rúz 1974, paragraph 13)

1. Strengthening of Local Spiritual Assemblies — Nerve Centres of Communities¹

"Great attention should be paid to the strengthening of Local Spiritual Assemblies which must act as the nerve centres of the Bahá'í communities in the towns and villages, promote Bahá'í education of the youth and children, and increase cooperation and participation of the believers in Bahá'í community life. Travelling teachers and all who are actively engaged in spreading the Message should rededicate themselves to their vital work and set out with [pg 4] renewed enthusiasm. They should aim at assisting as large a number as possible of Bahá'í communities to stand on their own feet and become capable of carrying out the thrilling tasks which they are called upon to discharge in the Vineyard of God in this Day."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, February 8, 1972)

1. Primary Purpose to Promote Teaching Work

¹ (See also: No. 1988)

“And since the primary purpose for which Local Spiritual Assemblies are established is to promote the teaching work, it is clear that every National Spiritual Assembly must give careful consideration to ways and means to encourage each Local Assembly under its jurisdiction to fulfil its principal obligation... it is important that Local Assemblies share with the local friends stories of successes achieved by some of them, descriptions of effective presentations found useful by them, examples of various ways that a Bahá'í subject could be introduced to inquirers, or illustrations of methods which would enable the believer to relate the needs of society to our teachings. Such information and suggestions should be offered to the friends at Nineteen Day Feasts, through a local newsletter, or by any means open to each Local Assembly. In all these contacts with the believers, each Local Spiritual Assembly should impress upon the friends the unique and irreplaceable role the individual plays in the prosecution of any Bahá'í undertaking....”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, March 3, 1977)

*** Areas Under Jurisdiction of Local Spiritual Assemblies — National Spiritual Assembly Must Study**

“The matter of the areas under the jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly is one which the National Assembly must study, and apply the principles laid down by the Guardian; namely, that within a municipal area, where the people resident in the area pay taxes and vote, the Assembly can be elected, and holds jurisdiction. Anyone living outside of that area is not a member of that Community and cannot enjoy the administrative privileges of that Community. Although this will affect your Assembly roll, it will place the work of the Faith on a much sounder basis, and increase the number of Centres where the Bahá'ís reside... It will challenge the friends to work harder to create new Assemblies and make up for those dissolved.... ”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, June 13, 1956: Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, pp. 130-131)

1. Local Spiritual Assemblies — Created by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas

“As to your query about the Local Spiritual Assembly, it is indeed a divine institution, created by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the Local House of Justice. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has clearly set out its provenance, authority and duties and has explained the differences between it and other administrative institutions, whether of the past or the present. We refer you to the book ‘Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá,’ 37, 38, and 71. [pg 5] “It is clear that while Local Spiritual Assemblies must supervise all Bahá'í matters in their areas, including arrangements for the Nineteen Day Feast, the observance of the Holy Days, the election of the members of the Assembly, promoting the teaching work, caring for the spiritual welfare and Bahá'í education of the friends and children, etc., they and the friends themselves must at the same time be good citizens and loyal to the civil government, whether it be a Tribal council, a Cacique or a municipal authority.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, April 13, 1983)



D. Formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies

1. Forming Local Assemblies — Obligation to Establish

“Shoghi Effendi feels that in any locality where the number of adult believers reaches nine, a Local Assembly should be established. He feels this to be an obligation rather than a purely voluntary act. Only in exceptional cases has the National Spiritual Assembly the right to postpone the formation of an Assembly if it feels that the situation does not warrant such a formation. This right, however, should be exercised if the situation absolutely demands it. As to the principle according to which the area of jurisdiction of a Local Assembly is to be determined, he feels, this is to be the function of the National Spiritual Assembly; whatever principle they uphold should be fairly applied to all localities without any distinction whatever.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, April 11, 1931: Bahá'í News, No. 55, September 1931, p. 1)

1. A Community of Nine Adult Believers Must Form an Assembly by Joint Declaration

“In reply to your letter of 28 October 1980 we are instructed to make the following points:

(1) There is nothing in the directives of the beloved Guardian or in the by-laws of Local Spiritual Assemblies to require that the joint declaration of a new Local Spiritual Assembly be signed. The way the declaration is made is within the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly to determine, and it may or may not require signatures.

(2) Wherever at Ridván there are nine or more adult believers resident in an area properly qualified for the establishment of a Local Spiritual Assembly, the Assembly must be formed at Ridván.

(3) If the number of adult resident believers is exactly nine the Local Spiritual Assembly must be formed by joint declaration in a manner acceptable to the National Spiritual Assembly and the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly will record the formation of the Local Assembly.

(4) When the Spiritual Assembly is to be formed for the first time and one or more of the adult believers refuses to join in the declaration, the Spiritual Assembly cannot be formed.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iceland, December 2, 1980) [pg 6]

1. Duty of Every Bahá'í to Take Part in Joint Declaration

"The statement that it is a condition to the formation of a Local Spiritual Assembly that there be at least nine adult believers who are ready, willing and able to serve on the Local Assembly, should not be construed as giving any Bahá'í the right to refuse to take part in the formation of the Assembly. It is merely a statement of a factual condition. The National Bahá'í Constitution specifies: 'When ... the number of Bahá'ís in any authorized civil area is exactly nine, these shall on April 21st of any year, or in successive years, constitute themselves the Local Spiritual Assembly by joint declaration. Upon the recording of such declaration by the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, said body of nine shall become established with the rights, privileges and duties of a Local Spiritual Assembly ...'. It can therefore be seen that it is the duty of every Bahá'í in such a situation to take part in the joint declaration. If a Bahá'í, however, refuses to do so he should be helped to realize that he has committed a grave dereliction of his Bahá'í duty. In this stage of the development of the Cause a National Spiritual Assembly should not, generally, deprive a believer of his voting rights for such an offence, but should lovingly and patiently educate the friends in the importance of their responsibilities."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, October 12, 1969)

*** Believer Must Be "a Resident" to Participate in the Formation of a Spiritual Assembly — Unusual Cases as Exceptions**

"To count as a member of a local Bahá'í community for the purpose of forming or maintaining the Local Spiritual Assembly, a believer must be resident in that area of jurisdiction on the First Day of Ridván. This is the principle. What constitutes 'residence' is a secondary matter for each National Spiritual Assembly to decide, but there is no exception to the principle that a believer must be resident in order to participate in the formation of the Spiritual Assembly."

"You will see from the above instruction that it is not possible for believers living outside the civil limits of a locality to count as members of that community. There are, of course, many unusual cases. For example, it may be that a university student spends some six months of the year in the town where his university is, and the other half-year in the home of his parents. In such a case it is normal to permit him to choose which of the two places is to count as his residence for Bahá'í purposes; one cannot count as being 'resident' in two places at once. It is, moreover, not essential for a person to be physically present to be resident. There are many instances of a sailor or salesman who spends most of his time moving from place to place but who is indisputably resident in the town where his family lives. All such matters must be decided by the National Spiritual Assembly in the light of the circumstances of each case within the general framework of the definition of 'residence' that it adopts. Such a definition must, of course, be a reasonable one, otherwise the principle would be nullified."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of France, September 18, 1985)

*** Re-Formation by Election or Joint Declaration — Refusal of a Believer to Participate does not Prevent Re-Forming Assembly**

“In subsequent years the Assembly must be re-formed each Ridván, either by [pg 7] election, if the number of voting believers exceeds nine, or by joint declaration if the number is exactly nine. The failure or refusal of a believer to take part in the joint declaration would not be a bar to the re-formation of the Assembly.”

“Where the number of voting believers resident in a community falls below nine during the course of a year, the Local Spiritual Assembly is not automatically dissolved; it can continue in existence so long as the National Spiritual Assembly has the hope and expectation of being able to restore the number, by enrollment or pioneers. If, however, the number is not restored by the following Ridván, the Assembly will lapse.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, July 22, 1981)

1. Circumstances Under Which an Assembly Should not be Immediately Dissolved

“He feels that where the dissolution of an Assembly is in question each case should be treated separately in this sense, that if a member moves away permanently, leaving less than 9 to function, the Spiritual Assembly should not immediately be dissolved if they, its members, see an immediate remedy in view; in other words if they are going to confirm soon, or receive within a reasonable length of time, someone to take the person’s place, they need not give up Assembly status. If they do, for insurmountable reason, fall below Assembly status, then they can only be reconstituted on April 21st. Also if certain members temporarily absent themselves from meetings there is no need to dissolve the Assembly; on the contrary the reluctant ones should be educated and encouraged to reassume their spiritual obligations as believers. A Spiritual Assembly is not based on 9 people being available for every single meeting but on 9 resident Bahá’ís doing their best to discharge their duty to the Spiritual Assembly when they are not prevented by illness or absence or some legitimate reason for doing so.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, March 31, 1945)

1. Members of Lapsed Assembly are Responsible to Notify National Secretary

“...any Assembly which is dissolved must immediately report to the national secretary, who must always keep an up-to-date list of Assemblies. Any dissolved Assembly cannot be reconstituted until the time of election in April...”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, April 13, 1944: The Covenant and Administration, p. 62)

1. Spiritual Assembly Jurisdictions Changes as Civil Units Are Modified

"The general principle is that Local Spiritual Assemblies may be formed in the smallest civil administrative units of the country. If these areas are enlarged or reduced in size by the Government the area of jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly should likewise be changed."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Zambia, June 8, 1978)

1. Assemblies Cannot be Formed in Prison

"...the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land have shared with us [pg 8] a portion of the February 3rd letter of ... referring to teaching in the prison in ... and to the formation of Local Assemblies in cell blocks. While this teaching work is commendable those who accept Bahá'u'lláh under these conditions cannot undertake administrative responsibilities, nor can Local Assemblies be formed in prisons. However, they may observe Nineteen Day Feasts, Bahá'í Holy Days, and other Bahá'í events. When they return to their own communities they may participate in administrative affairs as well."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, February 9, 1972: Extract from a letter written to another National Spiritual Assembly, June 11, 1964)

1. Qualifications of Assembly Members — Subject to Human Limitations

"With reference to your next question concerning the qualifications of the members of the Spiritual Assembly: There is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the Spiritual Assembly as an institution, and the persons who compose it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. The existence of elections is a sufficient indication that Assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgment is defective."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 15, 1935)

1. Qualifications Outlined Applicable to Anyone Elected

"In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: The qualifications which he outlines are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá'í office, whatever its nature. But these are only an indication, they do not mean people who don't fulfill

them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, October 24, 1947: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 3)

1. Auxiliary Board Members, Eligibility of

"All adult Bahá'ís, including members of the Auxiliary Board, are eligible to vote in elections for delegates or in elections for members of the Local Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda and Central Africa, April 10, 1966)

1. Board Members May Serve on Assembly Temporarily²

"In all three areas of election, Auxiliary Board members are eligible to be elected. Therefore, a ballot should not be invalidated because it contains the name of a member of an Auxiliary Board. The basic principle involved is that the Board member himself must decide whether or not to accept his election. As you have stated in your letter, if the membership in a Bahá'í community drops to nine, including the Auxiliary Board member resident there, the Auxiliary [pg 9] Board member may serve temporarily as a member of the Assembly to preserve its Assembly status."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, March 25, 1966, cited in the compilation, Auxiliary Board Members)

1. Annual Elections Provide Opportunity to Remedy Defects the Assembly May Suffer

"For as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly emphasized Bahá'í Assemblies are under the guidance and protection of God. The elections, specially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Bahá'í Assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated, the institution of the Spiritual Assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 15, 1935)

1. Absence of Nomination in Bahá'í Elections — A Distinguishing Feature

"As to the practice of nomination in Bahá'í elections, this the Guardian firmly believes to be in fundamental disaccord with the spirit which should animate and direct all elections held by the Bahá'ís, be they of a local or national character and importance. It is, indeed, the absence of such a practice that constitutes the distinguishing feature and the marked superiority of the Bahá'í

². (See also: Nos. 91-92)

electoral methods over those commonly associated with political parties and factions. The practice of nomination being thus contrary to the spirit of Bahá'í Administration should be totally discarded by all the friends. For otherwise the freedom of the Bahá'í elector in choosing the members of any Bahá'í Assembly will be seriously endangered, leaving the way open for the domination of personalities. Not only that, but the mere act of nomination leads eventually to the formation of parties — a thing which is totally alien to the spirit of the Cause."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 4, 1935)

1. **Bahá'í Electoral Procedures Develop Spirit of Responsibility**

"In addition to these serious dangers, the practice of nomination has the great disadvantage of killing in the believer the spirit of initiative, and of self-development. Bahá'í electoral procedures and methods have, indeed, for one of their essential purposes the development in every believer of the spirit of responsibility. By emphasizing the necessity of maintaining his full freedom in the elections, they make it incumbent upon him to become an active and well-informed member of the Bahá'í community in which he lives."

(Ibid.)

1. **Freedom of Believers to Choose — Should Be Choicest, Most Varied Elements**

"...I do not feel it to be in keeping with the spirit of the Cause to impose any limitation upon the freedom of the believers to choose those of any race [pg 10] nationality or temperament, who best combine the essential qualifications for membership of administrative institutions. They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality. The Assembly should be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements in every Bahá'í community."

(From a letter of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 11, 1933: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 3)

1. **Believers Should Become Intelligent, Well-Informed and Responsible Electors³**

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

3. (See also: No. 68)

corruption and partisanship, it has to be entirely discarded in all Bahá'í elections."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 4, 1935)

1. **Canvassing is Deprecated**

"The strength and progress of the Bahá'í Community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls.... Canvassing is deprecated...."

"Bahá'í elections of the Community are ... sanctified from all traces of canvassing and plotting that characterize the activities of the perfidious."

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the friends in Persia, April 9, 1932: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 3)

1. **Reference to Personalities Before Election**

"I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends."

(From a letter of Shoghi Effendi to the Spiritual Assembly of Akron, Ohio, May 14, 1927: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 46)

1. **Avoid Intrigues**

"Beware, beware lest the foul odour of the parties and peoples of foreign lands in the west, and their pernicious methods, such as intrigues, party politics and [pg 11] propaganda — practices which are abhorrent even in name — should ever reach the Bahá'í Community, exert any influence whatsoever upon the friends, and thus bring all spirituality to naught. The friends should, through their devotion, love, loyalty and altruism, abolish these evil practices, not imitate them. It is only after the friends completely ignore and sanctify themselves from these evils, that the spirit of God can penetrate and operate in the body of humanity, and in the Bahá'í Community."

(From a letter of the Guardian to the friends in Persia, January 30, 1923: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 1)

1. **Election Day**

“On the election day the friends must whole-heartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.”

(From a letter of the Guardian to the friends in Persia, February 27, 1923: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 1)

1. Prayer and Reflection Before Voting

“...the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold. Moreover, the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust, inasmuch as it gives the right ... to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 27, 1927: Bahá'í Administration, p. 136)

“... in the time of election, the friends should be in the mood of prayer, disinterestedness and detachment from worldly motives. Then they will be inspired to elect the proper members to the assemblies.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 7, 1924)

1. Procedure for Voting by Mail

“The same procedure in voting should be followed, namely, the ballot should be placed and sealed in an unmarked inner envelope and that envelope placed in an outer envelope marked with the name of the voter...”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, January 21, 1973)

1. No Quorum Required for Election of an Assembly

“No quorum is required in the holding of an election for a Local Spiritual Assembly. This rule also applies in the case of by-elections. The mere fact that less than nine vote for the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly does not invalidate the election.”

“As you know, the National Assembly can always look into the circumstances surrounding a Local Spiritual Assembly election and use its discretion in determining whether, considering all circumstances, the existence of the Local Spiritual Assembly should be recognized.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, April 16, 1969) [pg 12]

1. Bahá'í Elections for Spiritual Assemblies — Cast Nine Votes, Neither More nor Less⁴

“Concerning the question you have asked as to whether in elections for Spiritual Assemblies the electors should cast exactly nine votes, or may cast less than this number. Inasmuch as Spiritual Assembly membership, according to the principles of Bahá'í Administration, has been limited for the present to nine members, it follows that no electoral vote can be effective unless it is cast for exactly that number. It is, therefore, the sacred duty of every Bahá'í elector to cast nine votes, neither more nor less, except under special circumstances so as to insure that the results of the elections for the Spiritual Assembly will be effective and on as wide a basis of representation as possible.”

(From a letter dated March 27, 1940 written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles)

1. Believer Has Right to Vote for Himself

“A believer has the right to vote for himself during the election time, if he conscientiously feels the urge to do so. This does not necessarily imply that he is ambitious or selfish. For he might conscientiously believe that his qualifications entitle him to membership in a Bahá'í administrative body, and he might be right. The essential, however, is that he should be sincere in his belief, and should act according to the dictates of his conscience. Moreover, membership in an assembly or committee is a form of service, and should not be looked upon as a mark of inherent superiority or a means for self-praise.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma, March 27, 1938: Dawn of a New Day, pp. 200-201)

1. Votes Confidential

“One's vote should be kept confidential. It is not permissible to make any reference whatsoever to individual names. The friends must avoid the evil methods and detestable practices of the politicians. They must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections; otherwise the outcome will be chaos and confusion, serious difficulties will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmation of God will be cut off.”

(From a letter of the Guardian to the friends in Persia, January 16, 1932: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 2)

1. Secret Ballot

“Let them exercise the utmost vigilance so that the elections are carried out freely, universally and by secret ballot. Any form of intrigue, deception, collusion and compulsion must be stopped

⁴. (See also: Nos. 80-95)

and

is

forbidden.”

(From a letter of the Guardian to the friends in Persia, January 16, 1932: The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, p. 2)

1. Results of Election Should Be Accepted

“...Once Assembly elections are over, the results should be conscientiously and [pg 13] unquestionably accepted by the entire body of the believers, not necessarily because they represent the voice of truth or the will of Bahá'u'lláh, but for the supreme purpose of maintaining unity and harmony in the Community. Besides, the acceptance of majority vote is the only effective and practical way of settling deadlocks in elections. No other solution is indeed possible.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, July 10, 1939)

1. Breaking of Tie Votes

“Regarding your question about the breaking of tie votes, a balloting to break such a tie vote for members of a Spiritual Assembly may be held after the first day of Ridván if necessary, but obviously the day of balloting should not be delayed too long.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of El Salvador, July 4, 1972)

1. If Enrolled Believer Withdraws — Subsequently Elected to Spiritual Assembly

“Regarding your last question, if, prior to local elections an enrolled believer withdraws from the Faith and this leads to the removal of his name from Bahá'í membership, and yet he is subsequently elected to the Local Assembly, such votes as have been cast in his name are disregarded without invalidating the remaining votes on the ballots. If, however, the process of withdrawal has not taken place, that is, the believer refuses on the day of election to participate and expresses then his desire to withdraw from the community, and yet he is subsequently elected to the Assembly, since his withdrawal is generally unknown to the friends, in such a case the remaining eight elected members should meet, consider the withdrawal, and if his name has to be removed from Bahá'í membership, a by-election should be held to fill the vacancy.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, December 11, 1979)

1. Mass Migrations

“Local Assemblies cannot be formed any time during the year, unless it is for the first time. The House of Justice fully understands the problems you face each year in forming the ... Assemblies

due to the mass migration of the friends during the pine nuts harvest. However, the Assemblies in that area cannot be elected before January 15 or after May 15, as you have suggested. We have noted from your letter that not all of the ... friends may migrate to the higher regions during the Ridván period, which means that those remaining at home may hold elections. Those Bahá'ís who leave their homes and are absent during the Ridván period may leave their votes with those believers remaining behind, who will on the First Day of Ridván count the ballots and report the results of the election to the National Spiritual Assembly or its representative."

"If all the friends from one Spiritual Assembly jurisdiction go away to work at different locations and there is nobody left in the village to receive their votes, they may write out their ballots before dispersing and send them to the National Assembly or to any committee appointed by that body, who at Ridván will open and count the votes and inform the Bahá'ís when they return home of those elected to the Local Assembly." [pg 14]

"When the entire Bahá'í population of a village moves away together to a new location and is absent during the Ridván period, they may elect their Assembly at Ridván and function as a Local Assembly when they return home."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Chile, January 1, 1984)

1. When Conditions Beyond Human Control Prevent Election of Assembly at Ridvan

"Local Spiritual Assemblies which have not been re-elected during the Ridván period must be considered as groups. However, there may be cases when conditions beyond the control of the local believers exist, such as, as you have said, the Bahá'ís had left the community because of flooding, or extremely inclement weather conditions made it impossible to hold the election. In such cases which, by their very nature, should be rare, the National Spiritual Assembly may use its discretion in recognizing the Local Spiritual Assembly, considering it a group, or decide to hold the election of such Local Spiritual Assemblies at a later date when the friends have returned to their communities."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, September 5, 1983)

1. Should Guide Believers During Year in Proper Administrative Procedures

"The conditions of limited manpower, of difficulties in travelling and of illiteracy among the local people are found in varying degrees in other countries of the world, and we have always and everywhere urged the National Spiritual Assemblies concerned to guide and teach the friends in proper Bahá'í administrative procedures, not only during the weeks immediately preceding local elections but indeed throughout the year, so that the friends would await the advent of Ridván with anticipation and determine to observe and uphold correct principles of Bahá'í administration."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, September 24, 1973)



E. Annual Conventions

1. The Functions of the National Convention

“The assembled delegates at a National Convention have two basic functions — to elect and to recommend....”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, June 8, 1967)

“...The function of the Convention is purely advisory and though the advice it gives is not binding in its effects on those on whom rest the final decision in purely administrative matters, yet, the utmost caution and care should be exercised lest anything should hamper the delegates in the full and free exercise of their functions. In discharging this sacred function no influence whatever, no pressure from any quarter, even though it be from the National Assembly, should under any circumstances affect their views or restrict their freedom. The delegates must be wholly independent of any administrative agency, must [pg 15] approach their task with absolute detachment and must concentrate their attention on the most important and pressing issues.”

(From letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, August 18, 1933: The National Spiritual Assembly, pp. 23-24)

1. Election of Delegates to National Conventions

“As you are aware, some national communities elect their delegates to the National Convention on the basis of areas which have Local Spiritual Assemblies, while in other, larger, national communities delegates are elected on the basis of electoral units in which all adult believers have the vote.”

“In view of the growth of the Faith and the developing life of the Bahá'í communities, the Universal House of Justice has decided that, notwithstanding that in some countries the number of believers and of Local Spiritual Assemblies is still small, the time has come for delegates to National Conventions everywhere to be elected on the basis of electoral units, but with the option of introducing certain differences from the procedures followed to date. These differences are explained below and are designed to make the system adaptable to the variations in the make-up of the many Bahá'í communities and in the geography of the lands in which they are situated.”

“When establishing the electoral unit basis for the election of delegates, a National Spiritual Assembly should divide the territory under its jurisdiction into electoral units, based on the

number of adult Bahá'ís in each area, in such a way that each unit will be responsible for electing preferably one delegate only."

"In addition to the voting, the opportunity for consultation with the delegates is important. Hitherto this has been achieved by calling a convention in each unit to which all the believers in that electoral unit are invited. The voting for delegates has then taken place at the unit conventions with provision for voting by mail for those who do not attend. In some areas these meetings have been very fruitful and have helped to foster collaboration among the believers in the unit. However, in other areas, no doubt for a number of reasons, attendance at unit conventions has been very low, as has been the voting by mail, and this has meant that the delegates have been elected by a relatively small proportion of the electorate. National Assemblies are free to call unit conventions if they find they are successful, but if they find problems of attendance they may follow the alternative method described below."

"Where holding unit conventions has proved ineffective, or does not seem to be a viable procedure, a National Assembly may divide each electoral unit into sub-units of a convenient size. A meeting could then be held in each sub-unit to which all the adult believers residing therein would be invited. This should result in the participation of a large number of the believers. It is important to remember, however, that the delegate to be elected represents the entire unit and therefore, although the voting may be carried out in sub-units, each voter has all the adult believers resident in the entire unit to choose from in voting for the delegate."

"In some countries, it may even be too difficult to expect the believers throughout a sub-unit to gather together at a certain time, and so it would not be practical to hold sub-unit meetings. In such places a central point in each sub-unit could be chosen for the establishment of a polling station to which the friends would come to leave their ballots on the voting day as and when they can do so." [pg 16]

"Each National Spiritual Assembly should study and master the broad outlines of this system. All matters of detail should be decided by the National Assembly which should ensure that the friends are fully informed and thoroughly understand what they are expected to do. The help and advice of the Counsellors and their Auxiliary Board members and assistants could be sought in working out these details and in educating the friends. It may also be desirable for the National Assembly to appoint a special national committee to organize the elections and to oversee them through unit or sub-unit committees or representatives. Such matters of detail could include the following:

— The number of delegates to be allocated to each unit. Although one for each unit is preferable, this may not be practicable in certain instances, such as in a unit which contains one or more very large local communities. In such cases it may be necessary to make the unit large enough to be the electoral base for two or possibly three delegates.

— The number and size of sub-units. These could be as many as there are Local Spiritual Assemblies in a unit, the boundaries being so delineated as to include the surrounding isolated believers and Bahá'í groups. It may even be necessary in some remote areas to have sub-units in which there are no Local Spiritual Assemblies.

— The body to be responsible for organizing a unit convention or sub-unit meeting or for establishing and supervising a polling station. This could be a centrally located, firmly established Local Spiritual Assembly or a committee.

— The day or days on which the elections should take place. Elections could be carried out in different sub-units on different days, extended over a reasonable period of time, if this is felt to be desirable.

— The manner in which ballots are to be cast, collected, counted, and consolidated with other ballots from the same unit.

— Procedures to be followed in consultation, if the procedure chosen allows for consultation.

— A method for monitoring the balloting to ensure that proper Bahá'í procedures are followed, that the ballots are safeguarded, and that a Bahá'í voter cannot cast more than one ballot.

— The procedure for holding a second ballot should there be a tie-vote for the delegate.

— The means for announcing to the friends in all units the names of their elected delegates. "It is the hope of the Universal House of Justice that the implementation of these instructions this year and thereafter will promote Bahá'í solidarity, broaden the basis of representation at the National Conventions and that thereby the work of the Faith in each country will be characterized by greater efficiency and enhanced harmony."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, July 21, 1985)

1. Area of Assembly Jurisdiction Not to be Subdivided for Electoral Districts

"The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 14 April 1986 and [pg 17] has instructed us to confirm the principle that the area of jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly should not be sub-divided by boundaries of districts for the election of delegates to the National Convention. We are asked to explain the policy in more detail, as follows."

"The basic guideline for the fixing of the boundaries of electoral districts which was given in the letter of 21 July 1985 was that a National Spiritual Assembly should divide the territory under its jurisdiction into electoral units, based on the number of adult Bahá'ís in each area, in such a way that each unit will be responsible for electing preferably one delegate only. Later in the letter it was further clarified that although one delegate for each unit is preferable, this may not be practicable in certain instances, such as in a unit which contains one or more very large local communities. In such cases it may be necessary to make the unit large enough to be the electoral base for two or possibly three delegates."

"In some national Bahá'í communities which are comparatively small numerically in relation to the number of delegates allocated for their National Conventions, it may be found that, to avoid sub-dividing localities (i.e., the areas of jurisdiction for Local Spiritual Assemblies), it will be

necessary to have some electoral districts elect more than three delegates. This does not matter, as long as the principle of proportionality is followed as closely as possible.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of France, June 3, 1986)

1. Delegates Assigned According to Numerical Strength

“Delegates must be assigned according to the numerical strength of a Bahá’í community uniformly in all parts of the country. The question as to whether the friends are active or not is not to be taken into consideration; all persons accepted by you as Bahá’ís must be included on the voting list. Of course, if some of the believers cannot be found after reasonable efforts have been made to locate them, they need not be counted on the voting list.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of French Guiana, January 20, 1987)

1. Inactivity Does Not Justify Removing Name from Voting List

“Mere inactivity on the part of a believer does not justify removing his name from the voting list. Neither is it in accordance with Bahá’í principles to take into account the degree of activity in allocating delegates. Believers whose whereabouts are unknown should be considered quite separately from those who are inactive, and a distinction is to be made between those who are interested in the Faith but remain inactive and those whose inactivity indicates complete lack of interest to the extent that they no longer consider themselves to be Bahá’ís.”

(Ibid.)

1. Replacement of Delegates

“There is no provision in the National Bahá’í Constitution for replacement of a delegate and this is, therefore, a matter left to the decision of each National Spiritual Assembly. In general, one of the following procedures is followed. If a delegate dies or becomes unable to serve before Convention, the believer polling the next highest number of votes may replace him, or another election may be [pg 18] held. If a delegate ceases to be able to serve after the Convention and there is need for a by-election to the National Spiritual Assembly, you may decide whether or not the delegate should be replaced, and if so, how. In the event of an elected delegate removing to another place, either before or after Convention, you may decide whether to replace him or allow him to continue as an elected delegate. Whatever procedure is adopted should be uniformly followed in all such cases.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, July 3, 1973)

1. National Spiritual Assembly Determines Timing in Respect to Unit Conventions

“...all matters of detail concerning Unit Conventions are left to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly and this includes the timing of the allocation of delegates and the holding of the Unit Conventions. The House of Justice points out, however, that the allocation of delegates should be left as late as possible so that the National Assembly will be able to take into consideration any increases in membership which would affect the number of delegates assigned.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Kenya, March 29, 1987)

1. Consultation Between Delegates and the National Spiritual Assembly

“I fear this letter will reach you after the closing of the convention, but I hope that it will serve to assure you of the necessity of adopting for future conventions the essential method of a full, frank and unhampered consultation between the National Assembly and the assembled delegates. It is the vital duty of the delegates to unburden their hearts, state their grievances, disclose their views, and explain their motives. It is the duty of the National Assembly to give earnest, prompt and prayerful consideration to the views of the delegates, weigh carefully their arguments and ponder their considered judgements, before they resort to voting and undertake to arrive at a decision according to the dictates of their conscience. They should explain their motives and not dictate; seek information and invite discussion.”

(From a postscript to a letter dated April 13, 1927, written by the Guardian to the Spiritual Assembly of Montreal, Canada: Extracted in Bahá'í News, No. 18, June 1927, p. 3)

1. Status of Members of the National Spiritual Assembly at the National Convention

“Concerning the status of members of the N.S.A. at Convention sessions, the Guardian feels that the members of both the incoming and the outgoing assemblies should be given the full right to participate in the Convention discussions. Those members of the N.S.A. who have been elected delegates will, in addition to the right of participation, be entitled to vote. The Guardian wishes thereby to render more effective the deliberations and the recommendations of the national representatives. He feels that the exercise of such a right by the members of the N.S.A. will enable them to consult more fully with the assembled delegates, to exchange fully and frankly with them their views, and to consider collectively [pg 19] the interests, needs and requirements of the Cause. This, he believes, is one of the primary functions of the Convention.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, December 25, 1933)

1. Preferably Delegates Attend Convention in Person

“...It should, however, be made clear to every elected delegate — who should be continually reminded — that it is a sacred responsibility and admittedly preferable to attend if possible in person the sessions of the Convention, to take an active part in all its proceedings, and to acquaint his fellow-workers on his return with the accomplishments, the decisions and the

aspirations of the assembled representatives of the ... believers."

(From a letter written by the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, October 24, 1925: Bahá'í Administration, pp. 91-92)

1. If Delegate Cannot Pay Own Expenses

"...In the matter of attendance of delegates at Conventions, the desirability of the friends themselves being self-supporting should be pointed out by the National Assembly. If a delegate cannot pay his own expenses in attending the Convention, the Local Assembly or the believers in the electoral unit from which the delegate comes should be encouraged by the National Assembly to defray such expenses, so that only when funds are unavailable from those sources, the National Assembly is approached to consider offering financial assistance. The same principle holds true about other activities, such as attendance at Institutes, Conferences and Summer Schools."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a number of National Spiritual Assemblies, February 9, 1967)

1. New Blood Adds to Energy of the Group

"Shoghi Effendi has never said that the members of the National Assembly have to be renewed partially every year. The important thing is that they should be properly elected. It would be nice if there should be new members elected, for new blood always adds to the energy of the group and will keep up their spirit. But this depends entirely upon the will of the delegates as represented in the result of their voting."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 27, 1932: Bahá'í News, No. 67, October 1932, p. 4)

1. Election of New Members on the National Spiritual Assembly — Duty of Friends to Acquaint Themselves with Fellow Believers

"As regards the election of new members on the National Assembly, Shoghi Effendi finds no other practical method that is in conformity with the spirit of the teachings, except through better acquaintance of the friends during the annual conventions and summer schools. It is the duty of the individual friends to come to know one another and find out who are the persons best fitted to become members of that body. This is a slow process but surely the best one and gives the greatest amount of freedom of choice to the electors. It is the duty of the friends individually to become more intelligent voters and vote only after studying the situation conscientiously."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 16, 1933) [pg 20]

1. Consultation Among Delegates of a Region Prior to Convention — No Objection, if the Bahá'ís Are Mature Enough

"The House of Justice sees no objection to consultation among the delegates of a region prior to the Convention, if they wish to undertake this. Indeed, one of the important functions of a Regional Convention, at which the delegates are elected, is for the delegates to consult with the believers present so that they may be familiar with their views and interests in preparation for their own participation in the National Convention. As you know, any believer at the National Convention can request a delegate to put forward a point for him, and the delegate is free to do this if he so wishes; likewise, there would be no objection to one delegate's speaking on behalf of all the delegates from his region to save time, if they and he agree. On the other hand, one must remember that the National Convention is a national Bahá'í institution, and that every delegate should have in the forefront of his mind the interests and needs of the Cause throughout the nation, not merely those of the region from which he happens to have been elected. All these details are secondary matters, not covered in the National Bahá'í Constitution, and therefore it is for the National Spiritual Assembly to make decisions where they are called for. In one country the delegates may be mature enough to have prior consultation in regional groups; in another it might indeed lead to 'caucusing' or other undesirable developments. The National Spiritual Assembly must ensure that not merely the letter but also the spirit of Bahá'í elections and consultation is upheld."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, October 26, 1983)

1. National Spiritual Assembly Present as an Institution at the National Convention

"The National Spiritual Assembly is present at the Convention as an institution, and its members are present as individual participants in the consultations. These two facts are not incompatible. All the delegates and the members of the National Spiritual Assembly should take part in the Convention in the spirit of free, frank, loving Bahá'í consultation. Most Bahá'ís perform many different functions in their lives. Very often a member of the National Assembly is also a delegate, a member of a Local Assembly, a member of one or more committees, and possibly also an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member. These multiple functions should not prevent him from expressing his views frankly and courteously in any consultation."

(Ibid.)

1. Only Delegates May Vote in the National Convention

"Only the delegates may vote at the National Convention, whether it be in the election of the National Spiritual Assembly or in arriving at decisions. Some decisions at the Convention can be implemented immediately, such as a decision to send a cable of news or greetings to the World Centre or to another Bahá'í body, but most are decisions on whether or not to make a specific recommendation to the National Spiritual Assembly."

(Ibid.) [pg 21]

1. Each Voter Must Vote for the Nine Best Suited for Election — Not Betray Sacred Trust⁵

“It is a basic principle of elections for Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies that each voter must vote for the nine people who, in his or her opinion, are best suited to serve. He may have a low opinion of all those who are eligible, but his duty is to vote for those nine from among them who, in his estimation, best meet the standards for service on a Spiritual Assembly. This is how it is possible to vote for exactly nine names. Since the membership of an Assembly is nine, it would give rise to a number of statistical anomalies if voters were permitted to record votes for fewer or more than nine names. In any one election there are not usually many cases where a voter accidentally makes a mistake and includes a name of an ineligible person, so the statistical effect is slight, and there is no need to invalidate his whole ballot. As you point out, a believer who does not wish to vote for nine, may achieve his end by purposely including the names of those who are ineligible, but this would be a betrayal of the trust placed in him as a Bahá’í voter. One cannot control such actions, but like any action contrary to the spirit of the Faith, they are detrimental and should be strongly discouraged.”

(Ibid.)

1. National Convention Must Be Convened During Ridván

“Concerning the dates of your National Convention, the Convention must begin, and the election of the National Assembly must take place, before sundown on 2nd May. It is permissible to extend the Convention beyond May 2nd, as long as it is convened during Ridván.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Paraguay, June 22, 1986)

1. Election of National Spiritual Assembly to be Held at Midpoint in the Convention

“It was noted that although you held a Convention of two days’ duration, the election of the new National Spiritual Assembly was scheduled to take place immediately after the election of Convention officers; that is very early in the program. You should know that Shoghi Effendi stated that the election of the National Spiritual Assembly should be held as nearly as possible at the midway point of Convention.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Chile, July 17, 1983)

1. National Teaching Conference and National Convention Should Not Be Held at the Same Time

“In response to your letter of 25th June 1982 asking whether or not it would be permissible to hold a national teaching conference either simultaneously with the National Convention or in the days immediately before or following the Convention, we have been asked by the Universal

⁵. (See also: No. 34)

House of Justice to inform you that the National Convention, for whatever number of days it is arranged, should be independent of a national teaching conference. They should not be [pg 22] held simultaneously, but whether the conference is held before or after the Convention is left to your discretion."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, July 22, 1982)

1. Attendance Record of National Spiritual Assembly Members May Be Provided to Convention Delegates

"In the matter of reporting to the delegates to the National Convention on the attendance record of the outgoing National Spiritual Assembly, the House of Justice confirms that this is entirely within the discretion of your National Assembly. You could, if you wish to do so, include this information in the National Assembly report to the Convention. The same guidance applies to providing information to the believers in a local community about the attendance record of the members of the outgoing Local Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, July 26, 1981)

1. Workshops During National Convention Not Suitable

"He does not feel that workshops are suitable at the National Convention, the time at the disposal of the delegates is short, and the whole purpose of delegates to a Convention is that as a body they should take up the affairs of the Cause presented for discussion and air ideas and make recommendations. No doubt the workshop itself is a good technique and should be used at summer schools and even if found desirable, at Conferences, but for the Convention it is out of place."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, August 25, 1949: Bahá'í News, No. 226, December 1949, p. 2)

1. Delegates Have Specific Administrative Duties

"The delegates have specific administrative duties to perform as a body and to divide them into smaller groups to consult upon matters which are the business of the Convention as a whole is not correct, particularly as the time of the delegates is limited."

(Ibid.)

1. Non-Delegate Can Be Permitted to Address Convention — Permissiveness Not to be Abused

“If a suggestion that a non-delegate be permitted to address the Convention is approved by the delegates, this is in order. The National Assembly, however, should be careful that such a permissiveness is not abused, as it will defeat the original purpose of stimulating the delegates and deprive them of the limited time at their disposal to engage in their vital deliberations. The delegates should bear in mind that they have business to attend to, and in all such cases the benefits of the Convention should be considered.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, September 18, 1968)

1. Auxiliary Board Members Present at National Convention

“Auxiliary Board members present at a National Convention do not have the [pg 23] privilege of the floor unless deputized by the Continental Board of Counsellors or given the privilege of the floor by the Convention.”

(To all Continental Boards of Counsellors from the Universal House of Justice, March 25, 1969)

1. Desirable Auxiliary Board Members Be Left Free from Administrative Duties

“National Assemblies in whose areas of jurisdiction Board Members reside, should point out to the delegates at Convention that whilst teaching and administrative duties are not mutually exclusive, it is desirable that Auxiliary Board Members, whether for teaching or protection, be left free to concentrate on the work allotted to them.... The following extract from the Guardian’s letter, written through his secretary, could be shared with the delegates for their guidance when casting their votes:

“‘Teachers of the Cause can surely become members of any Assembly or Committee. There should be no incapacity attached to them. But, Shoghi Effendi would just prefer to see them devote all their time to teaching and leave the administrative functions for those who cannot serve as teachers.’ (Bahá’í News, October 1932)”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, November 25, 1963)

1. Hands of the Cause and Counsellors' Participation in Conventions

“We ask you to extend a cordial invitation to the Continental Board of Counsellors of your area to attend each of your Annual Conventions. All Counsellors present at a Convention should be accorded the same freedom of the Convention as is given to the Hands of the Cause. If no Counsellors can attend a Convention, they may appoint for that Convention one or two Auxiliary Board Members to act as their special deputies, who should be warmly welcomed and given the courtesy of taking part in the Convention as representatives of the Board of Counsellors.”

(Ibid., March 25, 1969)

1. **Counsellors Ineligible for Membership on Administrative Bodies**

“The members of these Boards of Counsellors will serve for a term, or terms, the length of which will be determined and announced at a later date, and while serving in this capacity will not be eligible for membership on national or local administrative bodies....”

(The Universal House of Justice: Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 141-142)



F. Instruction of Tellers, Priority of Minorities, Approval of Outgoing Assembly⁶

1. **Tellers Should Be Given Guidelines — Recording of Identical Names**

“It is for your National Assembly to determine how to properly instruct the delegates beforehand in the recording of identical names on ballots and to give the tellers guidelines for handling these questions when they arise in the counting of the ballots. Thereafter, it is for the tellers to make the decision and give the results to the Convention or Assembly.... [pg 24]

Q. In the case of a tie between five persons for three vacancies should the names of the five be read for the delegates vote?

A. Yes.

Q. In voting for officers is it permissible to read the names of those persons who have tied?

A. When voting for officers of an Assembly a result is only reached when one member receives five or more votes. Until that result is reached all members are eligible for the office in question and the results of all inconclusive ballots should be made known to the meeting.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Jamaica, July 29, 1971)

1. **Convention Procedure in Connection with Tellers' Report**

“Normal Convention procedure would call for a tellers' report announcing the names of the nine believers elected to the National Spiritual Assembly plus statistical information as to the balance of the votes cast. However, if the Convention votes to have the complete report of the tellers, or any part of it, the Convention is entitled to have the information which will thereupon be presented by the tellers in accordance with the vote of the Convention.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, December 16, 1965)

6. (See also: Nos. 31-41)

1. Under Certain Conditions One or More Names May Be Invalidated⁷

"Under certain conditions an entire ballot may be declared invalid. These are: (1) More than nine names on ballot paper; (2) Less than nine names on ballot paper; (3) Duplication of names. Under other conditions, because of specified irregularities, one or more of the names may be invalidated but the rest of the ballot would be considered valid. These irregularities are: (1) A name not identifiable, or illegible; (2) The name of an ineligible person, such as a youth or person not resident in the jurisdiction of the voting area, provided of course that each ballot contains no more or less than nine names and no name has been duplicated."

(From a letter dated July 29, 1971 from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Jamaica)

1. Minority Accorded Priority Without Question

"Since the Guardian's instruction on this point is unequivocal where it is obvious that one of the persons involved represents a minority, that person should be accorded the priority without question. Where there is doubt further balloting will allow every voter present to participate."

"With reference to the provision in Article V of the National By-laws governing the situation where two or more members have received the same highest number of votes, if one of those members represents a minority that individual should be given priority as if selected by lot."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, January 25, 1967) [pg 25]

1. Definition of Minority and Majority at Discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly

"...the definition of a minority in any locality is in the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is clear that pioneers from other lands should not be regarded as belonging to a minority, neither do the categories quoted by the Guardian in 'The Advent of Divine Justice', namely, 'faith, race, class or nation', include sex. The overriding principle is always that if there is any doubt as to whether the minority principle should be invoked, then a further ballot should be taken."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom, March 5, 1986)

1. Results Reported to National Assembly for Acceptance and Instruction to Tellers About Re-Voting

"In answer to your question about who should decide this matter, the House of Justice states that it is the duty of the tellers to report the entire result of the voting to the National Spiritual Assembly which has a duty of accepting the tellers' report before it is presented to the Convention. If the National Assembly sees that the ninth place is tied and that one of the persons tied is a member of a minority, it would instruct the tellers to report the results on this basis without calling for a re-vote. If, however, there is any doubt at all as to whether a minority is

⁷. Ballot should not be invalidated because it contains name of Auxiliary Board Member (See Nos. 28-29)

involved, the Assembly should resolve the matter by instructing that a re-vote for the ninth place should be held."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Switzerland, April 13, 1975)

1. Only Names of Those Tied Appear on Subsequent Ballots

"Following the voting in an election of an Assembly, Local or National, results of the balloting should be announced, including the names of those tied for ninth place. A new ballot must then be cast to decide between those who have received the same number of votes for ninth place. Only those who are tied to be voted for on that ballot, and the tie may be broken by the delegates present at the Convention."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of The Bahamas, May 18, 1982)

1. How to Report a Tie

"It is not correct to show that Senorita ... received 13 votes. If she is to be listed among those receiving votes on the first ballot it should be shown that she was tied for ninth place with 6 votes and that on the second ballot she received 13 of the votes cast."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia, June 16, 1964)

1. First, New Assembly Must Consider Whether to Accept Resignation

"...your Assembly should first have considered whether to accept Miss ... resignation, and then, if the Assembly had accepted her resignation, the vacancy should have been filled by a by-election in which all ... delegates should have been given an opportunity to vote. It is only a tie vote that may be broken [pg 26] by a vote of those delegates present at Convention, not a by-election unless, of course, all delegates are present."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, July 6, 1981)

1. By-Election Can Be Held During Convention Only if All Delegates Are Present

"If a by-election is necessary, however, all delegates must be given an opportunity to vote. If all delegates are present at the Convention, the by-election can of course take place at one of the sessions. If there are absent delegates, the by-election can still be arranged so that the delegates present may cast their ballots before the Convention disbands, and ballots from absent delegates be received at a later date."

(Ibid., May 18, 1981)

1. Tie for Ninth Member of the National Spiritual Assembly

"In the case of a tie for the ninth member of a National Spiritual Assembly, a vote can be held immediately at the Convention among the delegates present, to break the tie. However, if a vacancy is declared at the Convention because a resignation of one of the members of the newly elected National Assembly is accepted, a by-election must be called, i.e., all delegates must be given an opportunity to vote for someone to fill the vacancy."

(Ibid., June 13, 1976)

1. Duty of Auxiliary Board Member to Advise Assembly, Not Delegates, that He Will Not Serve

"The Auxiliary Board member ... should have been listed as elected and given the opportunity to decide whether to continue to serve on the Board or to resign and accept the election to the administrative body. It is his duty to advise the National Assembly itself and not the delegates or the Convention. If he decides to remain on the Board, and the National Assembly declares a vacancy while Convention is still in session, a by-election could be arranged before the Convention disbands."

(Ibid., June 26, 1978)

1. Board Members Should Not Resign Before a Tie-Breaking Vote is Cast

"A Board Member should not be given the opportunity to resign before a tie-breaking vote is cast since there are other factors involved and it is possible that he may not be elected. However, if he is elected, he should advise the National Assembly of his decision to accept the elected post or continue his role as an Auxiliary Board member. If he resigns from the Assembly, then that body declares a vacancy and arranges for a by-election."

(Ibid.)

1. Preservation of Ballots

"In the minutes of your meetings of ..., the Universal House of Justice noted the items about 'Ballots of the Third National Assembly Election' and your instruction to the Secretary to destroy the ballots. We are directed to convey the following to you for your guidance."

"While it is within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly to determine what to do about preservation of the ballots following the annual election, the [pg 27] House of Justice points out that should any question concerning the balloting arise during the year following the election, it would be helpful if the ballots were available for National Spiritual Assembly scrutiny. Obviously,

after the next following election, such need to preserve the ballots cast in the previous year's election would no longer exist."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, July 22, 1980)

1. Assembly Has Right to Examine Ballots

"He considers that the National Spiritual Assembly has every right to examine the ballots if there is some doubt as to the election having been properly conducted. By 'preservation' of the ballots is meant that they are preserved in the National files."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, March 14, 1947)

1. Delegates Should Be Given Opportunity to Report to the Community

"A Convention delegate should certainly be given an opportunity to report to the Community his or her experiences at Convention and impressions!"

(Ibid.)



G. Officers of Local and National Assemblies

1. If All Members Present, Permanent Officers Should Be Elected Immediately

"While it is certainly true that the permanent officers of an Assembly should be elected immediately following the election of that Assembly, it is equally important, as stated in Article IV of the By-laws of the National Assembly, that 'The officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the entire membership of the Assembly taken by secret ballot.' That is all members of the Assembly must be properly notified and given an opportunity to vote, and in cases of unavoidable absence it does not contravene the spirit of the By-laws if the absent member should cast his ballot by mail or even by telephone."

"Temporary officers may be elected until all nine are properly notified of the election."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, July 27, 1981)

1. Assembly or Committee Members May Excuse Themselves from Being Elected as Officers

"We have also been asked to point out that although it is the obligation of a Bahá'í to serve on an Assembly, either Local or National, when elected, on several occasions the beloved Guardian pointed out that before the election of officers, if any member had a good reason in his own

opinion why he should not be elected to one of the offices of the Assembly, he was free to suggest that he should not be so elected. The House of Justice also feels that as the work of the Faith expands and the duties of officers, particularly on National Spiritual Assemblies, acquire more importance, it is permissible and at times advisable to discuss the duties incumbent upon and required of each officer before ballots are cast."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, February 9, 1987) [pg 28]

1. It is Preferable that a Person Hold No More Than One Office

"...we are asked to say it is preferable that a person hold no more than one office, but it is within the discretion of your Assembly to permit a member to hold two offices."

"Regarding the specific instance you have cited, you should consider carefully whether one person can effectively perform as both Chairman and Secretary, given the requirements of each office."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Togo, July 4, 1984)

1. Complete Results of Each Vote Must Be Known to All Members of the Assembly Present

"The complete results of each vote should be known to all members of the Assembly. Therefore, the names and tally should be given by the tellers, and if no member has received the required majority, the members should proceed to vote again. Voting should not be confined to those receiving the highest number of votes."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, August 4, 1981: cited in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, September 2, 1981)

1. The Integrity of the Elector Must Be Relied Upon

"You will note in the above extract that the tellers should report both names and tally. The House of Justice suggests that we must rely on the integrity of the elector to consider dispassionately those names he lists on his ballot, irrespective of the results of the previous balloting."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Mexico, September 2, 1981)

1. Any Officer Elected Must Have Received at Least Five Votes

"Any officer elected must have received at least five votes, even if only five members are present. The ballots of any absentee members cannot be counted if re-voting is necessary. If for any reason no member receives five votes, then the Assembly must in consultation appoint one or

more temporary officers to function until the next meeting, and must call another meeting as soon as possible to elect permanent officers."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, September 26, 1983)

1. The Chairman of the Assembly

"Concerning the duties of the Chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly: He is supposed to share, freely and fully, in the discussions of all subjects under the consideration of these bodies, and to register his vote regarding each one of them. The duty of a Bahá'í Chairman is not only to guide the course of the discussion, but also to express his own viewpoint without any reservation whatever. He is entitled to exercise both of these functions."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 10, 1936) [pg 29]

1. The Vice-Chairman

"The Universal House of Justice has asked us to advise you that the appropriate procedure would be for the Vice-Chairman of the Assembly to chair the meetings in the absence of the Chairman. If the Vice-Chairman happens to be also absent, then the Assembly should decide who among the members present should chair the meeting."

(From a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ciskei, February 10, 1987)

1. Duties of the National Secretary

"The proper growth of a community is possible only when the National Spiritual Assembly, through its office and secretary, is able to maintain a steady flow of communication to the believers in its jurisdiction, offering guidance and encouragement to them. Every effort should be made to enable the National Assembly secretary to discharge his or her duties without being hampered by too many administrative regulations. The manner in which this is done, of course, is left to the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly."

"A key factor in determining how much responsibility is to be placed on the secretary is trust. When there is trust and love among the members of the Assembly, many problems will be avoided. The National Assembly secretary should be empowered to take the initiative in matters of a routine nature. It is not normally necessary for the secretary's letters to be scrutinized by other members of the Assembly although they may always have access to such correspondence."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bangladesh, September 21, 1983)

1. The Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly is Its Chief Executive Officer

"Whatever the personal circumstances of the believer employed, the National Assembly should realize that its Secretary is its chief executive officer, and as such acts not only as liaison with the national committees, the Local Spiritual Assemblies and all the friends, but generally represents the National Spiritual Assembly and the Faith itself to the non-Bahá'í world, a duty becoming ever more important as the Cause becomes more widely known."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, January 23, 1981)

1. Full-Time Services of Secretary May Require Remuneration, about which the Agreement Should Be Duly Recorded

"A national Bahá'í community which reaches that stage of development where the work of its National Spiritual Assembly requires the full-time services of its Secretary, faces many difficult, and sometimes delicate, considerations. It is generally a thought-provoking occasion to the community itself, which has become used to the work of the Cause being discharged by voluntary, dedicated, part-time and often amateur service; and the realization that the Cause has reached the point where its work and public image — so important to future progress — can no [pg 30] longer be maintained in the old way, may be disturbing at first. The friends, however, quickly respond to the new capacity for leadership and guidance and the increased status which its National Assembly acquires by establishing a sounder foundation for its operations, and are encouraged by the advancement of the Cause."

"The specific remuneration and conditions of service of the national Secretary must obviously be the result of consultation, and when agreement has been reached the result should be recorded, not necessarily in a contract, but certainly in a Minute of the Assembly and/or an exchange of letters."

(Ibid.)

1. Secretary's Helper Can Be Non-Member of Assembly

"In reply to your letter of November 7th, 1973 there is no objection whatsoever to a non-member of the National Spiritual Assembly typing your Minutes or such other confidential reports. Many National Spiritual Assemblies employ typists in their national offices who are intimately connected with all the work of the National Spiritual Assembly. Of course, the person so employed should enjoy the confidence of the National Spiritual Assembly."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, November 20, 1973)

1. Secretariat Should Be Situated in the Capital City

"He was sorry that he felt it necessary to insist that the secretary of your Assembly must be located in Buenos Aires so that the Secretariat can be located in the Headquarters of this region; this is a general principle which he has insisted the friends adhere to everywhere...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, July 29, 1957: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 43)

1. National Secretary Should Keep in Close Touch with Local Assemblies

"Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that consultation must be maintained between the N.S.A. and the entire body of the believers and that such a consultation, when the Convention is not in session, can best be maintained through the agency of the local assemblies, one of whose essential functions is to act as intermediaries between the local communities and their national representatives."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, pp. 67-68)

1. Contents of Minutes

"The content of some of the minutes we receive could be improved, and we therefore offer the following suggestions: The purpose of the minutes is to record the action of the Assembly with sufficient background information so that one reading the minutes will understand the reason for the action. National Assemblies may find it helpful if the background and the action are separated and not typed together. On the other hand, minutes should not be a verbatim report of the National Assembly meeting, and it is not the purpose of the minutes to record the views of individual members. Names of individuals making motions need not be recorded. Names should be included, however, whenever required to [pg 31] make clear the assignments of persons responsible for actions. Each set of minutes should reflect the time and place of the next meeting."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, May 27, 1970)

1. Secretary Should Be Careful to Convey Majority Decision

"Generally speaking the Secretary of an Assembly must be careful to convey exactly what the majority decision or advice of the body was. There can surely be no objection to his putting it in proper terms and clarifying the matter according to the decisions or instruction of the Assembly. But he should of course not introduce his personal views unless endorsed by the Assembly."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 19, 1947)

1. Treasurer of the Spiritual Assembly Receives All Donations and Contributions

"And as the progress and execution of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as

well as National Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund...."

(From a letter of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated March 12, 1923: Bahá'í Administration, pp. 41-42)

1. **Handling of Funds**⁸

"As to your question: The friends can give their contributions to the treasurer, or, if they wish to remain anonymous and give small sums, a receptacle can be provided. The Local Assembly can decide this matter."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 29, 1951: Bahá'í Funds and Contributions, a compilation of extracts from the Guardian's letters on the subject dated January 1970, from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the World)

1. **Obligation of a Bahá'í Who is Elected to an Office which Requires Full-Time Service**

"The Universal House of Justice has received your letter mailed 23rd January, 1987 concerning the obligation of a Bahá'í who is elected to an office which requires full-time service. We are asked to share with you an excerpt of a letter dated 7th August 1980 written on behalf of the House of Justice addressed to an individual believer facing a problem similar to the one you pose."

"The delicate balance between the claims of the Cause of God and the claims of one's profession is an intensely personal matter which can only be resolved eventually in the heart and soul of each individual. Many Bahá'ís have become, and are, distinguished in their professions and at the same time have rendered and are rendering great services to the Cause and it is obviously possible to [pg 32] achieve distinction in one's profession and calling and to serve the Cause of God at the same time. The House of Justice realizes, however, that circumstances can conspire, at critical times in the fortunes of the Faith, to require individuals to make the heart-searching decision of sacrificing one's own prospects for the apparent good of the Cause. Here again, the history of the Cause provides many examples of believers who have willingly foregone promotion in, or even the continued practice of, their professions in order to meet the needs of the Faith. As in all difficult decisions facing individual believers, the God-given process of consultation is available to them, and every individual may consult either one of the institutions of the Faith or an individual officer, such as a Counsellor or Board member, or even one or two

8. (See also: XXI. C. 857-866)

friends of his own choosing. Even then, however, the eventual decisions rests with the individual himself."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, February 9, 1987)

1. Those Elected to an Assembly Should Consider It a Privilege and a Responsibility to Serve

"...those who have been elected to such membership should consider it a privilege and also a responsibility to serve in that body, and should therefore refrain from any resignation, even though they may disagree with the majority of the members. Obedience to the considered views and policies of the majority should be whole-hearted, for it implies obedience and loyalty to the Administrative Order itself."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 8, 1939)

1. Procedure for Assemblies When Dissatisfied with Officers

"As regards the question of what procedure the Bahá'í Assemblies should adopt when dissatisfied with the services of any of their officers. Should such dissatisfaction involve the loyalty of an Assembly officer to the Faith, he should, following a majority vote, be dismissed. But in case the dissatisfaction is due to the incompetence of a member, or simply to a neglect on his part to discharge his duties, this does not constitute sufficient justification to force his resignation or dismissal from the Assembly. He should be kept in office until new elections are held."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, November 22, 1940: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 42)



H. Local and National Administrators

1. Functions and Duties of Elected Representatives

"...Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, [pg 33] their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of

those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations."

(From a letter of the Guardian to the Bahá'ís of America, February 23, 1924: Bahá'í Administration, p. 64)

1. They Must Uphold the Standard of Justice

"In all cases submitted for its consideration the Assembly must uphold the standard of justice in delivering its verdict, and in all its dealings with the community and the outside world it must strive to evince the qualities of leadership. The following quotation from a letter of the Guardian summarizes in simple terms the immediate goal every Assembly should set for itself in its efforts to pursue the exalted standard of perfection inculcated in our writings:

'The first quality for leadership both among individuals and Assemblies is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers. Otherwise the more competent members of the group will go at a tangent and try to find elsewhere a field of work and where they could use their energy. 'Shoghi Effendi hopes that the Assemblies will do their utmost in planning such teaching activities that every single soul will be kept busy'. (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, dated August 30, 1930)"

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia, July 30, 1972)

1. Administrators of Faith Like Shepherds

"The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with firm determination to act with justice in all cases which are submitted to them for their consideration."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 9, 1934: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23)

1. The Ones in Real Authority Known by Humility and Self-Sacrifice

"The ones in real authority are known by their humility and self-sacrifice and show no attitude of superiority over the friends. Some time ago a tablet was written stating that none are appointed to any authority to do anything but to serve the Cause as true servants of the friends — and for this no tablet is necessary; such service when true and unselfish, requires no announcement, nor following, nor written document. Let the servant be known by his deeds, by his life! To be approved of God alone should be one's aim."

(Abdu'l-Bahá in the Holy Land answers questions of Dr. Edward C. Getsinger and recorded by Dr. Getsinger at the time (1905): Star of the West, Vol. VI, No. 6, p. 43) [pg 34]

1. Keynote of Cause of God Not Dictatorial Authority

"Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion, and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other."

(Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í Administration, pp. 63-64)

1. Assemblies Should Influence Believers to Confidently Present Their Problems

"...You are no doubt aware of the exhortations of the beloved Guardian concerning the attitude that National Assemblies must endeavour to maintain in their dealings with the friends under their jurisdiction. He indicated that a National Assembly should be like a loving parent, watching over and helping its children, and not like a stern judge, waiting for an opportunity to display his judicial powers.

"Shoghi Effendi has pointed out the National Assemblies must assume such a role as to influence the believers to confidently take their problems to the Assembly, and to respect and unhesitatingly obey its wishes and decrees. The Assemblies should evidence not even the least trace of dictatorial assertiveness, but should remember that most of the sins of the believers are the sins of immaturity. These friends should be nursed and assisted into a fuller understanding of their responsibilities as Bahá'ís and encouraged to conduct themselves in a Bahá'í manner."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Venezuela, June 3, 1979)

1. Breach of Trust by Assembly Members Will Destroy Confidence of Believers

"...regarding the extent to which confidential information about believers may be shared with other believers for their protection, and we offer in reply the following considerations:

1. Any information which comes to the notice of an Assembly member, solely by reason of his membership on that Assembly must not be divulged by that member, even though the Assembly itself may later decide to share it.
1. The Assembly must itself carefully consider which information should rightly fall in the category of confidential information and which should not be shared with others, and which information may be divulged under special circumstances, and how such information may be divulged. Should confidential matters regarding personal problems

be freely shared with others, upon application, the confidence of the believers in the Assembly and its members will obviously be destroyed.

1. It must be remembered that individuals can reform, and a reprehensible past does not necessarily disqualify a believer from building a better future.

"Within the general framework of these principles, we feel you should be able [pg 35] to handle each case as it may come to your attention. No hard and fast rule should be laid down in such cases, as each case requires careful handling, sound judgement and utmost discretion."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, September 18, 1968)

1. **Administrative Efficiency Should Be Accompanied by an Equal Amount of Love**

"Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life."

"But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form, are essential to the safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, December 10, 1933)

1. **Administrators Should Consider Themselves as Mere Channels Whereby God Protects and Guides His Faith**

"The Cause ... is a divine institution whose responsible administrators should consider themselves as mere channels whereby God protects and guides His Faith. The Administration should never be allowed to become a bone of contention between individuals and groups. It stands above human personalities and transcends the scope of their limited and inevitably selfish ideas. Its custodians should continually purge themselves of every trace of personal desire or interest and become wholly imbued with the spirit of love, of cooperation and of genuine self-sacrifice."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, August 8, 1933)

1. **National Spiritual Assembly is Supreme Authority, Mainspring of Activities, Sole Link to the Universal House of Justice**

"I wish to reaffirm, in clear and categorical language, the principle already enunciated upholding the supreme authority of the National Assembly in all matters that affect the interests of the Faith in that land. There can be no conflict of authority, no duality under any form or circumstances in any sphere of Bahá'í jurisdiction whether local, national or international. The National Assembly, however, although the sole interpreter of its Declaration of Trust and by-laws, is directly and morally responsible if it allows any body or institution within its jurisdiction to abuse its privileges or to decline in the exercise of its rights and prerogatives. It is the trusted guardian and the mainspring of the manifold activities and interests of every national community in the Bahá'í world. It [pg 36] constitutes the sole link that binds these communities to the International House of Justice — the supreme administrative body in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh."

(Postscript by Shoghi Effendi to a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, June 11, 1934)

1. Obedience to the National Spiritual Assembly is the Basis for Unity

"...the Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith ... and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Bahá'ís, delegates, groups, and assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be whole-hearted and unqualified. He is convinced that the unreserved acceptance and complete application of this vital provision of the Administration is essential to the maintenance of the highest degree of unity among the believers, and is indispensable to the effective working of the administrative machinery of the Faith in every country."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, June 11, 1934)

1. The National Spiritual Assembly is the Head and the Local Spiritual Assemblies Are the Various Organs

"...the best way to insure and consolidate the organic unity of the Faith is to strengthen the authority of the Local Assemblies and to bring them within the full orbit of the National Assembly's jurisdiction. The National Assembly is the head, and the Local Assemblies are the various organs of the body of the Cause. To insure full cooperation between these various parts is to safeguard the best interests of the Faith by enabling it to counteract those forces which threaten to create a breach within the ranks of the faithful. This is the delicate and highly significant mission with which the Guardian wishes to entrust you. Not only to teach the outsiders, through public lecturing, but in addition to that, and in view of making your efforts more varied and successful, to acquaint the friends with the essentials of the Administration, upon the full understanding of which the future progress of the Cause greatly depends."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, September 20, 1933)

1. Vital Function of National Spiritual Assembly

"...It is one of the vital functions of the National Spiritual Assembly to be always in touch with local conditions in every community and to endeavour through personal contacts and by means of regular correspondence, to guide the friends, individually and collectively, in all their activities."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, January 30, 1938: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 33)

1. Authority and Influence of Assemblies Must Be Strengthened

"...the steady progress and consolidation of the Cause of God on the one hand and progressive disintegration of a moribund world on the other — will undoubtedly impose upon us new tasks, the obligation of devising new approaches to teaching, of demonstrating more clearly to a disillusioned world the Bahá'í way of life and making more effective the administrative institutions of the Faith. The authority [pg 37] and influence of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be strengthened in order to deal with larger Bahá'í communities...."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridvan, 1971: Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 72)

1. A "Best" Assembly

"...The best Assembly is the one that capitalizes the talents of all the members of the group and keeps them busy in some form of active participation in serving the Cause and spreading the Message."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 1932: Bahá'í News, No. 68, November 1932, p. 3)

1. Centralization of Authority Made Manifest in Master's Will

"The need for the centralization of authority in the National Spiritual Assembly, and the concentration of power in the various local Assemblies, is made manifest when we reflect that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is still in its age of tender growth and in a stage of transition; when we remember that the full significance of the Master's world-wide instructions, as laid down in His Will, are as yet not fully grasped, and the whole Movement has not sufficiently crystallized in the eyes of the world."

(Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í Administration, p. 42)

1. Fundamentals of Bahá'í Administration Must Be Adhered to

"The fundamentals laid down in the Bahá'í Administration must, of course, be adhered to, but there is a tendency for Assemblies to constantly issue detailed procedures and rules to the friends, and he considers this hampers the work of the Cause, and is entirely premature. As far as

is possible cases which come up should be dealt with and settled as they arise, and not a blanket ruling be laid down to cover all possible similar cases. This preserves the elasticity of the Administrative Order and prevents red tape from developing and hampering the work of the Cause... Uniformity in fundamentals is essential but not in every detail. On the contrary, diversity, the solving of the local situation in the right way, is important."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, November 4, 1948: Messages to Canada, pp. 8-9)

1. Tendency of All National Assemblies to Over-Administer

"Your Assembly must be very careful not to over-load the Bahá'ís with rules and regulations, circulars and directions. The purpose of the Administration at this time is to blow on the fire newly kindled in the hearts of these people who have accepted the Faith, to create in them the desire and capacity to teach, to facilitate the pioneer and teaching work, and help deepen the knowledge and understanding of the friends. The beloved Guardian issues this word of warning, as long experience has shown that it is a tendency on the part of all N.S.A.'s to over-administer. In their enthusiasm they forget that they only have a handful of inexperienced souls to guide, and attempt to deal with their work as if they had a large population to regulate! This then stifles the spirit of the friends and the teaching work suffers."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia, July 15, 1957: Japan Will Turn Ablaze!, p. 67) [pg 38]

1. It is Not Necessary to Anticipate Situations

"...It is not necessary for your Assembly to anticipate situations which have not arisen, and to lay down general rules and regulations to meet them. It would be wiser to consider every case individually as it arises, and then to resolve the problem connected with it in the most suitable and practical manner...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, November 27, 1937: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 49)

1. Over-Administration Worse than Under-Administration

"...Over-administration can be even worse for the Faith at this time than under-administration. The believers are, for the most part, young in the Cause, and if they make mistakes it is not half as important as if their spirit is crushed by being told all the time — do this and don't do that! The new National Body should be like a loving parent, watching over and helping its children, and not like a stern judge, waiting for an opportunity to display his judicial powers. The reason he points this out to you is that constantly, for the past twenty years and more, he has been pointing this out to the old and tried National Assemblies, and he does not want the younger bodies to make the same mistakes. Individual cases should be dealt with as they arise, according to the Teachings, of which the believers have quite sufficient available to handle all of

their problems at this time, and no more additional rules and regulations need be introduced."

1. National Spiritual Assemblies Should Be Uncompromising in Principle But Flexible in Procedures

"In the Bahá'í Faith there are matters of principle affecting the operation of Bahá'í institutions, which are outlined in the writings of the Faith as well as in the Constitutions of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. Obviously, National Assemblies will face situations and problems which have to be resolved but are not fully covered by these texts. In such matters the National Assembly should adopt its own procedures suited to the conditions and requirements of its own national community. It may be found useful to adopt a procedure followed by another National Spiritual Assembly; certainly there is no objection to such a course of action, provided it is clear that in the final analysis such issues are left to the discretion of the National Assembly itself."

"In matters of principle, therefore, there should be uniformity, while in matters of detail and procedure not only is diversity permitted, it is also encouraged. As conditions vary from country to country and, indeed, can vary from community to community within the country, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly advised the friends that they should be uncompromising in principle but flexible in subsidiary details."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Burundi, October 22, 1986)

1. National Assembly is Guardian of the Welfare of the Faith

"The National Assembly is the guardian of the welfare of the Faith, a most sacred and heavy responsibility and one which is inescapable. They must be ever vigilant, ever on the lookout, ever ready to take action, and, on all matters [pg 39] of fundamental principle, refuse to compromise for an instant. Only in this way can the body of the Faith be free of disease."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, August 14, 1957: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 61)

1. Tendency of Late-Comers to Belittle Work Done

"...So often ... situations arise because there is a tendency, very human but not very kind, for late-comers to belittle the work done by the first believers and hurt their feelings. Those responsible therefore, for carrying on the work, must be extremely tactful and loving in their efforts to prevent a rift from occurring. It is very difficult for the administrators of the Cause to learn to be absolutely impartial, patient and wise, and very difficult for the believers to learn to give up personal will to the will of the majority! But this is Bahá'u'lláh's standard, and they must all constantly strive to attain it."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Inter-America Committee, March 28, 1950)

1. Each Believer Should Have Access to Communications from World Centre of His Faith

"The importance of communicating the progress of the Faith to every individual believer can hardly be over-emphasized. Learning of the victories achieved by the valiant souls who have arisen to serve Bahá'u'lláh can inspire others and can create a sense of world perspective which raises one's sights above his own petty pre-occupations and makes being a Bahá'í more meaningful and purposeful."

"Each believer should have access, for example, to the communications from the World Centre of his Faith — the Messages from the Universal House of Justice and the Hands of the Cause as well as news emanating from the World Centre."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assemblies in Latin America, Africa and the South Pacific, August 28, 1965)

1. Legal Standing for Spiritual Assemblies⁹

"It is surely very important to give to the Local Assemblies some legal standing for as the Cause progresses and its adherents increase, they will be confronted with duties they cannot even imagine at present. Not only will they have to make contracts for acquiring halls for their meeting place, but also they will be obliged to create new institutions to care for their sick, poor and aged people. We hope that before long the Bahá'ís will even afford to have schools that would provide the children the intellectual and spiritual education as prescribed in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, December 25, 1931: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 47)

1. Local Assemblies Should Give Teachers Every Encouragement

"Regarding the principle that the Cause must not be allowed to centre around any Bahá'í personality, the Guardian wishes to make it clear that it was never intended that well qualified individual teachers should not receive from Local Assemblies every encouragement and facilities to address the public. What the [pg 40] Guardian meant was that the personality and popularity of such a speaker should never be allowed to eclipse the authority, or detract from the influence of the body of the elected representatives in every local community. Such an individual should not only seek the approval, advice, and assistance of the body that represents the Cause in his locality, but should strive to attribute any credit he may obtain to the collective wisdom and capacity of the Assembly under whose jurisdiction he performs his services. Assemblies and not individuals constitute the bedrock on which the Administration is built. Everything else must be subordinated to, and be made to serve and advance the best interests of these elected custodians and promoters of the Laws of Bahá'u'lláh."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 12, 1933: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 19)

9. (See also: I. L. Nos. 224-231)

1. Class Consciousness Contrary to Actual Teachings of Faith

"...although it is essential for the believers to maintain always a clear distinction between teaching and administrative duties and functions, yet they should be careful not to be led to think that these two types of Bahá'í activity are mutually exclusive in their nature, and as such cannot be exercised by one and the same person. As a matter of fact, the friends should be encouraged to serve in both the teaching and administrative fields of Bahá'í service. But as there are always some who are more specially gifted along one of these two lines of activity it would seem more desirable that they should concentrate their efforts in acquiring the full training for that type of work for which they are best suited by nature. Such a specialization has the advantage of saving time, and of leading to greater efficiency, particularly at this early stage of our development."

"The great danger, however, lies in that by doing so the friends may tend to develop a sort of class consciousness which is fundamentally contrary to both the spirit and actual teachings of the Faith."

"It is precisely in order to overcome such a danger that the Guardian thinks it advisable that the friends should be encouraged to serve from time to time in both the teaching and the administrative spheres of Bahá'í work, but only whenever they feel fit to do so."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, July 29, 1935: Ibid., p. 3)

1. Extension Teaching Goals, Local Assemblies Should Assume Responsibility for

"The time has come, we believe, when increasing numbers of Local Spiritual Assemblies should assume responsibility for helping the teaching work of groups, isolated believers, and other Spiritual Assemblies in their neighbourhood. Such extension teaching goals should be assigned by the National Spiritual Assembly or one of its teaching committees, or can be spontaneously adopted by Local Spiritual Assemblies, and should be carried out within the framework of the overall teaching plans of the country. It should also be made clear that by being given such goals a Spiritual Assembly is not being given any jurisdiction over believers outside its area, still less over other Local Spiritual Assemblies, but is being called upon to collaborate with them in their work."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, Naw-Ruz 1974) [pg 41]

1. Plans of the Assemblies Should Be Known to Counsellors and Auxiliary Board Members

"It is the Spiritual Assemblies who plan and direct the work, but these plans should be well known to the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, because one of the ways in which they can assist the Assemblies is by urging the believers continually to support the plans of the Assemblies. If a National Spiritual Assembly has adopted one goal as preeminent in a year, the Auxiliary Board members should bear this in mind in all their contacts with the believers and

should direct their attention to the plans of the National Assembly, and stimulate them to enthusiastically support them."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, October 1, 1969: Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, pp. 32-33)

1. Local Spiritual Assemblies' Relations with Auxiliary Board

"It is at this local level of Bahá'í community life, the very foundation of the administrative structure of the Faith, that we so often find lack of adequate strength and efficiency. It is at this same level that our beloved Guardian urged Auxiliary Board members to establish contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups, isolated centres and the individual believers, and through periodic and systematic visits to localities as well as by correspondence help in promoting the interests of the Plan, assist in the efficient and prompt execution of the goals, watch over the security of the Faith, stimulate and strengthen the teaching and pioneer work, impress upon the friends the importance of individual effort, initiative and sacrifice, and encourage them to participate in Bahá'í activities and be unified under all circumstances."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all Continental Boards of Counsellors, November 17, 1971)

1. All Local Spiritual Assemblies Should Collaborate with Auxiliary Board Members and Their Assistants

"When a Local Spiritual Assembly begins to function properly, it does not mean it can dispense with the service and work of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, who can and should continue to provide stimulation and inspiration not only generally to the Assembly and local Bahá'í activities, but to individual believers as well."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 9, 1980)

1. When Local Spiritual Assemblies Are Truly Effective

"Such a firmly-founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will provide a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine Message to their fellowmen and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule."

(From the Naw-Ruz Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1974)

1. A Functioning Local Spiritual Assembly — Salient Objectives to be Attained

"In reply to your letter of July 14th asking guidance as to what is a functioning Local Spiritual Assembly, we offer you the following comments:" [pg 42]

"Local Spiritual Assemblies are at the present newly-born institutions, struggling for the most part to establish themselves both in the Bahá'í community and in the world. They are as yet only embryos of the majestic institutions ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His Writings. This is also true of National Spiritual Assemblies. In the following passage written by the Secretary of the Guardian on his behalf this point is elucidated:

"The Bahá'í administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only first beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful — how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings." (From a letter dated October 14, 1941 to an individual believer)

"What we find expounded in the writings of our Faith is the lofty station Local Spiritual Assemblies must attain in their gradual and at times painful development. In encouraging these assemblies to attain this aim, there is no harm in the National Spiritual Assembly mentioning certain minimum requirements from time to time, provided it is clear that non-attainment of such standards, which by their very nature must be continuously revised with changing conditions, do not justify the withdrawal of recognition from any weak Assemblies. It would not be profitable therefore for the Universal House of Justice to lay down universal minimum standards for properly-functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies, as these must necessarily differ from country to country, and even from district to district within the same country in the process of the evolution of these Assemblies into Houses of Justice, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh."

"Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia, July 30, 1972)

1. Prominent People, Foster Cordial Relations with

"A very important activity which has been pursued effectively in all too few countries, is the undertaking by the National Spiritual Assembly of a sustained, planned effort to foster cordial relations with prominent people and responsible government officials and to familiarize them personally with the basic tenets and the teachings of the Faith. Such an activity must be carried

out with wisdom and discretion, and requires the constant attention of a responsible committee as well as periodic review by the National Spiritual Assembly itself. Where successful it can effectively forestall opposition [pg 43] to the Faith and smooth the way for many essential aspects of the development of the Bahá'í community."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, Naw-Ruz, 1974)

1. Public Figures

"To approach such well-known and important persons is always an extremely delicate matter, since it requires a good deal of wisdom, courage and ability. But those friends who really feel the urge to do so, and possess the necessary qualifications, should cultivate such friendships which, if properly done, can be of an immense benefit to the Cause. In any case, however, the assistance and help of either the local or the National Assembly is not only useful but necessary if important contacts of this sort are to be fruitful and promising. The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá'í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through cooperation and continued exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 30, 1933: Bahá'í News, No. 79, pp. 3-4, November 1933)

1. Individual Members of the Local Spiritual Assembly Should Deepen

"Only as individual members of Local Spiritual Assemblies deepen themselves in the fundamental verities of the Faith and in the proper application of the principles governing the operation of the Assembly will this Institution grow and develop toward its full potential."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, August 11, 1970)

1. Members of Spiritual Assembly Must Face Responsibilities

"All over the world the Guardian is constantly encouraging and enjoining the believers to learn to function according to Bahá'í laws and principles; members of Spiritual Assemblies must learn to face their responsibilities; individuals must learn to turn to them and abide by their decisions. When we realize that all marriages, divorces, disposal of inheritance, etc., are now handled in Egypt and Persia solely through the Assemblies and that the believers abide by their decisions, we see that in Western countries the friends still have a long way to go — the sooner they start the better for themselves and for the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 17, 1944)



I. Meetings of Bahá'í Assemblies, Attendance, Resignations

1. Obligation of Assembly Members to Meet and Discharge Sacred Responsibilities

"After the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly, laxity and negligence in the holding of its meetings, in the coming together of its nine members, and in the [pg 44] discharge of its sacred responsibilities, will have undesirable repercussions in the community, will weaken and disgrace the Cause, will create chaos and confusion, and will cause the Faith to decline and retrogress."

(From a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to the Central Spiritual Assembly of Persia, April 22, 1930: Meetings of the National Spiritual Assembly, A Compilation, p. 1, October 1980)

1. Membership in Bahá'í Assembly or Committee is a Sacred Obligation — Should Endeavor to Attend All Meetings

"...The Guardian wishes you to make clear to all the believers that membership in a Bahá'í Assembly or Committee is a sacred obligation which should be gladly and confidently accepted by every loyal and conscientious member of the Community, no matter how humble and inexperienced. Once elected to serve in a given Assembly a believer's duty is to do his utmost to attend all assembly meetings, and cooperate with his fellow-members, unless, however, he is prevented from doing so by some major reason such as illness, and even then he should notify the Assembly to this effect. The N.S.A.'s duty is to urge, and also facilitate attendance at assembly meetings. If a member has no valid reason to justify his repeated absence from assembly meetings, he should be advised, and even warned, and if such warning is deliberately ignored by him, the Assembly will then have the right to suspend his rights as a voting member of the Community. Such administrative sanction would seem to be absolutely imperative and necessary, and while not tantamount to a complete expulsion of such member from the Cause, deprives him of any real participation in its administrative functions and affairs, and is thus a most effective corrective measure which the Assembly can use against all such half-hearted and irresponsible individuals in the Community."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, July 2, 1939: Ibid., p. 2)

1. Teaching Must Be Accorded Precedence When in Session

"When in session it behooveth them to converse, on behalf of the servants of God, on matters dealing with the affairs and interests of the public. For instance, teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of paramount importance, so that thereby all men may enter the pavilion of unity and all the peoples of the earth be regarded even as a

"Should these souls comply with the prescribed conditions, they shall, indeed, be aided through His invisible bestowals. This is truly a matter whose benefits will be conferred on all men...."

(Bahá'u'lláh: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 11)

1. All Meetings Must Revolve Around One Focal Center — Teach

"If the meetings or Spiritual Assembly has any other occupation, the time is spent in futility. All the deliberations, all consultation, all the talks and addresses must revolve around one focal center and that is: Teach the Cause! Teach! Teach! Convey the Message! Awaken the souls!"

"Nothing else will be useful, today... The interests of such a Glorious Cause will not advance without undivided attention. While we are carrying this load we cannot carry any other load!"

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Meetings and the Nineteen Day Feast, p. 9) [pg 45]

1. Principle on which to Conduct the Work of an Assembly

"There is only one principle on which to conduct the work of an Assembly, and that is the supremacy of the will of the majority. The majority decisions must be courageously adopted and carried out by the Assembly, quite regardless of the opinionated adherence to their own views which any minority may cling to."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 20, 1941: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 19)

1. Why Some Local Assemblies Do Not Meet

"Many Local Spiritual Assemblies do not meet, because they do not know or see what they should meet about. A compilation on the functions of a Local Spiritual Assembly, or the By-Laws of a Local Assembly will not usually provide the impetus to the members to meet. One of the stipulations of the Five Year Plan is the desirability for each Local Assembly to have local goals. Just as there are international and national goals, there should be local goals for each Local Assembly and throughout the Bahá'í world. These goals, as indicated in our Naw-Ruz 1974 Message, can either be adopted spontaneously by the Local Assemblies, or assigned to them by the National Spiritual Assembly. The adoption of a local plan by the Local Assembly can exert a far-reaching influence on its work and on the life of the community."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly of Africa, December 24, 1975)

1. How Often to Meet — The Spiritual Assembly Must Decide

"The Spiritual Assembly must decide how often it should meet in order to properly handle the affairs of the Cause under its jurisdiction. Twice a week or twice a month is not the point, the point is that it should be alert and carry on the work adequately."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 23, 1949: Bahá'í News, August 1951, p. 2)

1. **Bahá'u'lláh's Promise**

"Bahá'u'lláh has given the promise that in every Assembly where unity and harmony prevail, there His glorious spirit will not only be present, but will animate, sustain and guide all the friends in all their deliberations."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the Evanston and Wilmette Spiritual Assemblies, November 17, 1933: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 16)

1. **Not Possible to Have Non-Assembly Member in National Spiritual Assembly Meeting**

"...in the light of the Master's statement that the deliberations of Assemblies must be secret and confidential, it is not possible to have a non-Assembly member in the National Spiritual Assembly meeting. You must always remember that, in matters of principle, there can be no deviation;... Highly personal subjects, damaging to the honor and happiness of others, are often taken up by National Assemblies, and the danger that confidence will be betrayed is already great enough with the 9 chosen representatives of the whole community, let alone introducing non-Assembly members. You will just have to make your minutes a little more compact and [pg 46] sacrifice, if necessary, a certain amount of efficiency in order to follow this very important principle."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, July 5, 1950: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 19)

1. **Distribution of Minutes of Meetings**

"We have your letter ..., regarding distribution of the minutes of your National Assembly meetings to members of the National Assembly."

"Two principles apply, namely:

1. Every member of the National Spiritual Assembly is entitled to have access to the minutes of the National Assembly meetings.
1. The National Assembly must take measures to safeguard the confidential nature of many matters referred to in the minutes."

"It is within the discretion of your National Spiritual Assembly to decide what should be done to give effect to these two principles."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Asia, March 25, 1971)

1. Access to Records of the Spiritual Assembly

"In reply to your letter of May 13th, 1976, the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that all members of the Spiritual Assembly are equal and should have access to the files and minutes of the Assembly of which they are members. It is, however, within the discretion of any Spiritual Assembly to so organize its files and records that certain items could be listed as 'confidential' and access to those so classified could only be had by a specific decision of the Assembly itself."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ireland, June 8, 1976)

1. Business Can Be Conducted with a Quorum

"...It is, as you say, highly desirable for all nine members of a Spiritual Assembly to be present but business can be conducted with a quorum of five, provided that all have been properly notified of _____ the _____ meeting."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, June 14, 1972)

1. Assembly Quorum

"We have your letter of July 20, 1967 asking for clarification of Article VIII, Section 1 of the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly which appears on Page 19 of the Declaration of Trust."

"A majority of the members present and constituting a quorum is sufficient to carry a motion. Thus, if only five members of the Assembly are present at a meeting, a majority vote of three is sufficient."

"However, Assemblies should take into account the last clause of the first sentence of Section 1 of Article VIII reading as follows:

'...and with due regard to the principle of unity and cordial fellowship involved in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly.'"

"In other words, members of a Spiritual Assembly should not take advantage of a quorum as an expedient to pass a motion which would violate the spirit of the above quoted passage." [pg 47]

"As your National Assembly has stated, it is desirable that all nine members of a Local Spiritual Assembly be present at every meeting, and we hope that you will be able to educate members of Assemblies to assume their responsibilities in this regard."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, August 6, 1967)

1. Duties of Assembly Members

"In its own meetings it must endeavour to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá'í consultation, a process which will require great self-discipline on the part of all members and complete reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh. It should hold regular meetings and ensure that all its members are currently informed of the activities of the Assembly, that its Secretary carries out his duties, and its Treasurer holds and disburses the funds of the Faith to its satisfaction, keeping proper accounts and issuing receipts for all contributions. Many Assemblies find that some of their activities such as teaching, observance of Feasts and Anniversaries, solution of personal problems, and other duties are best dealt with by committees appointed by the Assembly and responsible to it..."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Bolivia, July 30, 1972)

1. Abstaining Does Not Arise in Bahá'í Voting

"It is important to realize that the spirit of Bahá'í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá'í bodies."

"The ideal of Bahá'í consultation is to arrive at a unanimous decision. When this is not possible a vote must be taken. In the words of the beloved Guardian: '...when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by the Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced.'"

"As soon as a decision is reached it becomes the decision of the whole Assembly, not merely of those members who happened to be among the majority."

"When it is proposed to put a matter to the vote, a member of the Assembly may feel that there are additional facts or views which must be sought before he can make up his mind and intelligently vote on the proposition. He should express this feeling to the Assembly, and it is for the Assembly to decide whether or not further consultation is needed before voting."

"Whenever it is decided to vote on a proposition all that is required is to ascertain how many of the members are in favour of it; if this is a majority of those present, the motion is carried; if it is a minority, the motion is defeated. Thus the whole question of 'abstaining' does not arise in Bahá'í voting. A member who does not vote in favour of a proposition is, in effect, voting against it, even if at that moment he himself feels that he has been unable to make up his mind on the matter."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, March 6, 1970: Consultation: A Compilation, p. 12, February 1978)

1. Bahá'ís Not Required to Vote Against Consciences

"Bahá'ís are not required to vote on an assembly against their consciences. It is [pg 48] better if they submit to the majority view and make it unanimous. But they are not forced to. What they must do, however, is to abide by the majority decision, as this is what becomes effective. They must not go around undermining the assembly by saying they disagreed with the majority. In other words, they must put the Cause first and not their own opinions. He (a Spiritual Assembly member) can ask the assembly to reconsider a matter, but he has no right to force them or create inharmony because they won't change. Unanimous votes are preferable, but certainly cannot be forced upon assembly members by artificial methods such as are used by other societies."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 19, 1947)

1. Only Under Special Circumstances is It Permissible to Resign from the Spiritual Assembly

"With reference to your question whether it would be permissible for a believer to resign from the Local Assembly; under special circumstances, such as illness, one may do so, but only after, and never before one has been elected to the membership of the Assembly. Personal differences and disagreements among Assembly members surely afford no sufficient ground for such resignation, and certainly can not justify absence from Assembly meetings. Through the clash of personal opinions, as Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and Divine guidance revealed. The friends should therefore not feel discouraged at the differences of opinion that may prevail among the members of an Assembly, for these, as experience has shown, and as the Master's words attest, fulfil a valuable function in all Assembly deliberations. But once the opinion of the majority has been ascertained, all the members should automatically and unreservedly obey it, and faithfully carry it out. Patience and restraint, however, should at all times characterize the discussions and deliberations of the elected representatives of the local community, and no fruitless and hair-splitting discussions indulged in, under any circumstances."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 18, 1939)

1. Differences of Opinion Should Not Deter One from Performing His Bahá'í Activities

"Needless to say how much he was afflicted to learn that you both had offered your resignation from the ... Spiritual Assembly. For he is convinced that your action in this matter will have a bad effect on the rest of the believers, and in this way cause great injury to the Cause. Differences of opinion, specially when they arise in connection with personalities, should under no circumstances lead any believer to turn his attention from his major Bahá'í activities. And what activity can be said to be more vital, and hence of a more weighty responsibility than to serve in an Assembly, and specially in the capacity of a Vice-Chairman. Your responsibilities, in this

connection, are indeed manifold, and it would be a pity, therefore, if you fail in the least to carry them out to the fullest possible extent."

"Besides, you can easily realize that by resigning from the Assembly you would be encouraging, quite unintentionally but through the mere effect of example, your fellow-members to take a similar action in the future if necessary. This, of course, cannot but lead eventually to the disruption of your Assembly, and would in the meantime greatly detract from the authority and prestige of that body in the eyes of the public." [pg 49]

"In view of all these, the Guardian would specially appeal to you, to exert your utmost in order to retain your membership in the ... Assembly, and thus put a good example before the friends. Should you act in this way, Bahá'u'lláh would undoubtedly assist and strengthen you in overcoming the obstacles which, at present, so sadly retard the effective working and progress of your Assembly."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 28, 1935)

1. There Should Be a Valid Reason for Resignation

"Although it is highly desirable that all members of the National Assembly attend every meeting of the Assembly, the fact that a member is prevented by business or other circumstances from having a good attendance record is not a ground upon which a resignation can be accepted. It is not justified to accept a resignation or otherwise declare a vacancy on the National Assembly without a valid reason such as in the case of prolonged absence or serious illness which prevents one from discharging his duties as a member of the National Assembly."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, November 27, 1968)

1. Should National Assembly Members be Relieved of Local Assembly Service?

"We have your letter of April 28, 1970 raising the question as to whether believers elected to both a Local Spiritual Assembly and the National Spiritual Assembly may resign their membership in the Local Assembly and dedicate their full efforts to the work of the National Assembly."

"Normally those elected to a Local Assembly and the National Assembly should make every effort to serve on both bodies, whatever the personal sacrifices may be. If it is too much of a burden and impractical for an individual member to assume the responsibilities of serving on both the National and Local Assembly, he should present his case to both bodies, and seek consultation. Each case should be considered separately, depending on the circumstances of each member. It may be found that if a National Assembly member is an officer of the Local Spiritual Assembly, his resignation as officer of the Assembly, instead of the membership of that Assembly, may solve the problem for that individual."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of North East Africa, May 7, 1970: Malaysian Bahá'í News, Vol. 8, No. 4, December 1972 to February 1973, p. 28)

1. Not Appropriate to Elect a Temporary Assembly Member

“As regards electing a temporary member to replace one who is absent, the present practice of Bahá’í Administration is not in favor of this but prefers to ascertain the duration of the absence of any member who has to be away. Should this period of time be excessive it is within the discretion of the Assembly to recognize a vacancy and call for a by-election. However this should not be lightly decided and the members declared elected at the Convention should remain in office unless there are insuperable difficulties which prevent it.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia, December 10, 1970: Meetings of the National Spiritual Assembly, p. 3, October 1980)

1. Non-Attendance of Assembly Members — No Time Limit Fixed

“...it is establishing a dangerous precedent to allow Assemblies to put a time limit [pg 50] on non-attendance of their members at meetings of the Spiritual Assembly beyond which that person is automatically dropped from the Assembly and a vacancy declared... There should be no time limit fixed by Assemblies beyond which a person is dropped. Every case of prolonged absence from the sessions of the Assembly should be considered separately by that Assembly, and if the person is seen to not want to attend meetings, or to be held away from them indefinitely because of illness or travel, then a vacancy could legitimately be declared and a new member be elected.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer: Bahá’í News, No. 208, June 1948)

1. Repeated, Unjustified Absence Cause for Suspension of Voting Rights

“...The National Spiritual Assembly’s duty is to urge, and also facilitate attendance at assembly meetings. If a member has no valid reason to justify his repeated absence from assembly meetings, he should be advised, and even warned, and if such warning is deliberately ignored by him the Assembly will then have the right to suspend his rights as a voting member of the Community. Such administrative sanction would seem to be absolutely imperative and necessary, and while not tantamount to a complete expulsion of such a member from the Cause, deprives him of any real participation in its administrative functions and affairs, and is thus a most effective corrective measure which the Assembly can use against all such half-hearted and irresponsible individuals in the Community.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, July 2, 1939: Dawn of a New Day, p. 79)

1. Criticism, Opposition, Confusion Do not Provide Grounds for Resignation — Sanction May Be Necessary

“Concerning the question of refusal by certain believers to accept election to an administrative post: The Guardian strongly feels that criticism, opposition, or confusion, do not provide sufficient grounds for either refusal or resignation. Only cases of physical or mental incapacity,

which, by their very nature, are extremely rare, constitute valid reasons for such an act. The difficulties and tests involved in the acceptance of administrative posts, far from inducing the believers to disassociate themselves from the work of the Cause, should spur them on to greater exertions and to a more active participation in the privileged task of resolving the problems that confront the Bahá'í community. Only in cases where individual believers, without any valid reason, deliberately refuse the repeated exhortations, pleas, and warnings addressed to them by their Assemblies, should action be taken in removing them from the voting list. This is a measure designed to sustain the institutions of the Faith at the present time, and to insure that the abilities and talents of its, as yet, limited number of supporters are properly consecrated to its service...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, January 15, 1942: Bahá'í News, No. 152, p. 2, April 1942)



J. Administrative Rights, Sanctions, Dissimulation

1. Basis for Deprivation of Voting Rights

"The general basis for the deprivation of voting rights is of course gross [pg 51] immorality and open opposition to the administrative functions of the Faith, and disregard for the laws of personal status; and even then it is the duty of the National Assembly, before exercising this sanction, to confer with the individuals involved in a loving manner to help them overcome the problem; second, to warn them that they must desist; third, to issue further warnings if the original warnings are not followed; and finally, if there seems no other way to handle the matter, then a person may be deprived of voting rights."

"The Guardian however, wishes the National Assemblies to be very cautious in using this sanction, because it might be abused, and then lose its efficacy. It should be used only when there seems no other way to solve the problem."

"Answering specifically the questions you raise, if a person is deprived of his voting rights, he may not contribute to the Local or National Funds; he may not attend Nineteen Day Feasts. Of course, not attending the Nineteen Day Feasts, he can take no part in consultation. While it is not forbidden for the friends to associate with the individual, yet their association should be on a formal basis."

"So far as the individual who has been deprived of his voting rights, teaching the Cause, he is of course free to do this, as every individual has been encouraged by Bahá'u'lláh to teach the Cause."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of South America, March 7, 1955)

1. Assembly Should not Deprive Believer of Rights Unless the Matter Is Very Grave

“As he already told you in a previous communication he feels that your Assembly should not deprive people of their voting rights unless the matter is really very grave; this is a very heavy sanction, and can embitter the heart if lightly imposed, and also make people think we unduly resort to pressure of a strong nature. The friends must be nursed and assisted, for they are still mostly immature spiritually, and their ‘sins’ are those of immaturity! Their hearts are loyal to the Cause, and this is the most important thing.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, August 2, 1946)

1. No Bahá'í Can Swear to Bring up His Children in Another Religion nor Be Married in Church as a Christian

“...As the Guardian pointed out..., no Bahá'í can conscientiously swear to bring up his children in another religion; and of course he has no right to lie; therefore it becomes impossible for him to make such a promise on his marriage to a non-Bahá'í. Any Bahá'í doing this should be deprived of his voting rights; and, as he has already made plain before, Bahá'ís who go to the church and are married as Christians must also of necessity be deprived of their voting rights.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the European Teaching Committee, May 13, 1936)

1. Alcoholic Beverages — Those Who Continue to Drink

“In the case of a believer who continues to take alcoholic drinks, the Assembly should decide whether the offence is flagrant, and, if it is, should try to help him to understand the importance of obeying the Bahá'í law. If he does not respond he must be repeatedly warned and, if this is unsuccessful, he is subject to loss of his voting rights. In the [pg 52] case of an alcoholic who is trying to overcome his weakness the Assembly must show especial patience, and may have to suggest professional counselling and assistance. If the offence is not flagrant, the Assembly need take no action at all.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, September 26, 1978)

1. Divorce

“...no sanctions should be imposed merely because the believer has commenced a civil action for divorce before the expiration of the year of patience. However, the believer will be subject to sanctions if he should marry a third party within the year of patience, not only because it is a violation of the year of patience itself, but also because even though a civil divorce has been granted, the Bahá'í divorce cannot be granted until the end of the year of patience. For this reason no marriage is possible during the running of the year of patience unless the parties to the divorce re-marry each other again in a civil ceremony.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska, March 29, 1966)

1. Ecclesiastical and Political Associations

“...The same sanction (deprivation of voting right) should apply to those who persistently refuse to dissociate themselves from political and ecclesiastical activities. This is a general principle which is being maintained throughout the Bahá’í world, and the believers throughout the East are already aware of the absolute necessity of refusing any political or Moslem ecclesiastical office.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, January 15, 1942)

1. Politics, Participation in

“Your understanding and attitude regarding participation in politics is correct, namely, you immediately warn and quickly remove the voting rights, as such prompt action is necessary to protect the interests of the Faith.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, November 12, 1965)

1. Homosexual Acts Condemned by Bahá’u’lláh¹⁰

“Regarding the question you asked him about one of the believers who seems to be flagrantly a homosexual — although to a certain extent we must be forbearing in the matter of people’s moral conduct because of the terrible deterioration in society in general, this does not mean that we can put up indefinitely with conduct which is disgracing the Cause. This person should have it brought to his attention that such acts are condemned by Bahá’u’lláh, and that he must mend his ways, if necessary consult doctors, and make efforts to overcome this affliction, which is corruptive for him and bad for the Cause. If after a period of probation you do not see an improvement, he should have his voting rights taken away. The Guardian does not think, however, that a Bahá’í body should take it upon itself to denounce him to the Authorities unless his conduct borders on insanity.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada: Messages to Canada, p. 39) [pg 53]

1. Immorality, Blatant Acts of

“Any blatant acts of immorality on the part of the Bahá’ís should be strongly censured; the friends should be urged to abandon such relationships immediately, straighten out their affairs, and conduct themselves as Bahá’ís; if they refuse to do this, in spite of the warnings of the Assembly, they should be punished through being deprived of their voting rights. The N.S.A. is empowered to settle such cases of flagrant immorality without referring them to the Guardian.”

¹⁰. (See also: Nos. 1221-1230)

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, July 20, 1946: Principles of Bahá'í Administration, p. 85)

1. Criminal Offences, Believers Charged with

"We have carefully reviewed your letter of April 18, 1967 inquiring about the attitude to be adopted by your National Assembly regarding believers who have been charged with criminal offences, suspected to have committed such offences, or convicted by the court. The principle to bear in mind is that each case falling in any of the aforementioned categories should be considered separately and on its own merits. No hard and fast rule should be applied."

"If the believer's actions conspicuously disgrace the Faith and such actions seriously injure its reputation, the National Assembly may in its discretion apply the sanction of deprivation of voting rights."

"We feel that the Assembly should exercise its utmost wisdom when depriving believers of their administrative privileges, each case should be considered on its individual merits, and it should be realized that the application of Bahá'í sanctions is not an automatic action in response to a verdict of the court."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, May 3, 1967: Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies, p. 81)

1. Should Be Given Chance to Improve — A Lesser Sanction May Be Applied

"Regarding those whose conduct is immoral, the matter should first be referred to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Whether the believer is a member of the Local Assembly or not, he should be first lovingly exhorted, then warned and required to rectify his conduct. If the conduct of the believer does not improve and continues to be a disgrace to the Faith, the National Spiritual Assembly may decide merely to remove him from the membership of the Local Assembly, if he is a member of it, or to apply the full sanction of depriving him of his voting rights, depending upon the circumstances in each case. It is impossible and unwise to lay down a general ruling to cover all circumstances."

(From a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, January 14, 1966)

1. One Offence of Immorality Not Enough to Incur Heavy Penalty

"In case of immoral conduct one offence is generally not enough to incur this heavy penalty, but only after patient counselling and in the face of flagrantly immoral conduct or blatant misbehaviour should it be invoked."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Vietnam, January 11, 1967)

1. Civil Marriage Ceremony Only

“... if a Bahá'í has a civil marriage ceremony only, he is subject to loss of his [pg 54] voting rights. If the Assembly is satisfied that such a couple is repentant, their voting rights may be restored on condition that they have the Bahá'í ceremony.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Perú, June 23, 1969)

1. **Parents' Voting Rights Can Be Suspended if Consent is Given Contrary to Bahá'í Law**

“In connection with your question regarding the case of Mr. Mrs. ... and their daughter, the Guardian considers that your Assembly did quite right to deprive all three of their voting rights. Their conduct in carrying out a Moslem marriage in the circumstances set forth by you in your letter, and contrary to Bahá'í law, are most reprehensible, to say the least, and if such actions, are not strongly censured by the Bahá'ís, other friends may be encouraged in moments of weakness, to err.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan and Burma, March 10, 1951)

1. **Bahá'í Membership in Masonic, Theosophical, Rosicrucian, and Similar Societies¹¹**

“The following two principles should help to guide your Assembly in dealing with the problems of Bahá'í membership in Masonic, Theosophical, Rosicrucian, and similar societies:

(1) Formal affiliation with and acceptance of membership in organizations whose programs or policies are not wholly reconcilable with the Teachings is not permissible to the friends.

(2) The friends should not become members of secret societies.”

“Your Assembly is advised to carefully inform the friends of these principles and to deepen them in their understanding and appreciation of them. Having made certain that all friends, especially those directly concerned, have been so deepened, your Assembly should then set a time limit by which the friends must obey your directive to withdraw their membership in the organizations. Each case will have to be considered on its own merits. Some of the friends may have to fulfill certain commitments as officers before they can withdraw with honor. The time limit should make allowance in such cases.”

“Whereas persistence in membership in these and in similar organizations is ample ground for deprivation of voting rights, your Assembly is advised to give sufficient time for each of the friends to be thoroughly deepened, and to comply with the principles before any disciplinary action is taken.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia, December 26, 1963)

1. **Mental Illness**

¹¹. (See also: XXXV, 1384-1400)

"Regarding persons whose condition (i.e., mental condition) has not been defined by the civil authorities after medical diagnosis, the Assembly on the spot must investigate every case that arises and, after consultation with experts, deliver its verdict. Such a verdict however, should, in important cases, be preceded by consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly. No doubt, the power of prayer is very great, yet consultation with experts is enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh. [pg 55] Should these experts believe that an abnormal case exists, the with-holding of voting rights is justified."

(From a letter of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 30, 1936: Bahá'í News, No. 153, June 1942, p. 12)

1. Mental Unfitness

"Regarding the interpretation of mental unfitness, this is not the same as being physically incapacitated. By the latter is meant a condition much more serious than any temperamental deficiency or disinclination to conform to the principle of majority rule. Only in rare cases when a person is actually unbalanced, and is admittedly proved to be so, should the right of membership be denied him. The greatest care and restraint should be exercised in this matter."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 15, 1940: Bahá'í Procedure, p. 20)

1. Withdrawal of Administrative Rights from One Mentally Ill is Not a Sanction

"The withdrawal of administrative rights from a person who is suffering from a mental illness is not a sanction, but merely a recognition of the fact that the believer's condition renders him incapable of exercising those rights. From this you will see that the mental incapacity must be very serious for this step to be taken, and would normally be dependent upon a certification of insanity by medical authorities or confinement in a mental hospital. Again, depending upon the kind of mental illness, such suspension of voting rights may or may not involve non-receipt of Bahá'í newsletters, inability to attend Nineteen Day Feasts, etc."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Austria, May 12, 1982)

1. National Assembly Can Debar an Individual from Serving on a Local Assembly Without Removing Voting Rights

"It is also quite permissible for a National Spiritual Assembly to debar an individual believer from serving on a Local Spiritual Assembly without removing his or her voting rights and they may also debar a believer from attending the consultative part of a Nineteen Day Feast. You may also debar a believer from voting in elections without imposing all the other administrative sanctions involved in administrative expulsion."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Panama, January 31, 1972)

1. Voting Rights, Only National Assembly Can Deprive Believers of

"In the Minutes of your meeting of March 13, 1971 we have noted an item on which we wish to comment."

"It concerns your decision to inform the Spiritual Assembly of ... that they can deprive a believer of his administrative rights if they feel that the believer's actions merit this. For the present only the National Assembly may deprive a believer of his administrative rights and this authority should not be given to Local Spiritual Assemblies."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Honduras, April 18, 1971) [pg 56]

1. Status of Those Who Lose Voting Rights

"Concerning your question as to the status of those individuals whom the Local Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly have considered it necessary to deprive of the voting right and to suspend from local meetings and gatherings: Such action which Local and National Assemblies have been empowered to take against such recalcitrant members, however justified and no matter how severe, should under no circumstances be considered as implying the complete expulsion of the individuals affected from the Cause. The suspension of voting and other administrative rights of an individual believer, always conditional and therefore temporary, can never have such far-reaching implications, since it constitutes merely an administrative sanction; whereas his expulsion or ex-communication from the Faith, which can be effected by the Guardian¹² alone in his capacity as the supreme spiritual head of the Community, has far-reaching spiritual implications affecting the very soul of that believer."

"The former as already stated, is an administrative sanction, whereas the latter is essentially spiritual, involving not only the particular administrative relationship of a believer to his Local or National Assembly, but his very spiritual existence in the Cause. It follows, therefore, that a believer can continue calling himself a Bahá'í even though he may cease to be a voting member of the community. But in case he is excluded from the body of the Cause by an act of the Guardian he ceases to become a believer and cannot possibly identify himself even nominally with the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 8, 1939)

1. No Bahá'í Marriage if One is Deprived of Voting Rights — A Bahá'í in Good Standing Cannot Marry One So Deprived

"A Bahá'í deprived of his voting rights cannot be married in a Bahá'í marriage ceremony; a Bahá'í in good standing cannot marry a Bahá'í who has lost his voting rights; the marriage of a Bahá'í who has lost his voting rights does not fall within the jurisdiction of a Bahá'í administrative institution."

"In other words, Bahá'ís who have lost their voting rights cannot be constrained to Bahá'í administrative requirements although their consciences should lead them to act as closely to the standards and ordinances of Bahá'í life as possible."

¹² The function of expulsion or ex-communication from the Faith is now effected by the Universal House of Justice "as supreme spiritual head of the Community."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, February 25, 1976, cited by the International Teaching Center)

1. Heaviest Sanction We Possess — Deprivation of Voting Rights

"...he feels that all National Spiritual Assemblies should bear in mind that this is the heaviest sanction we possess at present in the Faith, short of ex-communication, which lies within the powers of the Guardian alone, and is consequently a very weighty weapon to wield. "

"He considers that under no circumstances should any Bahá'í ever be suspended from the voting list and deprived of his administrative privileges for a matter which is not of the utmost gravity. By that he means breaking of laws, [pg 57] such as the consent of parents to marriage, etc., or acts of such an immoral character as to damage the good name of the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, March 3, 1955: Messages to Canada, p. 51)

1. Before Anyone Deprived of Voting Rights Must Be Given Repeated Warnings

"He has informed, some years ago, the American National Spiritual Assembly that, before anyone is deprived of their voting rights, they should be consulted with and lovingly admonished at first, given repeated warnings if they do not mend their immoral ways, or whatever other extremely serious misdemeanor they are committing, and finally, after these repeated warnings, be deprived of their voting rights."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, March 3, 1955: Messages to Canada, pp. 51-52)

1. No Justification Suspension of Voting Rights Pending Investigation

"There is no justification for the suspension of a believer's administrative rights pending investigation and review of the facts of the matter in which he is involved. As we have repeatedly stated, the application of sanctions is a very serious action and should be imposed only in extreme cases. Furthermore, any decision involving a believer's administrative rights is to be made by action of the Assembly itself."

"While the Assembly should always be concerned about matters which might affect the good name of the Faith, it should be remembered that a believer involved in such matters is entitled to the understanding of the Assembly and may need its guidance and assistance both before and after any decision regarding sanctions is made."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, July 16, 1969)

1. Believer Cannot Escape Expulsion by Resignation in Order to Break Law with Impunity

“As you know, a believer cannot escape administrative expulsion by the ruse of resigning from the Faith in order to break its law with impunity. However, the Assembly should be satisfied that there was indeed such an ulterior motive behind the withdrawal. A believer’s record of inactivity and his general attitude to the Faith may well lead the Assembly to conclude that his withdrawal was bona fide, even though immediately succeeded by marriage, and in such a case the withdrawal may be accepted.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, May 20, 1971)

1. **Dissimulation is Not Withdrawal**

“To deny that one is a Bahá’í while one still believes in Bahá’u’lláh is not withdrawal, it is dissimulation of one’s faith, and Bahá’í law does not countenance the dissimulation of a believer’s faith for the purpose of breaking the law.”

“If a believer who did not like a particular law were to be permitted to leave the community to break the law, and then rejoin with impunity, this would make a mockery of the Law of God... It is abundantly clear from his letters that he has [pg 58] continually believed in Bahá’u’lláh, that he knew the law that marriage is conditioned on the consent of parents, that he dissimulated his faith in order to be able to break this law with impunity. He must, therefore, be regarded as a Bahá’í without administrative rights....”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, May 15, 1967)

1. **Ignorance of the Law**

“In all matters concerning the deprivation of voting rights your Assembly should bear in mind that at the present time, when Bahá’í laws are being progressively applied and when a large proportion of the community consists of newly declared believers, you may accept ignorance of the Bahá’í law as a valid excuse if your Assembly is fully convinced that such ignorance existed.”

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, October 11, 1965)

1. **Child Out of Wedlock**

“Generally, administrative rights should not be suspended because of the birth of a child out of wedlock. The questions to be considered are whether the party is guilty of blatant and flagrant immorality, whether such conduct is harming the Faith, and whether the believer has refused or neglected to improve her conduct despite repeated warnings.”

“As you no doubt know, deprivation of administrative rights is a very serious sanction, and the beloved Guardian repeatedly cautioned that it should be exercised only in extreme situations. In a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to another National Spiritual Assembly which asked similar questions, it was pointed out that it was the task of the

institutions to provide both counsel and education for the believers, and thereafter it is for the individual Bahá'í to determine his course of conduct in relation to the situations of his daily life."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, March 23, 1983)

1. Loss of Voting Rights — Is to be Administratively Expelled

"A Bahá'í who has lost his administrative rights is administratively expelled from the community and therefore is not subject to the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Assembly in the matter of laws of personal status, such as divorce, unless, of course, he is involved in such a matter through having a Bahá'í spouse in good standing from whom the divorce is taking place. His observance of such laws is a matter of conscience and he would not be subject to further sanctions for non-observance of Bahá'í laws during the period he is without voting rights."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, April 6, 1982)

1. Cases Involving Only Civil Ceremony

"We have your letter of October 9, 1971 informing us of your action to deprive ... of his voting rights for violation of Bahá'í marriage law in that he married without having consent of all living parents. It is noted that he had a civil ceremony and a Catholic ceremony. The question you have asked deals with possible restoration of his voting rights."

"In cases involving only the civil ceremony, voting rights may be restored if [pg 59] the Assembly feels that the believer is truly repentant and wishes to comply with the Bahá'í law previously broken. The civil marriage ceremony itself is not contrary to Bahá'í law, and therefore the dissolution of the civil marriage is not a prerequisite to restoration of voting rights. In such cases the Bahá'í marriage ceremony may take place if the parents now give their consent to the marriage and the Assembly is satisfied that the consent has been genuinely and freely given and is not conditioned by the fact that the parties have already had a civil ceremony. In such cases the Assembly would restore voting rights immediately before the Bahá'í ceremony on the condition that it be performed."

"Should ... apply for restoration of his voting rights, and should your Assembly feel that he is truly repentant, you should offer assistance in arranging the other details including helping him to obtain the consents of parents."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, November 18, 1971)

1. Voting Rights Removed Mistakenly or Justifiably

"When believers who have been deprived of their voting rights have moved into the area of jurisdiction of another National Spiritual Assembly they are under the jurisdiction of that Assembly. When they apply for the restoration of their voting rights that Assembly should correspond with the National Assembly which applied the sanction in order to obtain the full particulars of the case and also any views the Assembly may have on the matter of restoration. It is then for the National Assembly in whose jurisdiction the believers are living to decide the

"In answer to the second question in your letter of 17th May 1976, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. It can happen, for example, that voting rights are removed mistakenly and the incorrect action of the Assembly is the basis for the believer's application for their restoration. If the voting rights have been removed justifiably it is generally sufficient for the believer to take the necessary actions to have them restored; his application for restoration and compliance with the requirements of Bahá'í law are sufficient evidence of repentance. However, if the Assembly sees that the believer does not understand the reason for the deprivation and has a rebellious attitude it should endeavour to make the matter clear to him. If his attitude is one of contempt for the Bahá'í law and his actions have been in serious violation of its requirements, the Assembly may even be justified in extending the period of deprivation beyond the time of the rectification of the situation — but such cases, by their nature, are very rare."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Peru, September 21, 1976)

1. Youth, Disciplinary Action Against

"With reference to the question in your second letter as to what disciplinary action can be taken against youth who are not of voting age, it must be remembered that the removal of his voting rights is administrative expulsion. In addition to being deprived of his right to vote, the believer cannot attend Feasts or other meetings for Bahá'ís only; cannot contribute to the Fund; or, cannot have a Bahá'í marriage ceremony. The restrictions against voting would become operative when the young offender reaches voting age."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, April 14, 1965) [pg 60]

1. If Acts of Immorality Are Not Generally Known — Gossip

"We feel that each and every case should be reviewed on its own merits. In some cases it is clear that there is no alternative to the removal of voting rights as in the case of marriage without the consent of parents. In other cases, such as those involving flagrant immorality, the removal of voting rights should be resorted to only in rare cases. If the acts of immorality are not generally known and are discoverable only on investigation, a serious question is raised as to whether this immorality is 'flagrant'."

"We realize that a great problem is presented by gossip when it occurs in Bahá'í communities, and the poison it can instill into the relationship between the friends. However, deprivation of voting rights is usually of little help in such circumstances and should be resorted to only after other remedies have been tried and failed."

"We think it would be much better for the National Assembly to provide for the proper deepening of the friends and in a loving and patient manner attempt to instill in them a respect for Bahá'í laws. Rash action can dampen the zeal of the community, and this must be avoided at all costs."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice written to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, August 20, 1969)

1. Community Attitude Toward Those Who Are Deprived of Voting Rights

"The degree to which a community should be active or passive towards a believer who is deprived of his voting rights depends upon the circumstances in each individual case. Obviously, it is desirable that such a person should come to see the error of his ways and rectify his condition. In some cases friendly approaches by the Bahá'ís may help to attain this; in other cases the individual may react more favourably if left to his own devices for a time."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, November 1, 1973)

1. The Assemblies Should Be Like the Master and the "Good Shepherd"

"As regards the admittance of new members into the different groups as declared Bahá'ís, and the expulsion of any from the Community: Shoghi Effendi believes that the Assemblies should not act hurriedly. They should be wise and most considerate, otherwise they can do much harm to the body of the Cause. They should see to it that the new-comer is truly conversant with the teachings, and when he expresses his beliefs in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, knows what he is saying and what are the duties he undertakes."

"On the other hand when any person is expelled, the Assembly should not act hurriedly. There is a great spiritual responsibility attached to the act. The Assemblies do not have only rights against the individuals, they have great duties also. They should act like the good Shepherd whom Christ mentions in His well-known parable. We also have the example of the Master before us. The individual Bahá'ís were organic parts of His spiritual being. What befell the least one of the friends brought deep affliction and sorrow to Him also. If by chance one of them erred He counselled him and increased His love and affection for him. Only after months of constant attention, if the Master saw that that friend was still stubbornly refusing to reform his ways, and that his being among the other Bahá'ís endangered the spiritual life of the rest, then He would expel him from the group. This should [pg 61] be the attitude of the Assemblies towards the individuals. The best criterion whereby you can measure the spiritual attainment of an Assembly is the extent its members feel themselves responsible for the welfare of the group. And perchance they feel forced to deprive a person from his vote it should be only to safeguard the rest and not merely to inflict punishment."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, April 11, 1933)

1. The Believer So Deprived Who Makes an Effort to Mend His Ways Should Be Helped

"The deprivation of a person's voting rights should only be resorted to when absolutely necessary, and a National Spiritual Assembly should always feel reluctant to impose this very heavy sanction which is a severe punishment. Of course sometimes, to protect the Cause, it must be done, but he feels that if the believer so deprived makes an effort to mend his ways,

rectifies his mistakes, or sincerely seeks forgiveness, every effort should be made to help him and enable him to reestablish himself in the Community as a member in good standing.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 18, 1948)

1. Bahá'ís Must Not Dissimulate Their Faith Under Any Circumstances

“The Beloved Guardian has directed me to write you concerning information which he has just received of your having indicated in your application for permanent residence in ..., that you were Protestants — and you did not indicate in any way that you were Bahá'ís.”

“The Guardian has instructed me to inform you that he is shocked and surprised to receive this news, and this action meets with his disapproval. He said that if advance information had been given that such action must not be taken under any circumstances; then there would be only one thing he could do and that would be removal of voting rights.”

“Certainly such action in the future would result in immediate removal of voting rights.”

“In Persia, even during the period of persecution, when life was in danger, and complete freedom offered to those who indicated they were Muslims and not Bahá'ís, the Guardian not only deprived anyone who did not openly declare his Faith of his voting rights, but even indicated they were Covenant breakers.”

“Thus you will see that it is completely inconsistent for a Bahá'í under any circumstances whatsoever, to indicate they are anything but a Bahá'í, regardless of what the result may be.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers, April 30, 1957)

1. Summary of the Extent of Deprivation of Voting Rights

“...One who has lost his voting rights is considered to be a Bahá'í but not one in good standing. The following restrictions and limitations apply to such a believer:

He cannot attend Nineteen Day Feasts or other meetings for Bahá'ís only, including International Conferences, and therefore cannot take part in consultation on the affairs of the community.

He cannot contribute to the Bahá'í Fund. [pg 62]

He cannot receive newsletters and other bulletins whose circulation is restricted to Bahá'ís.

He cannot have a Bahá'í marriage ceremony and therefore is not able to marry a Bahá'í.

He may not have a Bahá'í pilgrimage.

Although he is free to teach the Faith on his own behalf, he should not be used as a teacher or speaker in programs sponsored by Bahá'ís.

He is debarred from participating in administrative matters, including the right to vote in Bahá'í elections.

He cannot hold office or be appointed to a committee.

He should not be given credentials (which imply that he is a Bahá'í in good standing)."

(From an attachment to a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Netherlands, December 9, 1985)

1. Summary of the Rights and Privileges Not Deprived

"...Although generally speaking a believer deprived of his voting rights is not restricted except as stated above, the following privileges have been expressly stipulated as not denied:

He may attend the observances of the nine Holy Days.

He may attend any Bahá'í function open to non-Bahá'ís.

He may receive any publication available to non-Bahá'ís.

He is free to teach the Faith as every individual believer has been enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh to teach.

Association with other believers is not forbidden.

He may have the Bahá'í burial service if he or his family requests it, and he may be buried in a Bahá'í cemetery.

Bahá'í charity should not be denied him on the ground that he has lost his voting rights.

Bahá'í institutions may employ him, but should use discretion as to the type of work he is to perform.

He should have access to the Spiritual Assembly."

(Ibid.)



K. Appeals

1. Right to and Procedure for Appeal

"When the Local Assembly has given its decision in the matter, you then have the right to appeal, if you wish, to the National Spiritual Assembly for further consideration of your case. But before taking such an action it is your duty as a loyal and steadfast believer to whole-heartedly and unreservedly accept the National Spiritual Assembly's request to enter into joint conference with your Local Assembly. You should have confidence that in obeying the orders of your

National Assembly you will not only succeed in solving your own personal problems with the friends, but will in addition set a noble example before them.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 2, 1935: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 55)

1. Appeal from Local Assembly's Decision to the National Assembly

“Appeal can be made from the Local Assembly’s decision to the National Assembly, [pg 63] and from the National Assembly’s decision to the Guardian.¹³ But the principle of authority invested in our elected bodies must be upheld. This is not something which can be learned without trial and test.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, June 30, 1949)

1. Infringement of Bahá’í Rights

“...whenever there is any infringement of Bahá’í rights, or lapse in the proper procedure, the friends should take the matter up with the Assembly concerned, and if not satisfied, then with the National Spiritual Assembly. This is both their privilege and their duty.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, July 10, 1942: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 55)

1. Every Bahá’í May Write Directly to the Universal House of Justice, But Appeals Should Be Submitted Through the National Spiritual Assembly

“It would seem that your National Assembly has misunderstood the procedure for submitting appeals. Mr. and Mrs. ... were quite correct in sending the appeal to your Assembly and you should have then forwarded it to the Universal House of Justice together with your comments on the case.”

“It is true, as you state in your letter of 26th May 1975, that every Bahá’í may write direct to the Universal House of Justice but this does not apply in the case of appeals which should be submitted through the National Spiritual Assembly. Only if the Assembly fails to forward the appeal within a reasonable time should the appellant take the case directly to the Universal House of Justice. This process is explained in Article XVIII of the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, June 17, 1975)

1. The Appellant's Request for Referral of Appeal to the Universal House of Justice Cannot Be Refused

¹³. (Now to the Universal House of Justice)

"The House of Justice understands and appreciates your motive in striving to contain matters at the national level, and agrees that every effort should be made to resolve them without recourse to the World Centre. At the same time, if an appeal is turned down by the National Spiritual Assembly, the appellant's request for referral to the Universal House of Justice cannot be refused, nor should the referral be unduly delayed."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, July 17, 1979)

1. **Committees Should Take Up Their Problems with the National Spiritual Assembly**

"Committees should first take up their problems with the National Spiritual Assembly and seek to them satisfactorily; if they are dissatisfied they have the right to appeal to the Guardian¹⁴ himself. The Guardian will then decide whether it is a [pg 64] matter for him to pronounce upon, or if he will refer it back to the National body."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 28, 1943)

"In the event of a committee member disagreeing with the rest of his fellow-members on a particular issue, he has no right to appeal to the Assembly, but must follow the majority."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 26, 1938)



L. By-Laws

1. **Purpose of By-Laws**

"The purpose of the By-Laws is to clarify and strengthen the administrative legal functions of a Bahá'í community."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, July 5, 1950: Bahá'í News, No. 236, October 1950, pp. 2-3)

1. **A Baby Can Be Considered a Bahá'í — Declaration Age 15 for Protection**

"...As a believer of 15 cannot vote he (Shoghi Effendi) sees no reason for including a statement regarding the age of 15 in the By-Laws. A baby can be considered a Bahá'í; 15 is merely the age of maturity for fasting, marriage, etc., and in the case of America, a declaration at that age is invited from the youth in order to protect them, at a future date, from being forced to do active military service."

(Ibid.)

¹⁴. (Now the Universal House of Justice)

1. New York Version of By-Laws More Correct

“... The original New York By-Laws are more correct, because they differentiate clearly between all members of the Community and voting members who are 21 years of age or more. In other words children under 15 are Bahá'ís according to the New York version, which is correct, but according to your version only people over 15 years are Bahá'ís which is not correct.... The declaration of faith by children when they reach the age of 15 in the United States is in order to enable the American Youth to apply for exemption, under the American laws, from active military service. It has no other purpose, but in that country is expedient. It is not necessary to add such a clause to your By-Laws.”

“He wishes the essentials to be maintained as per the New York By-Laws, but not amplified and added to, as this will gradually lead, all over the Bahá'í world, to a steady addition of unessential rules and restrict the freedom and plasticity of the Cause. As he has repeatedly told the American and other National Assemblies, it is much better to deal with situations and new requirements as they arise, and not to have it all down in black and white and rigid before hand.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, August 22, 1949: Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 77)

1. Matter of Belief in Bahá'u'lláh Not of Availability for Participation

"...all declarants of the age of 15 years or older who qualify are accepted by your [pg 65] Assembly under the provision of your By-Laws are Bahá'ís and should be so registered in local communities or in your National office. It is a matter of declaration of belief in Bahá'u'lláh and not necessarily of availability for participation with fellow believers in their community activities."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, May 18, 1967: National Bahá'í Review, February 1968, No. 2, p. 3)

1. The National Spiritual Assembly Must Defend and Uphold Provisions of By-Laws and Declaration of Trust

“...The National Assembly... must at all times vigilantly uphold, defend, justify and enforce the provisions of the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws which are binding on the Convention no less than on themselves. The National Spiritual Assembly has the right to lay down, enforce and interpret the National Constitution of the Bahá'ís in that land. It cannot, if it wishes to remain faithful to that Constitution, lay down any regulations, however secondary in character, that would in the least hamper the unrestricted liberty of the delegates to advise and elect those whom they feel best combine the necessary qualifications for membership of so exalted a body.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, August 18, 1933)

1. International Uniformity in the Essentials is to be Maintained — The Local By-Laws

“The Guardian is striving to build up uniformity in essentials all over the Bahá’í World, and this frequently involves a small measure of delay in achieving our various goals set locally. But he considers it sufficiently important to warrant the sacrifices it sometimes involves.”

“In this connection he would like to mention your Local By-Laws: He feels that they should conform much more closely to the original one of the New York Assembly. What is absolutely essential was incorporated in those, and all other Local Assemblies being incorporated should follow this pattern as closely as local legal technicalities permit. This again is in order to maintain international uniformity in essentials. It is not a question here of whether the By-Laws drawn up by your Legal Committee are not more up-to-date and do not represent the last word, undoubtedly they are and do, but if every country, when drawing up its local By-Laws, continues this process of elaboration, in the end uniformity will be lost. The Eastern Assemblies have adhered to the original By-Laws so carefully that they have practically translated them word for word and adopted them.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, December 30, 1948)

1. Decisions of Local and National Assemblies Subject to Review by Higher Body — No Contradiction in By-Laws

“...Mr. ... explained that it was felt that there is a seeming contradiction between the right of appeal to the Universal House of Justice and the right of a National Spiritual Assembly to make ‘final’ decisions on certain matters as stated in the National Bahá’í Constitution.”

“The House of Justice instructs us to explain that wherever ‘final’ jurisdiction is given to the Local or National Spiritual Assembly in its constitution there is a balancing provision. For example: [pg 66] “Article IV of the Local Assembly By-Laws states: ‘while retaining the sacred right of final decision in all matters pertaining to the Bahá’í community, the Spiritual Assembly shall ever seek the advice and consultation of all members of the community, keep the community informed of all its affairs, and invite full and free discussion on the part of the community in all matters affecting the Faith.’ Yet, Article III of those same Local By-Laws states: ‘The Spiritual Assembly, however, shall recognize the authority and right of the National Spiritual Assembly to declare at any time what activities and affairs of the Bahá’í community of ... are national in scope and hence subject to the jurisdiction of the National Assembly.’ And in Article II is stated: ‘... the Spiritual Assembly shall act in conformity with the functions of a Local Spiritual Assembly as defined in the By-Laws adopted by the National Spiritual Assembly...’”

“With respect to those articles that accord final jurisdiction to the National Spiritual Assembly, there is the overriding provision of Article IX of the National By-Laws: ‘Where the National Spiritual Assembly has been given in these By-Laws exclusive and final jurisdiction, and paramount executive authority, in all matters pertaining to the activities and affairs of the Bahá’í Cause in ..., it is understood that any decision made or action taken upon such matters shall be subject in every instance to ultimate review and approval by the Universal House of Justice.’”

"It is clear, therefore, that the word 'final' is not used in an absolute sense. It is, rather, an indication of the principle enunciated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the believers should whole-heartedly and loyally support their Assemblies and abide by their decisions, even if they see them to be in error. At the same time, the Assemblies have the duty to lovingly and frankly consult with those who are under their jurisdiction and, if a believer (or Local Assembly) feels that a serious injustice is being committed or the interests of the Faith are being adversely affected, he has the right of appeal. When an appeal is made, the Assembly whose decision is being questioned should lovingly collaborate in the process and join with the appellant in submitting all relevant information to the higher body for decision."

"The whole matter of appeals is clearly summarized in Articles VII and VIII of the By-Laws of the Universal House of Justice."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain, March 24, 1982)

1. Incorporation is Not Necessarily Lost by the Temporary Dissolution of the Local Spiritual Assembly

"The problem posed by an Assembly's being incorporated varies from country to country with differences in the civil law. However, the House of Justice asks us to draw to your attention that in many countries it is only changes in the membership or officers of an incorporated body that have to be reported to the authorities, and therefore it is not always necessary to report the full membership each year. There have even been instances where an Assembly has had to be dissolved for a period but the corporation continued to exist as far as the civil law was concerned."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, July 22, 1981) [pg 67]



M. New Believers

1. The Cause of God Has Room for All

"The Cause of God has room for all. It would, indeed, not be the Cause of God if it did not take in and welcome everyone — poor and rich, educated and ignorant, the unknown and the prominent — God surely wants them all, as He created them all."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two individual believers, December 10, 1942: The Individual and Teaching, p. 25)

1. Abdu'l-Bahá's Example — Nurse New Believer Patiently

“... Let him remember the example set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker’s newly-awakened faith, and endeavour to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá’u’lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community... Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly-adopted Faith.”

(Shoghi Effendi: The Advent of Divine Justice, p. 52)

1. The Two Extremes in Bringing in New Bahá’ís

“The believers must discriminate between the two extremes of bringing people into the Cause before they have fully grasped its fundamentals and making it too hard for them, expecting too much of them, before they accept them. This requires truly keen judgment, as it is unfair to people to allow them to embrace a movement the true meaning of which they have not fully grasped. It is equally unfair to expect them to be perfect Bahá’ís before they can enter the Faith. Many teaching problems arise out of these two extremes.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 22, 1941: Bahá’í News, No. 241, p. 2, March 1951)

1. No Obstacles Should Be Placed Before Any Soul

“No obstacle should be placed before any soul which might prevent it from finding the truth. Bahá’u’lláh revealed His directions, teachings and laws, so that souls might know God, and not that any utterance might become an obstacle in their way.”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Holy Land answers questions of Dr. Edward C. Getsinger in 1915: Star of the West, Vol. 6, No. 6, p. 43)

1. Enrollments, New — Those Responsible for

“...Therefore, those responsible for accepting new enrollments must just be sure [pg 68] of one thing — that the heart of the applicant has been touched with the spirit of the Faith. Everything else can be built on this foundation gradually.”

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa, August 8, 1957: A Special Measure of Love, p. 21)

1. The Process of Becoming a Bahá'í is an Evolutionary One

"The Guardian fully shares your view that it would be most unwise, and unfair to those who apply for membership in the Community to require that they should at first accept all the laws of the Faith. Such a requirement would be impossible to carry out as there are many laws in the 'Aqdas' with which even the well-confirmed and long-standing believers are not yet familiar. As you rightly point out the process of becoming a Bahá'í is an evolutionary one, and requires considerable time, and sustained effort on the part of the new believer. Such questions as the withdrawal from Church membership and that of abstention from alcoholic liquors should not be thrust upon the newcomer, but explained to him gradually, so that he himself may be convinced of the truth underlying these ordinances of the Cause."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 17, 1938)

1. Admittance Into the Faith — Essential Prerequisites

"Indeed, the essential prerequisites of admittance into the Bahá'í fold of Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and the followers of other ancient Faiths, as well as of agnostics and even atheists, is the whole-hearted and unqualified acceptance by them all of the Divine origin of both Islám and Christianity, of the Prophetic functions of both Muḥammad and Jesus Christ, of the legitimacy of the institution of the Imamate, and of the primacy of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. Such are the central, the solid, the incontrovertible principles that constitute the bedrock of Bahá'í belief which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is proud to acknowledge, which its teachers proclaim, which its apologists defend, which its literature disseminates, which its summer schools expound, and which the rank and file of its followers attest by both word and deed."

(Shoghi Effendi: *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 114)

1. On Becoming a Bahá'í

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

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, March 12, 1949: *Bahá'í News*, No. 251, p. 2, January 1952)

1. Warning to Every Beginner in the Faith

"I consider it my duty to warn every beginner in the Faith that the promised glories of the Sovereignty which the Bahá'í teachings foreshadow, can be revealed only in the fulness of time, that the implications of the Aqdas and the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the twin repositories of the

constituent elements of that Sovereignty, are too far-reaching for this generation to grasp and fully [pg 69] appreciate. I cannot refrain from appealing to them who stand identified with the Faith to disregard the prevailing notions and the fleeting fashions of the day, and to realize as never before that the exploded theories and the tottering institutions of present-day civilization must needs appear in sharp contrast with those God-given institutions which are destined to arise upon their ruin."

(Shoghi Effendi: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 16)

1. Not Sufficient to Accept Some Aspects of Teachings and Reject Others

"...The believers, and particularly those who have not had sufficient experience in teaching, should be very careful in the way they present the teachings of the Cause. Sincerity, devotion and faith are not the sole conditions of successful teaching. Tactfulness, extreme caution and wisdom are equally important. We should not be in a hurry when we announce the message to the public and we should be careful to present the teachings in their entirety and not to alter them for the sake of others. Allegiance to the Faith cannot be partial and half-hearted. Either we should accept the Cause without any qualification whatever, or cease calling ourselves Bahá'ís. The new believers should be made to realize that it is not sufficient for them to accept some aspects of the teachings and reject those which cannot suit their mentality in order to become fully recognized and active followers of the Faith. In this way all sorts of misunderstandings will vanish and the organic unity of the Cause will be preserved."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, June 12, 1933: Bahá'í News, No. 80, p. 5, January 1934)

1. When Enrolling New Believers, Must Be Wise and Gentle

"When enrolling new believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles in their way that they feel it impossible to accept the Faith. On the other hand, once accorded membership in the Community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live up to His Teachings, and to show forth the signs of a noble character in conformity with His Laws. This can often be done gradually, after the new believer is enrolled."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the British National Spiritual Assembly, June 25, 1953: Teaching the Masses, p. 6)

1. If Requirements to Enroll Made Too Rigorous, Will Cool Off Initial Enthusiasm

"...If we make the requirements too rigorous, we will cool off the initial enthusiasm, rebuff the hearts and cease to expand rapidly. The essential thing is that the candidate for enrollment should believe in his heart in the truth of Bahá'u'lláh. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of all the Teachings or not, is beside the point entirely. When the spark of faith exists the

essential Message is there, and gradually everything else can be added unto it..."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, July 9, 1957: Teaching the Masses, p. 12)

1. **A Bahá'í Must Be Wholly a Bahá'í; Must Not Be Insular**

"...the very essence of the reason a person has accepted Bahá'u'lláh is that he has decided this Way alone is the solution to the absolutely hopeless problems facing humanity. A Bahá'í must be wholly a Bahá'í, concentrate on the work of the Cause, [pg 70] and put aside from his mind the distracting influences that scream at him from every newspaper these days. Naturally, this does not mean he must be insular, it means he must concentrate more consciously on doing the work of the Cause!"

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, November 23, 1951: United States Supplement to Bahá'í News, No. 82, p. 5, December 1964)

1. **A True Bahá'í Should Justify His Claim to be a Bahá'í**

"They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name..."

"He is a true Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress along the path of human endeavor, whose cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and illumine the world; whose source of inspiration is the essence of Divine Perfection, whose aim in life is to conduct himself so as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a Bahá'í."

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Bahá'í Revelation, p. 285)

1. **The Primary Reason for Becoming a Bahá'í**

"The primary reason for anyone becoming a Bahá'í must of course be because he has come to believe the doctrines, the teachings and the Order of Bahá'u'lláh are the correct thing for this stage in the world's evolution. The Bahá'ís themselves as a body have one great advantage: They are sincerely convinced Bahá'u'lláh is right; they have a plan; and they are trying to follow it. But to pretend they are perfect, that the Bahá'ís of the future will not be a hundred times more mature, better balanced, more exemplary in their conduct, would be foolish."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, July 5, 1947: Teaching Work Among the Masses, p. 2)

1. **Ploughing Up the Soil of the Heart**

"When a person becomes a Bahá'í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds."

"Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if that person turns firmly toward the divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 6, 1954: *Living the Life*, pp. 18-19)

1. New Believers Must Not Be Left to Their Own Devices

"After declaration, the new believers must not be left to their own devices. [pg 71] Through correspondence and dispatch of visitors, through conferences and training courses, these friends must be patiently strengthened and lovingly helped to develop into full Bahá'í maturity. The beloved Guardian referring to the duties of Bahá'í Assemblies in assisting the newly declared believer has written: '...the members of each and every Assembly should endeavour, by their patience, their love, their tact and wisdom, to nurse, subsequent to his admission, the newcomer into Bahá'í maturity, and win him over gradually to the unreserved acceptance of whatever has been ordained in the Teachings.'"

(From a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, July 13, 1964: *Wellspring of Guidance*, pp. 32-33)

1. Deepening the Spiritual Life of the Individual Believers

"Above all, the duty of deepening the spiritual life of your newly-enrolled co-workers is paramount, for the fate of the entire community depends upon the individual believers. Without the whole-hearted support of each and every one of the friends, every measure adopted, no matter how well thought out, is fore-doomed to failure. It is the individual believers who must maintain the Local Assemblies, and the centres already won at the cost of such great sacrifice. It is they who must, afire with the love of Bahá'u'lláh, go forth to further broaden the base of administrative activity by forming new Assemblies and implanting the standard of Bahá'u'lláh in new localities; who must arise in response to the call to travel to the remote outposts of the Faith and push back the frontiers; and who must, through your wise and loving guidance, become your collaborators in carrying out your God-given mission."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, August 14, 1968: National Bahá'í Review, No. 10, p. 1, 10/68: Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1968-1973, p. 16)

1. Assemblies and Committees Must Enable Believers to Carry Forth Message of God

"Now that they have erected the administrative machinery of the Cause they must put it to its real use — serving only as an instrument to facilitate the flow of the spirit of the Faith out into the world. Just as the muscles enable the body to carry out the will of the individual, all Assemblies and Committees must enable the believers to carry forth the message of God to the waiting public, the love of Bahá'u'lláh, and the healing laws and principles of the Faith to all men."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 6, 1942)

1. If One Desires to Become a Bahá'í, His Past Should Not Be Held Against Him

"The Guardian does not feel that, if a person has approached this Cause and desires to become a Bahá'í, and is determined to change his way of life, his past should be held against him. Where would forgiveness be if every prospective Bahá'í was judged by his past? But once a Bahá'í, a change of life is expected and hoped for, and the friends must help people to change."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 29, 1951)

"Also there is no reason why a prisoner should not be accepted as a declared believer on the same basis as anybody else. They are now expiating their crime [pg 72] against society, and, if their hearts have changed, and they accept the Cause, there is no reason why they should be excluded from membership."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Spiritual Assembly of Honolulu, April 23, 1955)

1. Convert Advised Not to Become Alienated from Parents

"It made him very happy to know of the recent confirmation of your young Jewish friend, and of her earnest desire to serve and promote the Faith. He will certainly pray on her behalf that she may, notwithstanding the opposition of her parents and relatives, increasingly gain in knowledge and in understanding of the Teachings, and become animated with such a zeal as to arise, and bring into the Cause a large number of her former co-religionists."

"Under no circumstances, however, should she allow her parents to become completely alienated from her, but it is her bounden duty to strive, through patient, continued and loving effort, to win their sympathy for the Faith, and even perhaps, to bring about their confirmation, however deep-rooted their attachment to the Jewish Faith may be."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 6, 1938)

1. Assembly Should Not Prevent Enrollment of Persons With Questionable Morals — When Accepted New Enrollees Should Henceforth Conduct Themselves As Bahá'ís

“The young lady in question should be advised by you or the believer with whom she has been studying that the decision as to whether or not she wishes to enroll in the Faith rests with her and her alone. Your Assembly should not prevent her from enrolling should she so decide, but if she does apply for membership in the community, she obviously should understand that she will be expected to conduct herself as a Bahá'í by adjusting her relationship to the man with whom she is presently living. This means that either they must become legally married or she should sever the existing relationship between them.”

“Your Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible to guide and assist this young lady, including helping her to obtain whatever welfare and legal assistance may be available from State or Federal sources.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly, April 4, 1977)

1. May Be Occasions When Enrollment Must Be Postponed

“There may be occasions when an enrollment must be postponed, as in the case of someone holding a political post, unless that person is able and can, in good conscience, resign from such a post immediately. Other cases may permit acceptance but indicate a need for fixing a time when the individual will be required to conform to certain laws, such as membership in the Masonic Order, church, or other ecclesiastical organizations. Still other times an individual may be encouraged to become better acquainted with the spirit, laws, and principles of the Faith before submitting his application. However, the Guardian has cautioned us not to be too rigid in our requirements for accepting new believers or to place hindrances in their way. The question of conforming one's character and the pattern of one's life to the standards of conduct upheld in the Bahá'í way of life is a matter which should [pg 73] be inculcated in the new believer in the course of his spiritual education and deepening.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, May 13, 1979)

1. Qualifications of a Believer

“Regarding the very delicate and complex question of ascertaining the qualifications of a true believer, I cannot in this connection emphasize too strongly the supreme necessity for the exercise of the utmost discretion, caution and tact, whether it be in deciding for ourselves as to who may be regarded a true believer or in disclosing to the outside world such considerations as may serve as a basis for such a decision. I would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as present circumstances permit the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded a true believer or not. Full

recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world — these I conceive to be the fundamental and primary considerations that must be fairly, discreetly and thoughtfully ascertained before reaching such a vital decision...."

(Shoghi Effendi: Bahá'í Administration, p. 90)

1. The Process of Acceptance Varies — Stage of Conviction Important

"The process by which a new believer reaches this stage of acceptance varies according to his individual capacity. In some societies, for example, most believers must go through all sorts of intellectual processes and a re-orientation of their thinking before coming to this acceptance. In a primitive society the new believer may reach this stage of conviction quite easily and directly. The stage of conviction is the important thing, and not the method by which he arrives at this conviction."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, November 9, 1963)

1. Declarants Need Not Know All the Proofs — Spark of Faith

"...Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the Teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey."

(From a message from the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, July 13, 1964: Teaching the Masses, p. 2)

1. Acceptance of New Believers Left to Discretion of Assembly

"As regards the accepting of new believers, it is for the National Spiritual Assembly to decide the appropriate procedure to be followed. Naturally, when there is a firmly established Local Spiritual Assembly, as in Bombay, the National Assembly will normally endorse the Local Assembly's decision unless there is a particular reason to query it in any specific case. However, in the case of declarations from an area [pg 74] where there is no Local Assembly, or where the Assembly is having difficulty in functioning, the National Spiritual Assembly itself will have to decide whether to accept them, basing its decision on the views of such teaching committee, individuals or neighbouring Local Spiritual Assembly, as it may feel necessary."

“We have noted that you have advised the Local Spiritual Assemblies to meet new believers at the time of their enrollment in the Faith. While it would be desirable for new believers to become acquainted with the elected members of their community, this should not be a requirement for acceptance of the new believer in the community.”

“It is entirely within the discretion of your National Assembly to set up proper procedures for enrolling believers in accordance with the requirements of the areas under your jurisdiction, bearing in mind that where there are local Assemblies it would be preferable to enroll new believers in their area of jurisdiction through the Local Assembly.”

(Extracts from letters written by the Universal House of Justice on this subject cited in a letter to an individual believer, dated February 28, 25.)

1. Mental Instability Has No Bearing Upon Acceptance of an Enrollment

“In response to your letter of 11 March 1981, conveying the question of one of your Local Spiritual Assemblies about the enrollment of individuals who are mentally incompetent, drug users, alcoholics, etc., the Universal House of Justice asks us to convey the following.”

“The acceptance of a person into the Bahá'í community should be based not on whether he is leading an exemplary life, but on whether the Assembly is reasonably certain that he is sincere in his declaration of faith in Bahá'u'lláh and that he knows of the laws which would affect his personal conduct, so that he does not enter the community under a misapprehension. The question of mental instability has no bearing upon the acceptance of an enrollment unless it is of such a nature that it affects the ability of the declarant to judge whether or not he believes in Bahá'u'lláh.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Hawaiian Islands, April 19, 1981)

1. In These Special Cases, Steps Should Be Taken to Deepen Their Understanding

“Concerning the acceptance into the Faith of individuals who have mental problems or are drug addicts, etc., the House of Justice instructs us to say that if the Assembly is satisfied that the person is sufficiently in command of his faculties to understand what his declaration of faith implies, he may be accepted as a believer. In other words you should apply the normal guidelines of acceptance of new believers. In such cases, however, you may have to ensure that special steps are taken to deepen the understanding of the new Bahá'í. A drug addict or alcoholic should, of course, be told that the taking of drugs and alcohol is strictly forbidden in Bahá'í law, and he will have to do whatever is necessary to break himself of the addiction. You may find it necessary and helpful to put him in touch with organizations which specialize in helping such cases. If a case is severe you may have to warn the person that if he does not overcome this problem within a reasonable time you may have to consider depriving him of his voting rights.”

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Austria, May 12, 1982) [pg 75]

1. Declaration of Faith Normally Accepted from Those Living in Immoral Situation or from Member of an Organization Not Permissible — To Be Given Time to Rectify Situation

"In the case of people who accept the Faith while living in a situation which is not morally acceptable, or while being a member of an organization to which it is not permissible for a Bahá'í to belong, the normal procedure is for the Assembly to accept the declaration of faith so that the new believer may become a member of the Bahá'í community and his newly-born belief in Bahá'u'lláh can be nurtured, and at the same time for the Assembly to explain that his situation is one that he must change within a reasonable time. If the believer does not rectify his situation as a result of the Assembly's exhortations and assistance, and following due warnings when the time limit expires, the Assembly would have to consider depriving him of his administrative rights. It may well be, however, that in a particular case, it is preferable to explain the matter to the individual concerned and advise the postponement of the registration of his acceptance of the Faith until such time as he has been able to rectify his situation. This has happened, for example, in some countries where a person who holds a prominent political post has accepted the Faith and needs to complete his term of office before being able to withdraw honourably from politics."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 18, 1985)

1. Children Are Accepted as Bahá'ís Regardless of Age

"...if the non-Bahá'í parents of a youth under fifteen permit their child to be a Bahá'í, we have no objection whatsoever from the point of view of our Teachings to permitting such a youth to declare as a Bahá'í, regardless of age. When he declares his faith in Bahá'u'lláh, he will then be accepted in the community and be treated as other Bahá'í children."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of El Salvador, December 14, 1970)

1. Prisoners, Declarations from

"We have your letter of 16th November, 1969 inquiring about the status of Bahá'ís who are imprisoned and whether it is permissible to enroll prisoners who wish to join the Faith."

"You are free to accept declarations of faith from inmates of a prison, but their participation as voting believers can take place only after they have been discharged from prison. The fact of having been in prison does not deprive a Bahá'í from exercising his voting rights when he is released and there is no need for a probationary period. However, if there is some other factor

which would indicate to the National Assembly that in a particular case the voting rights should be suspended, the National Assembly may then exercise its discretion."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the South Pacific Ocean, December 8, 1969)

1. Signature on Card is to Satisfy Administrative Requirements — There is a Difference Between Character and Faith

"You have asked if the mere declaration of faith by a newcomer suffices to recognize him as a Bahá'í, and whether living the Bahá'í life should not be [pg 76] regarded as the basis of admission into the Faith. You should bear in mind that the signature on a card, in the sense that it represents a record of the date of the declaration and data about the declarant, is to satisfy administrative requirements enabling the enrollment of the new believer in the community. The deeper implications of the act of declaration of faith are between the individual and God. Shoghi Effendi has made several statements on this important subject, and we have been asked to share with you the following two excerpts from letters written on his behalf to individual believers:

'There is a difference between character and faith; it is often very hard to accept this fact and put up with it, but the fact remains that a person may believe in and love the Cause — even to being ready to die for it — and yet not have a good personal character, or possess traits at variance with the teachings. We should try to change, to let the Power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá'ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough. But these things cause us suffering and are a test to us in our fellow-believers, most especially if we love them and have been their teacher!'

'The process of becoming a Bahá'í is necessarily slow and gradual. The essential is not that the beginner should have a full and detailed knowledge of the Cause, a thing which is obviously impossible in the vast majority of cases, but that he should, by an act of his own will, be willing to uphold and follow the truth and guidance set forth in the Teachings, and thus open his heart and mind to the reality of the Manifestation.'"

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, June 7, 1974: Bahá'í News of India, p. 2, July/August, 1974)

1. Enrolment Card — Not a Universal Requirement

"There is no requirement in Bahá'í administration for a new believer to sign an enrolment card. It is for each National Spiritual Assembly to decide, in the light of conditions in the territory under its jurisdiction, how it wishes a declaration of faith to be made. For a number of reasons it has been found in most countries that an enrolment card is a simple and useful way of registering new believers, but this is not a universal requirement...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, October 28, 1975)

1. **Duty of Assembly to Newly Enrolled Believer**

"Above all, the utmost endeavour should be exerted by your Assembly to familiarize the newly enrolled believers with the fundamental and spiritual verities of the Faith, and with the origins, the aims and purposes, as well as the processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, to acquaint them more fully with the history of the Faith, to instil in them a deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and of Abdu'l-Bahá, to enrich their spiritual life, to rouse them to a greater effort and a closer participation in both the teaching of the Faith and the administration of its activities, and to inspire them to make the necessary sacrifices for the furtherance of its vital interests. For as the body of the avowed supporters of the Faith is enlarged, and the basis of the structure of its Administrative Order is broadened, and the fame [pg 77] of the rising community spreads far and wide, a parallel progress must be achieved, if the fruits already garnered are to endure in the spiritual quickening of its members and the deepening of their inner life."

(Postscript by the Guardian to a letter written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, June 26, 1956: Messages to Canada, pp. 61-62)



N. The Believers' Relationship with the Assemblies

1. **Being a Bahá'í Essentially an Inner Thing**

"It is good for the Bahá'ís to learn that being a Bahá'í is essentially an inner thing, or way of life, and not dependent on fixed patterns. Important as our organized institutions are, they are not the Faith itself. The strength of the Cause grows no matter how much disrupted its activities may temporarily be. This we see over and over again, in lands where the Faith has been temporarily banned; at times when the believers are persecuted and even killed; where they are serving all alone or scattered and isolated...."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Program Committee of Geyserville, November 11, 1951: Bahá'í News, No. 257, p. 4, July 1952)

1. **Should Have Respect for National and Local Assemblies**

"We should respect the National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assembly because they are institutions founded by Bahá'u'lláh. It has nothing to do with personality, but is far above it. It will be a great day when the friends, on and off the Assemblies, come to fully grasp the fact that it is not the individuals on an Assembly which is important, but the Assembly as an institution."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 7, 1949: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 19)

1. This Great Prize, This Gift of God — Local Spiritual Assembly

"...The friends are called upon to give their whole-hearted support and cooperation to the Local Spiritual Assembly, first by voting for the membership and then by energetically pursuing its plans and programmes, by turning to it in time of trouble or difficulty, by praying for its success and taking delight in its rise to influence and honour. This great prize, this gift of God within each community must be cherished, nurtured, loved, assisted, obeyed and prayed for."

(From the Naw-Ruz Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1974)

1. Assembly is a Nascent House of Justice — Individuals Toward Each Other Governed by Love, Unity, etc.

"...There is a tendency to mix up the functions of the Administration and try to apply it in individual relationships, which is abortive, because the Assembly is a nascent House of Justice and is supposed to administer, according to the Teachings, the affairs of the community. But individuals toward each other are governed by love, unity, forgiveness and a sin-covering eye. Once the friends grasp this they will get along much better, but they keep playing Spiritual Assembly to each other and expect the Assembly to behave like an individual..."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 5, 1950: *Living the Life*, p. 17) [pg 78]

1. Two Kinds of Bahá'ís

"There are two kinds of Bahá'ís, one might say: those whose religion is Bahá'í and those who live for the Faith. Needless to say if one can belong to the latter category, if one can be in the vanguard of heroes, martyrs and saints, it is more praiseworthy in the sight of God."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 16, 1950: *Living the Life*, p. 16)

1. Spiritual Children Should Not Cling to Misconceptions of Their Teachers

"As to your question about the spiritual children of people who enter the Cause with some old ideas still clinging to them: Everyone should study the Faith for himself, and just because a person's Bahá'í teacher has some concept not strictly Bahá'í it does not stand to reason that the new believer must be saddled with it; old believers, as well as new, should constantly endeavour to grow more fully into the Bahá'í pattern of thought and of life. Each soul receives the gift of faith for himself, and from then on is a Bahá'í in his own right, independent of his teacher."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 17, 1945)

1. Assemblies Should Inspire Confidence in Individual Believers

"...the Local Assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the Local Assembly; the two must learn to co-operate, and to realize that only through such a co-operation can the institutions of the Cause effectively and permanently function. While

obedience to the Local Assembly should be unqualified and whole-hearted, yet that body should enforce its directions in such a way as to avoid giving the impression that it is animated by dictatorial motives. The spirit of the Cause is one of mutual co-operation, and not that of a dictatorship."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 28, 1935: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 23)

1. Buckets-Full of Administrative Information: Putting Out the First Sparks

"...The process of educating people of different customs and backgrounds must be done with the greatest patience and understanding, and rules and regulations not imposed upon them, except where a rock-bottom essential is in question. He feels sure that your Assembly is capable of carrying on its work in this spirit, and of fanning the hearts to flame through the fire of the love of God, rather than putting out the first sparks with buckets-full of administrative information and regulations."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of South and West Africa, July 9, 1957: Ibid.)

1. Look to the Teachings

"...You should, under no circumstances, feel discouraged, and allow such difficulties, even though they may have resulted from the misconduct, or the lack of capacity and vision of certain members of the Community, to make you waver in your faith and basic loyalty to the Cause. Surely, the believers, no matter how [pg 79] qualified they may be, whether as teachers or administrators, and however high their intellectual and spiritual merits, should never be looked upon as a standard whereby to evaluate and measure the divine authority and mission of the Faith. It is to the Teachings themselves, and to the lives of the Founders of the Cause that the believers should look for their guidance and inspiration, and only by keeping strictly to such true attitude can they hope to establish their loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh upon an enduring and unassailable basis. You should take heart, therefore, and with unrelaxing vigilance and unremitting effort endeavour to play your full share in the gradual unfoldment of this Divine World Order."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 23, 1939: Living the Life, p. 7)

1. Two Principles to Follow: Doctrinal and Administrative Unity

"There are two main principles which the Guardian wishes the friends to always bear in mind and to conscientiously and faithfully follow. First is the principle of unqualified and wholehearted loyalty to the revealed Word. The believers should be careful not to deviate, even a hair-breadth, from the Teachings. Their supreme consideration should be to safeguard the purity of the principles, tenets and laws of the Faith. It is only by this means that they can hope to maintain the organic unity of the Cause. There can and should be no liberal or conservatives, no moderates or extremes in the Cause. For they are all subject to the one and the same law which

is the Law of God. This Law transcends all differences, all personal or local tendencies, moods and aspirations."

"Next is the principle of complete and immediate obedience to the Assemblies, both Local and National. It is the responsibility of these Bahá'í administrative bodies to enable the community to acquire, and increasingly deepen in, the knowledge and understanding of the Cause. Doctrinal unity and administrative unity, these are the two chief pillars that sustain the edifice of the Cause, and protect it from the storms of opposition which so severely rage against it."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, September 5, 1936: Dawn of a New Day, p. 61)

1. Bahá'í Administration — Instrument of Spirit of the Faith

"The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only first beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful — how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 14, 1941: The Local Spiritual Assembly, pp. 28-29)

1. Bahá'í World Community Develops New Cells, New Organs

"In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. [pg 80] When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God 'has endowed each humble being with ability and talent', and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá'í World Community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity... The Bahá'í World Community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance, and the overflowing bounties of Bahá'u'lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained Order."

(Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, September 1964: Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 37-38)

1. Believers Should Turn to Assemblies for Advice and Help

"The believers should learn to turn more often to their Assemblies for advice and help and at an earlier date, and the Assemblies, on the other hand, should act with more vigilance and a

greater sense of community responsibility towards every situation that may damage the prestige of the Faith in the eyes of the public. When decisions have been reached by the Assembly, they must be carried out loyally and willingly, by all concerned."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 13, 1944: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 26)

1. Mission of Bahá'u'lláh, Friends Are Trustees of

"The friends have a great duty, first towards the Cause and then towards society at large. Bahá'u'lláh has come to the world with a divine Message and devoted all His life and withstood all forms of persecution in the hope of establishing it firmly. We are now the trustees of that Mission. It is for us to bring that task begun by Bahá'u'lláh to a final consummation. Should we fail, we have been untrue to our Lord and also remained deaf to the cry of humanity seeking salvation."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 15, 1931: Bahá'í News, No. 71, p. 2, February 1933)

1. Believers Should Have Confidence in Assembly

"The believers should have confidence in the directions and orders of their Assembly, even though they may not be convinced of their justice or right. Once the Assembly, through a majority vote of its members, comes to a decision the friends should readily obey it. Specially those dissenting members within the Assembly whose opinion is contrary to that of the majority of their fellow-members should set a good example before the community by sacrificing their personal views for the sake of obeying the principle of majority vote that underlies the functioning of all Bahá'í Assemblies."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 28, 1935: The Local Spiritual Assembly, p. 26)

1. If Assembly Makes Ill-Advised Decision It Must Be Upheld

"One of the fundamentals involved in our Administrative Order, which we must [pg 81] remember will become the pattern for our World Order, is that even if an Assembly makes an ill-advised decision it must be upheld in order to preserve the unity of the community. Appeal can be made from the Local Assembly's decision to the National Assembly... But the principle of authority invested in our elected bodies must be upheld. This is not something which can be learned without trial and test...."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, June 30, 1949: Ibid.)

1. If Assembly Makes a Mistake — God Will Right the Wrongs Done

"The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out, if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual Bahá'í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very

institution which must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have confidence in this and obey our Assemblies. He therefore strongly urges you to work directly under your Bahá'í Assembly, to accept your responsibilities as a voting member, and do your utmost to create harmony within the community."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer in 1949: Ibid., p. 27)

1. Obedience, Patience and Restraint

"The friends should therefore not feel discouraged at the differences of opinion that may prevail among the members of an Assembly for these, as experience has shown, and as the Master's words attest, fulfil a valuable function in all Assembly deliberations. But once the opinion of the majority has been ascertained, all the members should automatically and unreservedly obey it, and faithfully carry it out. Patience and restraint, however, should at all times characterize the discussions and deliberations of the elected representatives of the local community, and no fruitless and hair-splitting discussions indulged in, under any circumstances."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 18, 1939: Ibid., pp. 18-19)

1. Criticism to Assemblies — Bahá'ís Can Freely Air Their Views

"The Bahá'ís are fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies; they can freely air their views about policies or individual members of elected bodies to the Assembly, Local or National, but then they must whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly, according to the principles already laid down for such matters in Bahá'í administration."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, May 13, 1945: Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 55)

1. No Protection for Faith Unless Friends Submit to Administrative Bodies

"...There can be no protection for the Faith unless the friends are willing to submit to their administrative bodies, especially when these are acting in good faith; the individual believers are not in a position to judge their National Body. If any wrong has been done, we must leave it in the hands of God, knowing, as [pg 82] Abdu'l-Bahá said, that He will right it, and in the meantime not disrupt the Cause of God by constantly harping on these matters."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 3, 1957: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 37)

1. If Bahá'ís Undermine Leaders

"The Guardian believes that a great deal of the difficulties from which the believers ... feel themselves to be suffering are caused by their neither correctly understanding nor putting into practice the administration. They seem — many of them — to be prone to continually challenging and criticizing the decisions of their Assemblies. If the Bahá'ís undermine the very

leaders which are, however immaturely, seeking to coordinate Bahá'í activities and administer Bahá'í affairs, if they continually criticize their acts and challenge or belittle their decisions, they not only prevent any real rapid progress in the Faith's development from taking place, but they repel outsiders who quite rightly may ask how we ever expect to unite the whole world when we are so disunited among ourselves!"

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 26, 1943: Ibid., pp. 34-35)

1. Believers Have the Right to Express Their Criticism Action of Assembly, But Not in a Way to Undermine Its Authority

"...with reference to your ... letter in which you ... asked whether the believers have the right to openly express their criticism of any Assembly action or policy: It is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the Community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local community, and it is the duty of the Assembly also to give careful consideration to any such views submitted to them by any one of the believers. The best occasion chosen for this purpose is the Nineteen Day Feast which, besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfils various administrative needs and requirements of the Community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í Community."

"But again it should be stressed that all criticism and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the Community."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 13, 1939)

1. Obedience to the Decisions of the Local Assembly Should Be Unqualified and Whole-Hearted

"The most vital matter on which the Guardian wishes you to fully concentrate is that of consolidating the foundations of the Administration. Not until your group learns to work efficiently through obedience to the Local Assembly and under its guidance can there be any hope for future expansion. The friends must all realize the necessity of internal discipline and order which only a properly elected and efficiently functioning body such as the Local Assembly can effectively maintain. Obedience to the decisions of the Local Assembly should be unqualified and [pg 83] whole-hearted, as by this means alone can the community work as a united body and achieve something constructive and enduring."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Vienna, April 5, 1936)

1. Local Assembly Should Not Criticize Policy of National Assembly

"As to the problem which has arisen in connection with the Newsletter published and circulated by the ... Assembly, the Guardian has already written about it to your National Spiritual Assembly, expressing the view that under no circumstances should any Local Assembly be given the right to criticize, and much less oppose, the policy duly adopted and approved by the National Spiritual Assembly. It is his hope that henceforth the problem of the relationship between the National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assemblies in matters of this nature will, in the light of his instructions, be carefully understood by individuals and Assemblies alike."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 19, 1934)

1. Only One Remedy — Study the Administration

"There is only one remedy for this: To study the administration, to obey the Assemblies, and each believer seek to perfect his own character as a Bahá'í. We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weakness of others, if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise, and we can really help the Cause through our example and spiritual strength. The Bahá'ís everywhere, when the administration is first established, find it very difficult to adjust themselves. They have to learn to obey, even when the Assembly may be wrong, for the sake of unity. They have to sacrifice their personalities, to a certain extent, in order that the Community life may grow and develop as a whole. These things are difficult, but we must realize that they will lead us to a very much greater, more perfect way of life when the Faith is properly established according to the administration."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 26, 1943: The National Spiritual Assembly, p. 35)

1. On Individual Believer Depends Fate of Community

"This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. He it is who acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe. He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and insure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world. Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs, is foredoomed to failure. The World Center of the Faith itself is paralyzed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking. The sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh [pg 84] Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and each individual, who fails in the long run to arise and play his part."

(Shoghi Effendi: Citadel of Faith, pp. 130-131)

O. Inactive Believers

1. Voting List, Names Should Not Be Removed from

"Your Assembly should not remove the names of Bahá'ís from the voting list just because they do not attend meetings or just because their addresses are unknown. It is hard to make Bahá'ís; and you must try and help them and reactivate them, and find those whose addresses are unknown if you can."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Assembly of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, September 26, 1957)

1. Removal of Names from Voting List

"People who for years have ceased to either attend meetings or show the slightest interest in the Cause can be dropped from the voting list; but any who are unable to attend meetings, but still consider themselves to be Bahá'ís and are desirous of keeping up their contact with the Faith, should naturally be kept on the voting list."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, May 29, 1946)

1. Inactive and Unresponsive Believers Often Need Encouragement

"He feels that people who are inactive should not automatically be removed from the voting list; each individual, in such matters, must be considered as an individual case. He is constantly trying to avoid the needless multiplication of rules and procedures, and that is why he urges the friends, and responsible bodies, to use patience, good judgement, and tact in handling such cases, and not just start a new rule of thumb to solve the question en masse."

"When accepting new believers we must certainly not hold their past against them, but hope that the faith they have in Bahá'u'lláh will help them to change their characters and ways of living — as we know so often happens. We must not add any conditions for Bahá'í membership beyond those already outlined by the Guardian himself as absolutely necessary."

"It is very discouraging to find inactive and unresponsive believers; on the other hand we must always realize that some souls are weak and immature and not capable of carrying on an active administrative burden. They need encouragement, the love of their fellow Bahá'ís, and assistance. To blame them for not doing more for the Cause is useless, and they may actually have a very firm belief in Bahá'u'lláh which with care could be fanned into flame."

"If some of these isolated and inactive people gradually turn to other work than the Cause we should not always blame them — they probably needed more help, more stimulating, more teaching and Bahá'í comradeship than they received."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 25, 1947)

1. Inactive Believers — Names Removed Only When Clearly Stated No Longer Believe in Bahá'u'lláh

"Further guidance might be welcome and we share portions of a letter written by [pg 85] the Universal House of Justice to another National Spiritual Assembly on 4 September 1966: '...Whilst it is embarrassing to leave names of inactive believers on a membership list, inactivity and lack of attendance at Bahá'í meetings are not the bases for removing names of believers from the membership roster. A name should be removed only when the person clearly states that he no longer believes in Bahá'u'lláh and wishes his name to be removed from Bahá'í membership. If the believer's whereabouts are unknown, his name should still not be removed from membership, but kept in a special list of believers whose addresses are unknown, and who obviously are not counted in determining the allocation of delegates.'"

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia, September 25, 1973: Malaysian Bahá'í News, Vol. 9, Nos. 2 3, June/November 1973)

1. Reasons for Inactivity Should Be Ascertained

"Concerning your question about inactive believers, the Universal House of Justice feels that it would be somewhat abrupt to drop them from the roster simply because they have been absent from meetings or otherwise inactive. They should be approached and the reasons for their absence or inactivity ascertained, and only when such investigation leads you to the conclusion that the believer concerned no longer believes in Bahá'u'lláh should this definitely be recognized. Every case of inactivity should be investigated and the believers lovingly encouraged to become active. A distinction is to be made between those who are interested in the Faith but remain inactive and those whose inactivity indicates complete lack of interest in the Faith to the extent that they have in fact ceased to be Bahá'ís. In this latter instance removal from the list is simply recognition of this fact."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the North West Pacific Ocean, December 18, 1974)

1. Meetings Should Be Made So Interesting as to Attract the Old Believers

"You mentioned in one of your letters that some of the old believers who for many years had kept away are now coming back and attending the meetings. How wonderful it would be if all such persons together with all those who met the Master and whose life was changed through His influence would come along and help us in spreading these divine teachings! Perhaps the friends should take the initiative and make their meetings so inspiring and their activities so interesting and far reaching in importance that they would of their own accord come forward and lend us their help. Anyhow they would be a large army!"

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 9, 1932)

1. Must Aid Those with Unbecoming Conduct to Mend Their Ways

"As to certain of your voting members who have long been inactive, and whose conduct you disapprove of, he suggests you make an effort to find out if they still believe in the Faith, and if they do, and wish to be members of it, then they should be helped to mend their ways. If this patient and loving method does not [pg 86] prove successful and they refuse to identify themselves with the Faith, they should be removed from the voting list."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, May 8, 1947)

1. If Person Does Not Wish to be Considered Member

"...If a person makes it quite clear that they do not wish to be considered an active member of the Bahá'í Community and be affiliated with it and exert their voting right, then their name should be removed from the voting list; but if a person considers himself or herself a Bahá'í, and for various reasons is not able to be active in the affairs of the Community, then they should certainly not be removed from our voting list...."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, March 2, 1951: The Nineteen Day Feast, p. 8)

1. The Personal Situation of a Bahá'í May Preclude Activity

"The House of Justice has asked us to point out that normally once a person has declared his belief in Bahá'u'lláh and this declaration has been accepted by the Assembly it should be assumed that he continues to be a Bahá'í until he states the contrary. If believers become inactive it is naturally desirable that the Local Spiritual Assemblies attempt to maintain contact with them and encourage them to become active unless, of course, it is obvious that their personal situation precludes such activity. For example, a Bahá'í who is married to a non-Bahá'í may well have to limit his activities to some degree in order to maintain the unity of his family. If during this process of encouragement it becomes apparent that the Bahá'í in question has in fact ceased to believe in Bahá'u'lláh and wishes not to be a member of the Bahá'í community, the Assembly would be fully justified in accepting his withdrawal."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain, May 7, 1975)(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain, May 7, 1975)

1. Those Who No Longer Believe in Bahá'u'lláh...

"Basically it is for your National Spiritual Assembly to decide who should be retained on the voting lists, but guidelines have been given by the beloved Guardian and by the Universal House of Justice. Obviously, people who do not believe in Bahá'u'lláh and those who have become inactive to the extent that they do not show the slightest interest in the Faith can be dropped from the voting list. On the other hand, people who are inactive should not automatically be removed from that list. Each case should be considered on its own merits. In some cases a spark of faith may be found which with care may be fanned into flame. Patience and good judgement are called for."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, July 10, 1975)

1. Believers Whose Whereabouts Are Unknown

"Where a believer has been sought and his whereabouts and address are not known, the believer's name can be held in a suspended file against possible reappearance in another community, and need not be counted in delegate [pg 87] assignments. You are correct in acknowledging that such believers retain their full administrative rights. However, a category can be added to the voting list for those individuals whose addresses are unknown. While this category need not be included in allocation of delegates, it can be included in such lists as total number of believers, semi-annual reports, etc."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Paraguay, April 22, 1982)

