

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

1 October 1969

To the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

A number of questions have been raised concerning the work of the Counselors and Auxiliary Board members, and it has been suggested that Auxiliary Board members be permitted to work regularly with National Spiritual Assemblies and national committees. We have carefully considered again the various factors involved and have decided that we must uphold the principle that such direct consultations should be exceptional rather than the rule.

It is the responsibility of Spiritual Assemblies, assisted by their committees, to organize and direct the teaching work, and in doing so they must, naturally, also do all they can to stimulate and inspire the friends. It is, however, inevitable that the Assemblies and committees, being burdened with the administration of the teaching work as well as with all other aspects of Bahá'í community life, will be unable to spend as much time as they would wish on stimulating the believers.

Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. It is the principal task of the Auxiliary Boards to assist in arousing and releasing this power. This is a vital activity, and if they are to be able to perform it adequately they must avoid becoming involved in the work of administration. For example, when Auxiliary Board members arouse believers to pioneer, any believer who expresses his desire to do so should be referred to the appropriate committee which will then organize the project. Counselors and Auxiliary Board members should not, themselves, organize pioneering or travel teaching projects. Thus it is seen that the Auxiliary Boards should work closely with the grass roots of the community: the individual believers, groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies, advising, stimulating and assisting them. The Counselors are responsible for stimulating, counseling and assisting National Spiritual Assemblies, and also work with individuals, groups and Local Assemblies.

It is always possible, of course, for Counselors to depute an Auxiliary Board member to meet with a National Spiritual Assembly for a particular purpose, but this should not become a regular practice. Similarly, if the National Spiritual Assembly agrees, it may be advisable for an Auxiliary Board member to meet occasionally with a national committee to clarify the situation in the area and share information and ideas thoroughly. But this also should not become regular. Were it to do so there would be grave danger of inhibiting the proper working of these two institutions, vitiating and undermining the collaboration that must essentially exist between the Continental Boards of Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies. It would diffuse the energies and time of the Auxiliary Board members through their becoming involved in the administration of teaching. It could lead to the Auxiliary Board member's gradually taking over the direction of the national committee, usurping the function of the National Assembly, or to his becoming merely a traveling teacher sent hither and thither at the direction of the committee or National Assembly.

It is, of course vital that information be shared fully and promptly, as has been explained in the compilation on the work of Auxiliary Board members that was circulated on March 25, 1969. The ways of ensuring this should be worked out by the Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies and methods may vary from area to area.

Reports and recommendations for action, however, are quite different. Auxiliary Board members should send theirs to the Counselors and not to National Assemblies or national committees directly. It is possible that the Counselors may reject or modify the recommendation; or, if they accept it and pass it on to the National Spiritual Assembly, the National Assembly may

decide to refuse it. For an Auxiliary Board member to make recommendations directly to a national committee would lose the benefit of knowledge and experience in a wider field than that of which the Auxiliary Board member is aware, and would short-circuit and undermine the authority of both the Counselors and the National Assembly.

Similarly, although an Auxiliary Board member can and should receive information from the National Assemblies and national committees, his primary source of information about the community should be his own direct contacts with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups and individual believers. In this way the Counselors as well as the National Spiritual Assemblies have the benefit of two independent sources of information about the community: through the Auxiliary Board members on the one hand, and through the national committees on the other.

Assemblies sometimes misunderstand what is meant by the statement that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members are concerned with the teaching work and not with administration. It is taken to mean that they may not give advice on administrative matters. This is quite wrong. One of the things that Counselors and Auxiliary Board members should watch and report on is the proper working of administrative institutions. The statement that they do not have anything to do with administration means, simply, that they do not administer. They do not direct or organize the teaching work nor do they adjudicate in matters of personal conflict or personal problems. All these activities fall within the sphere of responsibility of the Spiritual Assemblies. But if an Auxiliary Board member finds a Local Spiritual Assembly functioning incorrectly he should call its attention to the appropriate Texts; likewise if, in his work with the community, an Auxiliary Board member finds that the teaching work is being held up by inefficiency of national committees, he should report this in detail to the Counselors who will then decide whether to refer it to the National Spiritual Assembly concerned. Similarly, if the Counselors find that a National Spiritual Assembly is not functioning properly, they should not hesitate to consult with the National Spiritual Assembly about this in a frank and loving way.

It is the Spiritual Assemblies who plan and direct the work, but these plans should be well known to the Counselors 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.

The Counselors in each continental zone have wide latitude in the carrying out of their work. Likewise they should give to each Auxiliary Board member considerable freedom of action within his own allocated area. Although the Counselors should regularly direct the work of the Auxiliary Board members, the latter should realize that they need not wait for direction; the nature of their work is such that they should be continually engaged in it according to their own best judgment, even if they are given no specific tasks to perform. Above all the Auxiliary Board members should build up a warm and loving relationship between themselves and the believers in their area so that the Local Spiritual Assemblies will spontaneously turn to them for advice and assistance.

We assure you all of our fervent prayers in the Holy Shrines for the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh upon the strenuous and highly meritorious services that you are performing with such devotion in His path.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]