

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

30 July 1972

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bolivia

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In reply to your letter of July 4th asking guidance as to what is a functioning Local Spiritual Assembly, we offer you the following comments:

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 just 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 letter dated 14 October 1941 to two believers)

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 nonattainment 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.

In its own meetings it must endeavor 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.

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 where they could use their energy.

Shoghi Effendi hopes that the Assemblies will do their utmost in planning such teaching activities and that every single soul will be kept busy.

(From letter dated 30 August 1930 written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada)

In the compilation of texts we sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies in August 1970, and in the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, you will find all the objectives Local Spiritual Assemblies must aim at achieving in their process of growth and development. We recommend that you restudy these documents carefully and discuss this highly important problem with the Counselors of your zone, who will be only too glad to help you encourage the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies in your country.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]