

Bahá'í Marriage, Family Life, Service

(The following is an excerpt from a letter written by the Department of the Secretariat on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer. Because the letter brings such clarity and understanding to a subject so central to the Bahá'í way of life, the National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to have the opportunity of making it available to the friends.)

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to acknowledge your letter of March 20, 1979, and to express its deep regret that you are experiencing severe difficulties in your marriage.

We have been asked to share with you some excerpts on the subject of marriage from the recently published "Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá'" and from letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian. It is hoped, as you suggest, that in the future it may be possible for a compilation of the Bahá'í Writings to be made on this subject.

We are asked to say that counseling on specific marital problems cannot be undertaken at the World Centre, as you must surely realize. Such consultations should take place on the local level, by seeking the advice and guidance of the Local Spiritual Assembly. Bahá'ís are also free to consult with professional marriage counselors, if they wish to do so.

The Universal House of Justice appreciates the importance you attach to the strengthening of the ties binding a Bahá'í family together, and to the need for individual spiritual development. As you will note in its Message to the Bahá'í world on the occasion of the inauguration of the Seven Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice has particularly stressed this point. But in addition to the progress and development of the spiritual life of each believer, individually and as a member of the family unit, the foundations of the administrative institutions of the Faith must likewise be continually strengthened. That these two goals go hand in hand is indicated in the following excerpt from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer:

"The Cause is evolving in America from the days when it was a very loosely held together group of people—many of them not really grounded in the Faith at all—towards the time when it will become a dynamic spiritual thing working through a perfected form—the administration. But at present it is not fully evolved, and therefore many of the friends feel upset and impatient about it, as you do. However, this is no reason for us not going on, energetically, patiently, lovingly, and trying to better the whole, and the individuals which compose the whole!"

Regarding this same subject, the Universal House of Justice has pointed out in a letter dated January 24, 1979, to an individual believer:

"The believers, if they are true to God's Covenant,

should be endeavouring all the days of their lives, with the aid of the grace and bounty of God, to overcome their weaknesses and to gradually transmute their imperfections into perfections. But while this endless individual regeneration is progressing, the community must continue to expand and consolidate. While we are engaged, as individuals, in perfecting our lives, we should lend our wholehearted support to the furtherance of the interests of the Faith. One of the ways we can do this is by cooperating with and helping the institutions of the Faith who are the appointed custodians charged with the responsibility for protecting and promoting its interests, thus helping them to grow into what Shoghi Effendi calls the 'chief sinews of Bahá'í society.'"

You write of the pressures that are placed on the friends to win "goals and numbers." The teaching of the Faith is a continuous responsibility of the friends placed upon them by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Shoghi Effendi describes it as a "passion" which must be the "dominating" factor in our lives. While it is true that some Assemblies have unsteady foundations at first, the friends obviously do not form Assemblies in order to lose them. At the time of their establishment they may appear to be "artificially created" but are in fact a stepping stone in the progressive development of the teaching work, a fact recognized by Shoghi Effendi:

"An artificially created assembly, consisting of settlers from abroad, can at best be considered as temporary and insecure, and should, if the second stage of the European enterprise is to be commenced without undue delay in the future, be supplanted by broad-based, securely grounded, efficiently functioning assemblies, composed primarily of the people of the countries themselves, who are firm in faith, unimpeachable in their loyalty and wholehearted in their support of the Administrative Order of the Faith." (Citadel of Faith, p. 22)

Therefore it is not so much a matter of which is more important, the teaching work or family and personal responsibilities, but how we can seek a balance in our lives to accomplish both of these sacred tasks. As you will note from the enclosed excerpts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian, the friends are never encouraged to use serving the Faith as a reason to neglect their families. The Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated August 1, 1978, to an individual believer, reiterated this principle:

"In considering the problems that you and your wife are experiencing, the House of Justice points out that the unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the fami-

ly. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires.

"Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict."

In conclusion, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to share with you the following statement from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer who was experiencing difficulties in his personal life:

"We must be patient with others, infinitely patient!, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair!... He urges you to persevere and add up your accomplishments, rather than to dwell on the dark side of things. Everyone's life has both a dark and bright side. The Master said: turn your back to the darkness and your face to me." (From a letter dated October 22, 1949, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF THE GUARDIAN ON THE SUBJECT OF MARRIAGE AND THE BAHÁ'Í HOME

"Under ordinary circumstances, non-Bahá'ís as well as Bahá'ís have to make many choices in life between what they consider their duty and what might lead to a more ideal personal state for them. Prayerfully, wisely and conscientiously, individuals must settle these matters for themselves.

"Wherever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not." (From a letter dated November 9, 1956, written on

behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America)

"Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá'u'lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá'í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other." (From a letter dated May 14, 1929, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

"He feels very strongly that Bahá'ís, if possible, more especially Bahá'ís who serve the Cause as actively and conspicuously as you and your family do, should set the newer believers and young Bahá'ís a high example in every way. As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permits it) and considered marriage a sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriages they have contracted, and to make of them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives." (From a letter dated October 19, 1947, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

"He was very sorry to hear that you are contemplating separation from your husband. As you no doubt know, Bahá'u'lláh considers the marriage bond very sacred; and only under very exceptional and unbearable circumstances is divorce advisable for Bahá'ís.

"The Guardian does not tell you that you must not divorce your husband; but he does urge you to consider prayerfully, not only because you are a believer and anxious to obey the laws of God, but also for the sake of the happiness of your children, whether it is not possible for you to rise above the limitations you have felt in your marriage hitherto, and make a go of it together.

"We often feel that our happiness lies in a certain direction; and yet, if we have to pay too heavy a price for it in the end we may find that we have not purchased either freedom or happiness, but just some new situation of frustration and disillusion." (From a letter dated April 5, 1951, written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

World Centre Analyzes 7 Year Plan

The following analysis of the goals and objectives of the first phase of the Seven Year Plan (1979-1986) was prepared by the Statistics Department at the World Centre.

I. MAJOR OBJECTIVES

1. Carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to territories and islands as yet unopened to the Faith.
2. Expansion and diversification of the community through a great increase in the number of believers from all levels of society, leading more countries to the stage of entry by troops.
3. Prompt, thorough, and continuous consolidation, leading to the safeguarding of victories won.
4. Continued exchange of pioneers and traveling teachers, especially between neighboring lands.
5. Attainment of self-sufficiency by national Bahá'í communities in carrying out vital activities, especially through greater local contributions in support of the Funds of the Faith, and the exercise of utmost economy.
6. Development of programs by National Assemblies, in

consultation with the Continental Boards of Counsellors, which will guide the friends in their service to the Faith, promote the healthy growth of the community, and enable auxiliary institutions to operate with efficiency in the true Bahá'í spirit.

7. Wise and dignified approaches to people prominent in all areas of human endeavor, acquainting them with the Faith and winning their esteem and friendship.

8. Fostering of the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers through the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies, the nurturing of a deeper understanding of Bahá'í family life, and the conduct of activities for children, youth and women.

9. Attainment, where circumstances permit, of any unaccomplished goals of the Five Year Plan.

II. GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Widespread distribution and increase of Local Spiritual Assemblies and localities where Bahá'ís reside.
2. Universal participation of the believers in Bahá'í ser-

vice and the stimulation of their efforts to follow the Bahá'í way of life.

3. Holding of summer and winter schools in accessible places, to permit the participation of the largest number of believers and inquirers.

4. Holding of national and regional teaching conferences.

5. Encouragement of the friends to hold weekly deepening meetings, and, where feasible, to gather for dawn prayers on a regular basis.

6. Provision and dissemination of a balanced supply of Bahá'í literature.

7. Development of locally made recordings on cassette tapes of songs, poems, stories, prayers and other quotations from the Writings.

8. Prompt and regular dissemination of the national newsletter, supplemented where feasible and necessary by regional and local news organs.

9. Use of correspondence courses, where feasible, for teaching and deepening.

10. Maintenance and use of existing properties as a means of fostering Bahá'í community life and adding to the prestige and dignity of the Faith in the eyes of the non-Bahá'í public.

11. Increased use of mass media for teaching and proclamation and, where feasible, for deepening the knowledge of the friends.

III. SPECIFIC GOALS

(NOTE: National Spiritual Assemblies which have not specifically been assigned these goals may find it propitious to adopt some of them in the discharge of their responsibilities.)

A. Expansion:

1. Guidance of the friends to make them aware that in teaching they should aim not only to assist the seeking soul to join the Faith, but also to inspire him to be a teacher of the Faith and its active supporter.

2. Encouragement of Local Assemblies to adopt teaching goals for themselves, in terms of numbers on newly enrolled believers over a given period; numbers of firesides held in the locality; and extent of extension teaching activity outside the local area of jurisdiction.

3. Organization of collaborative teaching between national Bahá'í communities in border areas, by travel-teaching across the border and joint campaigns on both sides of it.

4. Extension of the teaching among the minorities in the

country.

5. Appointment of a teaching committee by each Local Spiritual Assembly, where it is desirable to do so.

B. Consolidation:

1. Encouragement of the friends to attend Nineteen-day Feasts, Bahá'í anniversaries, and such regular meetings as workshops, classes, institutes, etc., held to stimulate them to follow ever more faithfully the Bahá'í way of life.

2. Recruitment and training of believers to assist them to become more effective teachers of the Faith.

3. Calling upon Local Spiritual Assemblies to meet at least once every Bahá'í month, with the aim in view that an increasing number of Local Assemblies should become "broadly based," "securely grounded," and "efficiently functioning."

C. Children:

1. Providing guidance to Local Spiritual Assemblies in the holding of regular Bahá'í classes for children.

2. Welcoming children whose non-Bahá'í parents wish their children to attend Bahá'í children's classes.

3. Establishment of tutorial schools, where necessary, to provide elementary education.

4. Holding seminars on the Bahá'í education of children.

5. Publication, where needed, of special books for children, including prayers which the children should be encouraged to memorize.

6. Encouragement of the friends to contribute to a special local education fund, administered by the Local Spiritual Assembly, to support its tutorial schools for the children of indigent believers.

D. Youth:

Encouragement of the youth to study the Faith, to conduct their own activities, to prepare and deliver talks about their Bahá'í studies, to deliver the Message of God to the members of their own generation as well as to faculty members at schools and universities, to establish Bahá'í clubs in colleges, to participate in the activities of the community, to travel-teach during their vacations, and to offer themselves as pioneers by attending a school or university in a pioneer goal.

E. Women:

Encouragement of Bahá'í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities, to participate in activities and classes especially for women, and to engage in teaching projects aimed at increasing the enrollment of women.

U.S. Sets 2-Year Guidelines for Plan

The National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to release to the friends the guidelines it has adopted to help the American Bahá'í community fulfill the goals given it by the Universal House of Justice for the first two-year phase of the Seven Year Plan.

These guidelines are the result of many months of consultation involving careful consideration of the advice of the Continental Board of Counsellors, members of the Auxiliary Board, national committees, and Local Spiritual Assemblies. The National Teaching Committee, the National Education Committee, and the International Goals Committee began consulting on those features of the Plan for which they are responsible and have already taken actions intended to fulfill its provisions.

Individual believers and Local Spiritual Assemblies are asked to study these guidelines in the light of the Seven

Year Plan and decide what they can best do to help fulfill it.

Consultation on the Plan at Feasts, Assembly meetings, and at informal gatherings is in order. Every believer has a part to play in making the Plan a success, and no one need feel he or she should wait to be asked to do something by an institution of the Faith before acting.

NOTE: 1. The emphasis throughout these guidelines is on a more systematic development of the American Bahá'í community than has obtained thus far—the necessity of eradicating freneticism from our activities while retaining enthusiasm in all efforts toward the attainment of our goals. While a systematic, phased approach may at first seem slower, the fact is that once set in motion it yields greater and more lasting results than spasmodic, ill-conceived campaigns no matter how many resources are brought to their aid. It is the desire of the National Spiritual

Assembly to cultivate the habit of systematic action at all levels of the community, beginning with the agencies of the national administration of the Faith.

2. Also evident is a greater emphasis on the collaboration which must take place at the grassroots between the Auxiliary Boards of the Continental Board of Counsellors, on the one hand, and Teaching Committees and Local Assemblies, on the other. The success of any plan depends largely on the effectiveness of this collaboration, which it is the duty of national committees, no less than the National Spiritual Assembly itself, to foster and maintain.

EXPANSION

Expansion means growth of the community: more individuals, more localities, more Assemblies. The major targets of this expansion are all strata of society; however, we must reach more people of capacity, specific minorities and the masses (middle-class America).

The basic expansion objectives should be stated in such a way that every Bahá'í in the United States knows what is to be achieved wherever he resides.

The Individual

The Individual is responsible for bringing in one new member each year. Bahá'ís should be urged to reach and teach their peers in the professions and trades, and to nurture them until they become Bahá'ís. When these persons become Bahá'ís they should receive special attention to assist them in their personal development and service to the Faith.

The Locality

Where there are fewer than five believers, the objective should be to expand to five. Where there are five or more, the objective should be to form an Assembly.

The Community

Where there is an Assembly, the first objective should be preservation of the institution, meaning more expansion within the community. Thus, where there are fewer than 15, the immediate objective should be to attain 15 active adult believers.

Where there are 15, three goals should be pursued: (a) incorporation of the Assembly; (b) opening a new locality; and (c) increasing membership to 30 adults.

District Teaching Committees should consider it one of their functions to consult and work with Local Spiritual Assemblies concerning their teaching goals, especially the extension goals.

Large Bahá'í communities having, say, 30 or more adult believers, should be regarded as manpower bases from which pioneers are supplied for the homefront and the international field. The National Teaching Committee and International Goals Committee will need to keep in close contact with such communities, keeping them apprised of current needs.

Furthermore, large communities should also be given special assignments, such as bringing in specific minority groups (e.g., San Francisco could be assigned Japanese; Fresno, Armenians; Chicago, Spanish-speaking and Greeks). In such instances, these communities should receive strong assistance and encouragement from the national administration.

NOTE: If the Auxiliary Board members and the National and District Teaching Committees motivated the community on the basis of these objectives, the goals of any plan could be won without extraordinary effort.

Tasks for the National Teaching Committee

Complete the categorization of Assemblies according to their level of functioning by the end of the second year of

the Plan.

Develop a method, in consultation with the National Education Committee, to assist Local Assemblies to monitor their own progress.

Examine carefully the regional characteristics of the country as outlined in the **Tablets of the Divine Plan** and build teaching programs to capitalize on those characteristics.

Assume responsibility for the functioning of the National Youth Committee, which will operate as an auxiliary of the National Teaching Committee. The Youth Committee, under the direction of the National Teaching Committee, will concern itself primarily with increasing the number of Bahá'í youth while at the same time assisting them to engage in the three fields of service identified for them by the Universal House of Justice. Regarding youth activities, the National Teaching Committee should also consider the following:

- Invite youth from various regions of the country to meet and consult with it periodically for the purpose of keeping it abreast of the sentiments, concerns and needs of youth.

- Devise a plan to revive the youth and college clubs, to stimulate the college clubs to exploit the academic community for the benefit of the Faith, and facilitate appropriate relations between Local Assemblies and college clubs.

- Help youth exploit college newspapers.
- Help youth use the media of forums and seminars to promote Bahá'í ideas.

- Help youth attract foreign students to the Faith.
- Help youth promote youth clubs.
- Train youth leaders.
- Establish a fellowship program at the National Center for training youngsters in Bahá'í administration.

- Hold a National Youth Conference every other year, beginning in 1981; regional conferences in alternate years.

Entry by Troops

For the first two years of the Plan, the committee should concentrate on areas already experiencing entry by troops, making sure also to aim at doubling the number of Bahá'ís in each of the following places: California, Illinois, New York State and Washington, D.C.

Minorities

Intensification of the teaching work among minorities is to be effected by the appointment of special committees, by a deliberate program of reaching people of capacity within each group, and by constant monitoring of the programs adopted by these committees. Special emphasis should be given to increasing teaching activities among the Spanish-speaking people at the same time that other minorities are being reached and taught.

Influential People

Establish special programs for reaching the leaders of thought and people of influence and appoint a committee for stimulating the development of such programs.

Collaboration With Auxiliary Board Members

Collaboration between the Auxiliary Board members and teaching committees should be intensified by the National Teaching Committee's own deliberate actions in encouraging District Teaching Committees to keep the Auxiliary Board members regularly informed of teaching activities and their plans and hopes for the work in their areas.

It is important that, before completing their plans at the beginning of the year, the District Teaching Committees arrange to consult with the Auxiliary Board members, so that the committees can benefit from the advice of the Board

members during the planning process.

CONSOLIDATION

Consolidation refers, in part, to the development of the distinctive characteristics of Bahá'í life. The targets of consolidation are individuals, families, children, youth, and Assemblies. These components constitute the Bahá'í community.

We have already developed basic programs to accomplish consolidation objectives on a broad basis. They are:

- parent training/child education
- comprehensive deepening
- Local Spiritual Assembly development
- Bahá'í schools, institutes and conferences

Suggested activities for implementing consolidation programs:

1. Institute two national study months per year using the format of the first Victory Weekend programs of 1978. The basic motivation of these programs would be to encourage the community at large to grow together in knowledge and spirit.

2. Designate the months of September and January as National Study Months. (There could be two general meetings on alternate weekends with homework assignments to cover the month's activities.)

3. Invite Auxiliary Board members and their assistants to assist in executing all consolidation programs, to encourage the participation of the friends, and to take actions according to their own discretion to extend the benefits of such programs to areas where the friends fail to get involved in deepening programs.

4. Urge Local Spiritual Assemblies to call upon the services of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.

5. Call for widespread and imaginative programs for Universal Children's Day.

6. Urge all communities to establish and sustain classes for children on a regular basis.

7. Request the National Education Committee to continue the successful "Youth Energy Zone" conference; collaborate with the National Teaching Committee in implementing the conference.

8. Encourage individuals to engage freely and consistently in private study of the Bahá'í Writings.

9. Train Assembly officers by region as a regular part of the Local Spiritual Assembly Development Program. This training could begin during the second year of the Seven Year Plan.

10. Request that the National Education Committee conduct weekend institutes which are convenient to new believers in areas where rapid expansion is occurring; invite Auxiliary Board members to assist in such endeavors through their advice and participation.

11. Intensify and expand visits to the National Center as a joint effort of the House of Worship Activities Committee and the National Education Committee.

12. Encourage "Family Night" activities in every community.

13. Urge the National Education Committee to proceed with standardizing the curriculum of Bahá'í summer schools. Summer schools should assign a portion of their activities to training people to carry out certain services to the community (e.g., how to conduct firesides or give public talks; functioning as officers of Assemblies).

PROCLAMATION

Proclamation in the final year of the Five Year Plan took on a new dimension and pointed to rich opportunities for expansion of the Faith among various strata and the need for a higher level of activity in this field.

1. Establish a **Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs**. The purpose of this office is:

- a. to educate the public about the Bahá'í Faith,
- b. to attract public attention to the Bahá'í Faith, and
- c. to make friends for the Bahá'í community.

Thus this office will handle all propaganda activities of the National Assembly. For instance, within the sphere of this office falls NABOHR (North American Bahá'í Office of Human Rights), the Bahá'í United Nations office, **World Order** magazine, and the Louis G. Gregory Award.

Organization/Structure: The directors are the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. The National Spiritual Assembly will appoint an executive committee from its own membership—three or four, including the secretary, perhaps the assistant secretary, and one or two others. The executive officer will be the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Any member of the National Spiritual Assembly may participate in any meeting of the executive committee.

The executive committee will function as an emergency committee when the Faith is under attack and needs to be defended publicly.

The Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs subsumes the functions of the former National Information Office in relation to the non-Bahá'í public.

Hill and Knowlton Inc., public relations and public affairs consultants, are retained as the expert advisers and helpers to the Bahá'í Office of Public Affairs for at least one year.

2. Promote the distribution of **Call to the Nations** as the major proclamation piece during the first phase of the Seven Year Plan.

3. Develop "issues" ads as needed for distribution to local communities.

4. Encourage Bahá'í authors to write articles for publication in prestigious journals and magazines.

5. Ask communities to plan well the celebration of Bahá'í Holy Days and the proclamation of special event days in ways that will attract the public.

6. Encourage the holding of regular study classes at the House of Worship for the general public and publicize them widely.

Contacting Officials, Prominent Persons

The following is a letter sent to all Local Spiritual Assemblies dated August 10, 1979:

We are prompted by certain developments to remind you once again not to contact persons of national prominence about the Bahá'í Faith without the direct permission of the National Spiritual Assembly.

The National Assembly has increased its communications with such persons in recent months and is intensifying its efforts to contact more and more of them in view of the situation in Iran. It would be a humbug if such contacts were to fail because of the conflicting actions of other institutions and individuals in the Bahá'í community. We call this to your attention because we have learned in recent

weeks that Local Assemblies and individuals have been contacting such persons about the Iranian crisis and other Bahá'í matters. In one particular instance, a representative from our assembly was rebuffed by a nationally prominent person, who complained that the Bahá'ís from all over had overwhelmed him with information about the Faith and that some had gone as far as to assume that he might be interested in becoming a Bahá'í. He was quite annoyed and we were quite embarrassed by the innocent but unwise actions of the friends.

To be specific: Please do not contact officials of the national or state governments or other persons who have become prominent nationally by virtue of their outstanding

accomplishments. Should you feel that any such person ought to be contacted with information about the Bahá'í Faith, please send us your recommendation, but take no direct action on your own. There are exceptions, of course, in cases in which the Bahá'í making the contact is himself or herself a relative or close friend of the prominent person in question.

Please share these guidelines immediately and frequently with the friends under your jurisdiction and urge their compliance.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

**NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES**

Status of Bahá'í Children Is Clarified

Because of the widespread misunderstanding that children born to Bahá'í parents are not Bahá'ís until they become fifteen and some confusion over registration of Bahá'í children when they become fifteen, the National Spiritual Assembly has selected for publication certain extracts from the Bahá'í writings that illumine our understanding of the issues involved.

Is the child of Bahá'í parents a Bahá'í?

"Although the children of Bahá'í parents are considered to be Bahá'ís, there is no objection at the present time, for purposes of keeping a correct census, and also ascertaining whether the young people are, sincerely, believers, and willing to do their share in service to the Faith, to ask them to make a declaration of their intention, at the age of fifteen or so. Originally the Guardian understands this was adopted in America to enable young Bahá'í men to make certain arrangements in connection with their application for non-combatant status, upon their attaining the age of military service. There is really nothing about it in the Teachings or in the Administration. Your Assembly is free to do as it pleases in this matter." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, dated June 17, 1954)

"In reply to your letter...about the declaration of children as Bahá'ís, the Universal House of Justice advises that the basic principle to follow is that children born into Bahá'í families should be considered as Bahá'ís. A couple who accept the Faith when they already have children must exercise the greatest love and understanding towards their children; no hard and fast lines can be drawn in such cases as so much depends upon the ages and reactions of the children concerned; each case must be viewed in its own light—the main thing is that all Bahá'í children and children of Bahá'ís should be made to feel welcome at Bahá'í children's classes and other community gatherings. Tact and wisdom must be exercised, especially if only one of the parents has accepted the Faith. The children of non-Bahá'í parents should be regarded as Bahá'ís if they accept the tenets of the Cause, and if their parents give consent. On the basis of these principles your National Assembly is free to adopt any procedure it feels necessary to maintain records of the enrolments of children under the age of 15. Similarly, the procedure for registering Bahá'í youth at 15 years of age is a matter left to your discretion." (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia, dated July 16, 1976)

What is the administrative significance of the age of fifteen?

"... Both children of Bahá'í parents, and children who, with their non-Bahá'í parents' consent, declare their faith in Bahá'u'lláh before they are fifteen years old, are regarded as Bahá'ís and it is within a Spiritual Assembly's discretion to request such children to undertake work of which they are capable in service to the Faith, such as service on suitable committees. However, upon attaining the age of fifteen a child becomes spiritually mature and is responsible for stating on his own behalf whether or not he wishes to remain a member of the Bahá'í community. If he does not then reaffirm his faith, he must be treated, administratively, as a non-Bahá'í." (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, dated December 12, 1975)

"The House of Justice wishes us to point out that whereas your Assembly is quite free to compile a register of Bahá'í children in Luxembourg for your own administrative convenience, there is no general requirement that Bahá'í Assemblies do this. In doing so you should avoid rigidity. Many problems can arise in implementing such a procedure, as individual cases vary in many ways. The important thing is that the children of Bahá'ís should be welcomed at Bahá'í gatherings and

Ordering Materials From Outside Sources

In recent months Bahá'ís in scattered areas around the country have received mailings from publishers other than the Publishing Trust—mailings advertising Bahá'í materials. Several librarians and Local Spiritual Assemblies have asked about the policy regarding the distribution of these publishers' books and materials.

Bahá'í librarians or other agencies are free to order, promote, and distribute Bahá'í materials from any source, domestic or foreign, at the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly. In other words, each Spiritual Assembly (or Group) must decide for itself whether it wants its librarian, for example, to order from other publishers, to make announcements regarding their materials at Feasts, and so on. Individuals, of course, are free to order from whomever they choose.

parents should be encouraged and assisted to bring their children up in the light of the Faith." (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Luxembourg, dated April 13, 1978)

Need Bahá'í children register as Bahá'ís upon becoming fifteen?

"In answer to your letter ... concerning the registration of children of Bahá'í parents the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to say that at the present time it prefers to leave the details of such matters to the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly. One National Assembly, for example, sends a very nice letter to each Bahá'í child in its community on the occasion of its fifteenth birthday (unless, of course, it has reason to doubt that the child in question is a Bahá'í), explaining the meaning of attaining the age of maturity, and extending the good wishes of the Assembly for his or her future service to the Cause. This does not require an active response from every child but does provide each with an opportunity to make his or her position clear if desired. The House of Justice points out that the Assembly must wisely steer a course between seeming to doubt the faith of a child who has been brought up as a devout Bahá'í on the one hand, and seeming to compel a child to be a member of the Bahá'í community against his will, on the other." (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal

House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, dated October 5, 1978)

"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 light of the 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. Similarly the way in which Bahá'í children should be registered upon reaching the age of fifteen is within the discretion of each National Spiritual Assembly; there is no objection to using for this purpose the general enrolment card, if such a card is adopted, or a new and separate one specially for Bahá'í children attaining the age of fifteen. It is important, however, that whatever method of enrolment is used or card adopted, it is clear to such children that they have been Bahá'ís up to that time, and that on attaining the age of spiritual maturity they are re-affirming their belief in Bahá'u'lláh. The form and wording of an enrolment or registration card is also within the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly." (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany, dated October 28, 1975)

Teachings on Adultery, Homosexuality

Because the moral standards of society have deteriorated so markedly and become so thoroughly confused, the National Spiritual Assembly wishes to draw to the attention of the friends certain extracts from the Bahá'í writings on adultery and homosexuality for their general edification.

Ye are forbidden adultery, homosexuality and unfaithfulness. Refrain therefrom, O concourse of those who have set their faces towards Him. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been created to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions. This is what the lord of all mankind enjoineth upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself unto the All-Merciful and commiteth satanic deeds, verily he is not of Me. Unto this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond that this eloquent, truthful and trustworthy Tongue. (Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated December 9, 1971, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States)

Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low water mark in history, is the question of immorality, and over-emphasis on sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.

We must struggle against the evils in society by spiritual means, and medical and social ones as well. We must be tolerant and uncompromising, understanding but immovable in our point of view.

The thing people need to meet this kind of trouble, as well as every other type, is greater spiritual understanding and stability; and of course we Bahá'ís believe that ultimately this can only be given to mankind through the Teachings of the Manifestation of God for this Day. (From a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer, dated May 21, 1954)

Concerning your question whether there are any legitimate forms of expression of the sex instinct outside the marriage; according to the Bahá'í Teachings no sexual act can be considered lawful unless performed between lawfully married persons. The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigor. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be over stressed. (From a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer, dated December 13, 1940)

No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature.

To be afflicted in this way is a great burden upon a conscientious soul.

But through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul

can overcome this handicap.

God judges each soul on its own merits. The Guardian cannot tell you what the attitude of God would be towards a person who lives a good life in most ways, but not in this way. All he can tell you is that it is forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh, and that one should struggle and struggle again to overcome it. We must be hopeful of God's mercy but not impose upon it. (From a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer, dated March 26, 1950)

A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and transexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul. It should, moreover, be born in mind that although to be married is highly desirable, and Bahá'u'lláh has strongly recommended it, it is not the central purpose of life. If a person has to wait a considerable period of time before finding a spouse, or if ultimately, he or she must remain single, it does not mean that he or she is thereby unable to fulfill his or her life's purpose. (From a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated February 6, 1973)

As the friends can clearly note, Bahá'u'lláh denounces the person who engages in homosexual or other immoral relations with the censure: "Verily, he is not of Me"—a form of condemnation He applies to users of opium. In these days when in the United States an inherently deficient moral code tolerates and promotes indulgence in one's passions and all manner of sexual vices, the Bahá'ís should refuse to be influenced by the perversity of their society and its corruption, and through determination, prayer and daily vigilance, as well as active and wholehearted participation in Bahá'í service, and when necessary, with the assistance of competent and expert advice, release themselves from the bondage of their carnal desires and take refuge under the shadow of God's loving care and mercy. (From a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, dated December 9, 1979)

The Bahá'í Observance Of Christian Holidays

Should Bahá'ís observe Christmas and New Year's? The Guardian's answer to this question, published in **Bahá'í News**, March 1940 (No. 134), was as follows:

"As regards the celebration of the Christian holidays by the believers, it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Year, and to have their festival gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Rúz ..."

Use of 'National Review'

The **Bahá'í National Review** is a publication through which the National Spiritual Assembly informs enrolled Bahá'ís of important matters of national policy and explains various teachings of the Faith. It should be carefully studied and preserved for further reference and instructional purposes. Local Spiritual Assemblies, in particular, should keep all the issues of **Bahá'í National Review** on hand in a ready reference file.

The **Bahá'í National Review** is for Bahá'ís only and is to be distinguished from **The American Bahá'í**, which contains news of events taking place in the American Bahá'í community and is written for the enjoyment and inspiration of the Bahá'ís. While it is permissible to share **The American Bahá'í** with friends who are close to the Faith, the **Bahá'í National Review** is for registered Bahá'ís only and therefore should be removed from **The American Bahá'í** before the latter is shown to anyone else.

Sending Assembly Minutes

The National Spiritual Assembly requests that all Local Spiritual Assemblies continue to send their minutes to the National Center. In submitting the minutes, Assemblies are asked to observe the following:

1. Minutes are not a substitute for correspondence. Anything requiring action by the National Spiritual Assembly or one of its committees should be reported by letter and mailed in a separate envelope.

2. Be certain to put the Assembly's name and state at the top of the first page of the minutes.

3. Send the minutes immediately after they have been typed or written. Please do not wait until the Assembly has approved the minutes.

4. Write in the bottom-left corner of the envelope, "Minutes."

Your attention to these matters will greatly facilitate the handling of minutes in the Secretariat.

An Apology for Our Errors

The editor wishes to apologize for the many typographical errors in the June 1979 issue of the **Bahá'í National Review**. He would also like to make the following corrections:

1. The headline on Page 5 should have read "Public Kissing, Embracing Discussed." Use of the term "Condemned" gives a misleading connotation.

2. On Page 4, in the statement on "Administering Bahá'í Marriage Laws," the second sentence in the second paragraph of the section entitled "When Two Ceremonies Are Held" should have read: "The reason for this is that a Bahá'í marriage in the eyes of the Faith **is not valid** unless the couple are legally married, either during the ceremony itself or beforehand." (Omitted words are in bold face.)

3. The following extract from a letter written by the Universal House of Justice was left out of the section entitled "Unreasonable Refusal to Give Consent" on Page 5:

"... it should be understood that consent to marriage is all that is required from a parent. It is not necessary that the parents consent to a Bahá'í ceremony. However, if the reason the parent refuses to give consent is the fact that the parties propose to have a Bahá'í ceremony, then the marriage cannot take place."