

Chapter Two

Bahá'í Elections

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2. BAHÁ'Í ELECTIONS

ANNUAL BAHÁ'Í ELECTIONS

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 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 Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf, dated November 18, 1933, to National Spiritual Assemblies

The Administrative Order of the Cause, though first established in America, copied as a model by other national Baha'i communities, is not an American production, but is a universal system based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 29, 1938, to an individual believer

Bahá'í elections are the means of establishing Bahá'í administrative structures at local, regional, national and international levels. Elections of the Local Spiritual Assembly, Regional Bahá'í Council, and of the delegate to the National Convention (Unit Convention) are held annually. Bahá'í elections are for Bahá'ís only. To participate in a Bahá'í election, a believer must be at least 18 years of age and in possession of his or her administrative rights. Additional criteria apply for regional, national and international elections as described elsewhere.

FORMING THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

It is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the *Most Holy Book*, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine, a local "Spiritual Assembly" be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision. The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local House of Justice.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 37

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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 11, 1931, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 46

OBLIGATION TO FORM

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá... .

Bahá'u'lláh, *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 13

NOTE: A group wishing to form an Assembly or to restore a lost Assembly should notify the National Spiritual Assembly before taking action.

SPIRIT AND CHARACTER OF BAHÁ'Í ELECTIONS

The fundamental difference between the system of candidature and the Bahá'í system is that, in the former, individuals, or those who nominate them, decide that they should be placed in positions of authority and put themselves forward to be voted into it. In the Bahá'í system it is the mass of the electorate which makes the decision. If an individual ostentatiously places himself in the public eye with the seeming purpose of getting people to vote for him, the members of the electorate regards this as self-conceit and are affronted by it; they learn to distinguish between someone who is well known as an unintentional result of active public service and someone who makes an exhibition of himself merely to attract votes.

Memorandum from the Universal House of Justice dated 16 November 1988 to the International Teaching Center in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 29, p. 7

The manner of participation by all adult members of the community in these elections is a distinguishing feature of the System of Bahá'u'lláh; for it is a bounden duty that confers a high privilege upon every Bahá'í to select, as a responsible citizen of the new world being brought into existence, the composition of the institutions having authority over the functioning of the Bahá'í community.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 2007, to the Bahá'ís of the World

With concerted worldwide endeavour to advance the process of entry by troops gathering momentum through implementation of the provisions of the Five Year Plan, it is now opportune that the believers everywhere give greater attention to strengthening the process by which Assemblies, national and local, are elected. The manner of participation by all adult members of the community in these elections is a distinguishing feature of the system of Bahá'u'lláh; for it is a bounden duty that confers a high privilege upon every Bahá'í to select, as a responsible citizen of the new world being brought into existence, the composition of the institutions having authority over the functioning of the Bahá'í community. In this regard, indifference and neglect on the part of any believer are alien to the spirit of the Cause. The friends must strive ceaselessly to avoid being contaminated with these destructive attitudes, which have inflicted such damage on the integrity and authority of the institutions of a declining world order.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 2007, to the Bahá'ís of the World

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.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated February 4, 1935, to an individual believer, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria*, vol. 1, p. 68; cited in the letter of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 2007, to the Bahá'ís of the World

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 and is forbidden.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated March 8, 1932, to the friends in Persia, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 45

For a full discussion of this subject, please see the letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World on 25 March 2007. The letter is available online under Resource Documents for this chapter, or from [the Bahá'í Reference Library](#).

ASSEMBLY'S RESPONSIBILITY TO EDUCATE THE BELIEVERS

The aim should always be so to educate the friends during the year that they consider their participation in Bahá'í elections not only as a right they exercise, but as a spiritual obligation which, when discharged in the proper Bahá'í spirit, contributes to the health and growth of the Bahá'í community.

Memorandum from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 18, 1980, to the International Teaching Centre

With a heightened awareness of the functions to be performed by the elected body, the believer can properly assess those for whom a vote should be cast. From among the pool of those whom the elector believes to be qualified to serve, selection should be made with due consideration given to such other

factors as age distribution, diversity, and gender. The elector should make his choice after careful thought over an extended period before the actual election.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 2007, to the Bahá'ís of the World

It [the Local Spiritual Assembly] sees to it that gatherings for the Nineteen Day Feast, Holy Day commemorations, and Bahá'í elections become opportunities to reinforce the high ideals of the community, strengthen its shared sense of commitment, and fortify its spiritual character. As numbers in the community grow larger, the Assembly gives thought to when it could be beneficial to decentralize such meetings so as to facilitate ever-greater participation on these important occasions.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 29, 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BAHÁ'Í ELECTOR

It is expected that in the future ... there will be very large numbers of individuals who have the qualities which make them fit for service....Of these only a few can be elected at any one time. It is also expected that, through training and experience in the process and spirit of Bahá'í elections, the members of the electorate will have raised their consciousness of their responsibility to vote for only those who satisfy the requirements that the Guardian has outlined. They will, therefore, see it as their continuing duty to familiarize themselves with the character and abilities of those who are active in the community so that, when the time for an election comes, they will already have some idea of the people from among whom they must make their choice.

The Universal House of Justice, memorandum to the International Teaching Center dated 16 November 1988

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. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, 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.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 47

[Y]ou should choose those women and men who, through their proven experience in the activities of the Plan, their capacity to participate in the learning process, and their upright character and constructive attitudes, can best advance the process of entry by troops in the various provinces. Much will depend on the quality of your deliberations, which should be carried out in a true Bahá'í spirit, standing humbly in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, forgoing self-interest and all partisan concerns, and thinking only of the best interests of the Faith that you all hold dear.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated October 27, 2005, to a National Spiritual Assembly

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 local activities, be they teaching, administrative or otherwise, and to fully and wholeheartedly participate in the affairs of the local as well as national committees and assemblies in his country... 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 corruption and partisanship, it has to be entirely discarded in all Bahá'í elections.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated 4 February 1935 to an individual believer, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, p. 68

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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 27, 1938, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 43

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.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated January 16, 1932, to the friends in Persia, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 44

On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly 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.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated February 27, 1923, to the Bahá'ís of the East, in *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I*, no. 706

Let us recall His explicit and often-repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is, in truth, appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 65

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 favor of those who he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 136

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ELECTED

Election to an Assembly, from a Bahá'í point of view, is not a right that people are entitled to, or an honor to which they should aspire; it is a duty and responsibility to which they may be called. The purpose is that those who are elected to an Assembly should be the most worthy for this service; this does not and cannot mean that all those who are worthy will be elected.

Memorandum from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 16, 1988, to the International Teaching Centre, in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 18, p. 4

Foremost is the election of the members of your ... Assembly, when you will choose individuals who can meet the pressing requirements of the progress of the Cause at the present stage of its development.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 16, 2013, to the delegates gathered at Bahá'í National Conventions

Due regard must be paid to their actual capacity and present attainments, and only those who are best qualified for membership, be they men or women, and irrespective of social standing, should be elected to the extremely responsible position of a member of the Bahá'í Assembly.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated December 27, 1923

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.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated August 11, 1933

It is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary

qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 88

[Y]ou should choose those women and men who, through their proven experience in the activities of the Plan, their capacity to participate in the learning process, and their upright character and constructive attitudes, can best advance the process of entry by troops in the various provinces. Much will depend on the quality of your deliberations, which should be carried out in a true Bahá'í spirit, standing humbly in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, forgoing self-interest and all partisan concerns, and thinking only of the best interests of the Faith that you all hold dear.

Letter dated 27 October 2005 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies ... we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part, every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 88

In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined 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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated October 24, 1947, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no 27

[C]oncerning 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 comprise 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. For as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly emphasized Bahá'í assemblies are under the guidance and protection of God. The elections, especially 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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 15, 1935, to an individual believer, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly: An Institution of the Baha'i Administrative Order, A Compilation*, p. 6

REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES DESIRABLE

Bearing in mind the extreme desirability of having the minority elements participate and share responsibility in the conduct of Bahá'í activity, it should be the duty of every Bahá'í community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the diverse minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Bahá'í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these diverse elements, racial or otherwise, as possible.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, pp. 35-36

[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, 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.

Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated August 11, 1933, to an individual believer, quoted in *Extracts from the Guardian's Letters on the Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections*, p. 3

See also:

Voting — Tie Votes — Minorities, Ch. 2

Considerations for Diverse Populations, Ch. 6

ELECTING NEW MEMBERS

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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated April 27, 1932, to an individual believer, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 63

There is no objection in principle to an Assembly being re-elected whether in toto or in part, provided the members are considered to be well qualified for that post. It is individual merit that counts. Novelty, or the mere act of renewal of elections, are purely secondary considerations. Changes in Assembly membership would be welcome so far as they do not prejudice the quality of such membership.

Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, pg. 24

He was very happy to see that changes had been made in membership of the N.S.A. this year, not from any reasons of personality, but because change itself is good and brings a fresh outlook into the discussions of any assembly. He was also pleased to see that these changes involved more younger people being on the N.S.A.; with the tremendous amount of work which this ... Plan is going to involve, this will be a great help to the older members of that body.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated May 21, 1946, to an individual believer, in *The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II*, no. 1449

ELECTION ELIGIBILITY

Bahá'í elections are the means of establishing Bahá'í administrative structures at local, regional, national and international levels. Bahá'í elections are for Bahá'ís only. Additional criteria apply for regional, national and international elections as indicated.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO VOTE OR HOLD OFFICE

Those who are eligible to vote are:

- Any Bahá'í whose membership is in good standing, who is at least eighteen years of age, as of the date of the Bahá'í election, and is a resident of the respective jurisdiction.

Those who are eligible to be voted for are:

- Any Bahá'í whose membership is in good standing, who is at least twenty-one years of age, as of the date of the Bahá'í election, and is a resident of the respective jurisdiction.

Those who cannot participate in Bahá'í elections are:

- Believers deprived of their voting rights
- Believers who are applying to have their membership reinstated after having withdrawn but have not yet received approval from the National Assembly

- Believers who have transferred in from outside New Zealand but whose transfer of membership has not been confirmed by the National Assembly
- Believers who are serving prison sentences
- Individuals who have declared but whose enrolment has not yet been accepted by the Local Assembly
- Those who have moved into the community but have not yet been transferred (can't be on two voting lists)
- A very small number of individuals in New Zealand are entitled to vote but are not eligible for election, because they are subject to specific restrictions.
- See also, the section below, "Members of Appointed Institutions".

Age of Eligibility

[W]e have decided that, ... while the age at which a believer becomes eligible to serve on a Spiritual Assembly shall remain twenty-one, the age at which a believer may vote in Bahá'í elections shall be lowered to eighteen.

Universal House of Justice, Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2021

Members of Appointed Institutions

All adult Baha'is, including Continental Counsellors and members of the Auxiliary Boards, are eligible to vote in elections for delegates or in elections for members of a Local Spiritual Assembly. The rank and specific duties of the Counsellors render them ineligible for service on local, regional or national administrative bodies. Auxiliary Board members are eligible for any elective office but if elected to such a post on a national, regional or local level must decide whether to retain membership on the Board or accept the post as they cannot serve in both capacities at the same time. Whether elected to a Spiritual Assembly or a Regional Council, or as a delegate to the National Convention, a Board member should be allowed a reasonable length of time to make a choice and should feel no compulsion to decide immediately after the results of the election are announced. Membership on an Auxiliary Board would be regarded as a valid reason for resignation from an elected body.

Document prepared by the Universal House of Justice, dated January 1, 2001, "The Institution of the Counsellors", p. 11

[A]uxiliary 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 Board member may serve temporarily as a member of the Assembly to preserve its Assembly status.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly, cited in the compilation Auxiliary Board Members, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 293

Believers can serve at the same time both as assistants to Auxiliary Board members and on administrative institutions.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 7, 1973, to the Bahá'ís of the World, in *Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, par. 137.4

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.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Continental Boards of Counsellors*, p. 34

Newly declared Bahá'ís

Newly declared Bahá'ís are eligible to vote in an election or to be elected to a Local Spiritual Assembly once their enrolment in the Faith has been confirmed by the Local Spiritual Assembly. The exception to this guidance is believers who belong to certain populations whose enrolment requires a process involving the National Spiritual Assembly. These include, primarily, persons of Middle Eastern origin. For further

information, please contact the National Spiritual Assembly. Re-enrolment of individuals who previously resigned from the Faith also requires National Assembly approval.

See also:

Election Call — Voting Lists, Ch. 2

Summary of the Enrolment Process — Special Enrolment Procedures, Ch.5

Process of Enrolment, Ch. 5

Acceptance of Declaration/Registration, Ch. 5

RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

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.

It is, moreover, not essential for a person to be physically present to be a 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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 18, 1985, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 20

Only those who physically reside within the boundaries of an established locality have the right to either vote for or be elected to the Local Assembly. A believer living outside the limits, even if he or she has a business and/or mailing address within the city, may not be considered a part of that locality.

See also:

Election Call — Voting Lists, Ch. 2 (below)

Believers outside Civic Boundaries

Generally, only those who actually physically reside within the boundaries of an established locality have the right to either vote for or be elected to the Assembly. There may be instances where an individual's firm intention to reside in a locality within a very short span of time after Ridván may allow them to vote in the Ridván election of that locality, but this matter would require the consideration of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Students and Others Who Reside in More Than One Community

[F]or 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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 18, 1985, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 20

If a believer resides in more than one locality during the year, the locality in which the believer resides for the longest period of time (e.g., seven out of the twelve months) should be considered the community in which he or she is eligible to vote for and serve on the Assembly. If the length of time spent at each residence is approximately the same, the believer may choose the community in which to hold membership. The individual's residential address in the national membership database should be within the locality in which he or she chooses to vote.

Where Individuals May Vote When Moving at Ridván

The National Spiritual Assembly has decided that if a Bahá'í has made a firm commitment, such as signing a lease or purchase agreement on a house, he is eligible to serve on the Assembly if he is able to physically reside in the community within 42 days (six weeks).

No Minimum Residency Requirement for Voting

There is no minimum amount of time Bahá'ís must be residents of a community before they can participate in a Bahá'í election. If they move to a community the day of an election, they may participate in it, as long as they are making their home in that community and fulfil other eligibility requirements.

The Local Spiritual Assembly secretary should check with the person's previous Assembly and 1) find out if the person is a Bahá'í in good standing, 2) ask for a transfer through the National Office and 3) ask that the person's name be deleted from the other community's voting list. (This may need to be done by telephone if time is short before the election.)

Change of Community Boundaries May Affect Who is Eligible

Bahá'í community membership is sometimes affected by civil boundary changes, and because of this, those who are eligible to serve on the Assembly one year may not be members of the same community the next year. The National Spiritual Assembly should be notified of all civil boundary changes. No change in a membership list resulting from civil boundary changes should be made until the National Assembly approves or acknowledges the changes.

Newly Transferred Bahá'ís from Other Countries

Bahá'ís are not eligible to vote and serve on a Spiritual Assembly until their status has been verified and their transfer has been completed by the National Office.

See also:

Transfers for Migrants Arriving in New Zealand or Leaving New Zealand, Ch. 5
Policies on Administrative Participation During Transfer of Membership, Ch. 5

Bahá'ís with Unknown Addresses

If contact is lost with someone e.g. mail is returned, or they move with no forwarding address, the Local Spiritual Assembly should attempt to locate the individual. If they cannot be contacted, and **a reasonable search has been made**, they would be marked as "Lost Contact" on the national database, and remain on the community voting list. After 3 years, if the Local Assembly confirms that they have not been located, they would be marked as "Gone No Address" by the National Office and would not appear on any voting list, but would be retained on the national membership list.

To make a reasonable search:

1. Search using www.whitepages.co.nz
2. If there is a phone number, address, or email—send letter and make phone call.

Enrolments and Transfers from the Middle East

Persian declarants (any person from Persian background regardless of their immigration status or length of stay in New Zealand) and Middle Easterners may participate in administrative functions only after their enrolments and transfers are confirmed by the National Spiritual Assembly.

See also:

Election Call — Voting Lists (below), Ch. 2

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

People with Physical Handicaps Not Ineligible

In view of the spiritual principles which must guide the elector in selecting those he feels are best fitted to serve on the Assembly, and to preserve the unfettered freedom of the voter, a believer should not be arbitrarily considered ineligible for Assembly membership because of physical handicaps. The handicapped person, seemingly incapable of taking part in consultation, may in fact be able to function quite adequately, provided his fellow Assembly members are determined to find ways in which they can help him to participate. In the Bahá'í community for anyone to be elected, a sufficient number of voters

must have prayerfully considered that believer fitted to serve. If the elected Assembly finds that one of its members is unable to function, the question of declaring a vacancy may be considered.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 15, 1965, to a National Spiritual Assembly

See also:

Considerations for Diverse Populations — People with Disabilities, Ch. 6

Persons Who Are Mentally and/or Emotionally Impaired

If a believer is incapable of voting or serving on an Assembly due to a mental impairment, the Assembly should write to the National Assembly, recommending that the person be relieved of administrative service. Until the National Assembly approves the recommendation, the person should be included on the voting list.

As regards the question about a person who is mentally ill attending the Feasts, anybody who is well enough mentally to attend a Bahá'í Feast and understand what it is all about is certainly well enough to be a voting member. Only people who are seriously deranged mentally and confined to institutions or under constant supervision should be deprived of their voting rights.

Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*, p. 59

See also:

Disruptive Behaviours, Ch. 10

Medical Matters — Mental Illness, Ch. 10

Medical Matters — Diminished Mental Capacity, Ch. 10

Persons Requesting to Withdraw

If a person has asked to withdraw from the Faith but the community has not received notice from the National Spiritual Assembly that the withdrawal has been officially accepted, the person is still considered a member of the community, and his or her name should be included on the voting list, except in circumstances that would be communicated to the Local Assembly by the National Office.

Reinstatement of Membership

A person who has previously withdrawn and wishes to be reinstated to Bahá'í membership is eligible to vote in an election only after the reinstatement has been approved by the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Spiritual Assembly should send its recommendation to the National Assembly, which will then notify the Local Assembly upon approval of the reinstatement.

See also:

Election Call — Voting Lists, Ch. 2

Withdrawal From and Reinstatement of Membership, Ch. 5

Prisoners

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 8, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 263

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.

The Universal House of Justice, February 9, 1972

See also:

Considerations for Diverse Populations — Bahá'í Prisoners, Ch. 6

ELECTION PROCEDURES

ELECTION CALL

An election call should be conveyed to all adult believers who are eligible to vote in the Assembly's jurisdiction, with the exception of those who have requested not to be contacted, no less than fifteen days prior to the election. The election call should include clear instructions about when and where the election will take place. It is also considered best practice to provide:

- A ballot with places to enter exactly nine names
- Instructions for voting in person or by absentee ballot

The Local Assembly may consider providing eligible voters with two envelopes, an inner and outer, as described in the next section, for submitting completed ballots.

In the event of failure to notify the community of an election fifteen days prior to the meeting, the Assembly should inform the National Spiritual Assembly immediately, explaining the situation, including the reason why this requirement was not met. The National Assembly will review the case and decide whether the formation will be recognised.

Enclose Ballots in Envelopes

An absentee ballot should be conveyed to the tellers in an outer envelope that has the voter's name, clearly printed on the outside, containing the unlabelled envelope without any marking or designation within which is the ballot paper itself.

The inner envelope is meant to contain the ballot itself after the voter has recorded their vote on it and should always be left blank on the outside.

The outer envelope is meant to securely transport the inner envelope (containing the completed ballot) to the head teller and to identify the voter. It should show the name of the voter in their own handwriting, preferably including a signature, his or her legal place of residence, and be marked "Ballot". It may be advisable to use a third envelope for postal ballots so that signatures do not appear on the outside of envelopes.

Voting Lists

Concerning the distribution and use of a voting list during Bahá'í elections, there is no requirement that such a list be circulated. Instructions to the believers on their responsibilities as electors emphasize the need to give careful consideration, over an extended period of time, to those best qualified to serve, rather than merely consulting a list of names at the time balloting is to occur. Nor should a Spiritual Assembly insist on including the name of a believer on a list to which he strongly objects.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated June 29, 2003, to a National Spiritual Assembly

The TuiCRM database allows the Assembly secretary to view, export and print a list of those eligible to vote (18+ years) and a list of those eligible to be voted for (21+ years). These can be found in the Reports section. The list of those eligible to be voted for is comprised of the names of all Bahá'ís who are eligible to vote and hold elected office, including those who may have requested to receive no communications. It must be available at each election for the tellers and any interested voters.

It may be necessary for the Local Spiritual Assembly to provide the tellers with a list of individuals who may vote but not be voted for. In this category are Counsellors, individuals who have been disqualified by the National Spiritual Assembly from serving on an Assembly (Bahá'í Status: Specific Restrictions), and a few others, particularly some whose nationality precludes them from accepting membership on a Bahá'í institution.

Another category consists of believers who are eligible for election but do not wish for their names to appear on published community lists, for personal reasons. Their wishes should be respected.

In response to your comments regarding the distribution of voting lists, which are prepared by some Assemblies for the convenience of the voters in a Bahá'í election, there is no requirement that such a list

be circulated in advance. As you have noted, guidance to the believers on their responsibilities as electors emphasizes the need to give careful consideration, over an extended period of time, to those best qualified to serve, rather than merely consulting a list of names at the time balloting is to occur. However, there is no objection to providing the believers with a list of the names of those Bahá'ís in good standing ... Of course, the contact information of individuals should not be included, and measures would need to be taken to ensure the security of such lists, which should not be distributed freely in the community.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 8 December 2011, to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand

It is allowable for community lists, e.g., voting lists, to be shared within Assemblies with the following advisory note when sharing:

This document is strictly private, confidential and personal to its recipients and should not be copied, distributed or reproduced in whole or in part, nor passed to any third party. This information may be used only for the specified purpose and must be used in a sensitive manner which ensures the utmost privacy and confidentiality of the information.

See also:

Assembly Formation by Joint Declaration, Ch. 2
Ch. 5, Community Membership

TELLERS

The tellers are appointed by the outgoing Spiritual Assembly. Any Bahá'í, adult or youth, in good standing may serve as teller; however, the head teller should be an adult, 21 years of age or older. The task includes:

- Obtaining from the Assembly Secretary all absentee ballots sent ahead of time and bringing them unopened to the election meeting. The Secretary should check for last minute ballots before going to the election. (See Election Process — Absentee Voting)
- Explaining the election process to the assembled voters
- Collecting ballots at the election meeting
- Counting ballots (See Election Process — Counting Ballots)
- Making certain that the ballots are valid (See Election Process — Invalid Ballots)
- Recording the results of the election
- Reporting the results to those gathered for the election meeting (See Election Process — Tie Votes)
- Submitting a fully completed report form to the Local Spiritual Assembly. (See Actions after Any Type of Assembly Formation — Reporting Election Results)
- Turn over ballots to the Local Assembly after the election

In addition, the head teller is responsible for: organising the work of the tellers; announcing the results of the election; ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the report and signing the completed form.

Every year before Ridván the National Spiritual Assembly sends a letter to Local Spiritual Assemblies detailing the procedures for the annual meeting and election, and for reporting results to the National Office. Assemblies should familiarise themselves with this useful reference. A document to be given to head tellers is also supplied. In a convenient form, this provides the information they will need for their task.

See also:

Resource document — Tellers' Responsibilities, Ch. 2
Children and Youth May Serve, Ch. 3

Election with Less Than a Quorum

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 16, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 41

As long as all eligible voters are properly notified of the election meeting and a minimum of five votes are cast, whether in person or by absentee ballot, the election is valid, even if only one eligible voter attends the meeting. While the election itself is valid, the National Assembly will determine, following receipt of the election report, whether the Assembly can be duly recognised.

If fewer than five votes are cast, an Assembly should still be formed and the formation papers submitted to the National Assembly along with a description of any unusual or extenuating circumstances. The information will be reviewed by the National Assembly, and a decision will be made on whether to recognise the Assembly's formation. In the meantime, those elected should begin to carry out the duties and responsibilities of an Assembly.

See also:

Elections Held on First Day of Ridván, Ch. 2
Reporting Election Results, Ch. 2

VOTING

Sacred Responsibility

These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the friends, and every declared believer of twenty-one years and above, far from standing aloof and assuming an indifferent or independent attitude, should regard it his sacred duty to take part conscientiously and diligently in the election, the consolidation and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 39

I feel I must reaffirm the vital importance and necessity of the right of voting — a sacred responsibility of which no adult recognized believer should be deprived, unless he is associated with a community that has not as yet been in a position to establish a Local Assembly. This distinguishing right which the believer possesses, however, does not carry with it nor does it imply an obligation to cast his vote, if he feels that the circumstances under which he lives do not justify or allow him to exercise that right intelligently and with understanding. This is a matter which should be left to the individual to decide himself according to his own conscience and discretion.

Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour, Messages from Shoghi Effendi to the North American Bahá'ís, 1932-1946*, par. 15.1

The manner of participation by all adult members of the community in these elections is a distinguishing feature of the System of Bahá'u'lláh; for it is a bounden duty that confers a high privilege upon every Bahá'í to select, as a responsible citizen of the new world being brought into existence, the composition of the institutions having authority over the functioning of the Bahá'í community. ... [I]ndifference and neglect on the part of any believer are alien to the spirit of the Cause.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated March 25, 2007, to the Bahá'ís of the World

Correct Number of Votes Must Be Cast by Each Voter

Local Spiritual Assembly

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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 27, 1940, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 47

Regional Bahá'í Council

The members of the Regional Bahá'í Council for the North Island are nine in number; for the South Island the members are five in number at the present time. For details, please see the separate section on Regional Bahá'í Council elections below.

Unit Convention

In Unit Convention elections, various numbers of delegates are elected in each unit according to the population of each unit. The National Spiritual Assembly sets this number for each unit each year. Further details are explained in the separate section on Unit Convention elections below.

Voting for Oneself

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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 27, 1938, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 43

Absentee Voting

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated January 21, 1973, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

An absentee ballot should be conveyed to the tellers in an outer envelope that has the voter's name, clearly printed on the outside, containing the unlabelled envelope without any marking or designation within which is the ballot paper itself.

The inner envelope is meant to contain the ballot itself after the voter has recorded their vote on it and should always be left blank on the outside.

The outer envelope is meant to securely transport the inner envelope (containing the completed ballot) to the head teller and to identify the voter. It should show the name of the voter in their own handwriting, preferably including a signature, his or her legal place of residence, and be marked "Ballot". It may be advisable to use a third envelope for postal ballots so that signatures do not appear on the outside of envelopes.

If mailed, the absentee ballot should be mailed far enough in advance to ensure its receipt prior to the election date. If an individual unexpectedly cannot attend the election, he or she may call whomever the Assembly has designated to accept ballots by phone (usually the Head Teller). This should be counted as an "in person" vote on the Tellers' Report. Email voting can be permitted if confirmation by telephone can be done.

Assistance in Filling Out Ballot

If a person is unable to fill out a ballot form (for example, believers who lack sufficient English proficiency or are blind) she or he may contact a person designated by the Local Assembly to accept the ballots (usually the head teller or the secretary of the Assembly) for assistance. The Local Assembly should make arrangements for someone to complete the ballot according to the desire of the person in this situation. The Assembly should select a person of great trustworthiness for this task and impress upon him or her the need for confidentiality. It may be useful to select a youth to assist in this way given that he or she is ineligible for election.

Tie Votes

A tie vote occurs in the election of an Assembly when two or more persons receive the same number of votes and there are more persons voted for in the tie than there are remaining openings on the Assembly. Examples are a tie between two people for the ninth opening on the Assembly or a tie between three people for the eighth and ninth openings.

A second ballot to break the tie should be cast by those present at the election meeting. A situation may arise, however, where only a few members of the community are still present when the results are announced. If the outgoing Local Assembly members who are present feel that the number of remaining participants is so low that any such vote would not be representative, a balloting to break a tie vote may be held shortly after the first day of Ridván.

Whether the balloting to break the tie takes place at the election meeting or later, each voter should vote for the same number of people as there are remaining positions on the Assembly. For instance, if two people are tied for the ninth position then voters select one of them, if three people are tied for the eighth and ninth position one votes for two of those tied. No other names should be introduced on the ballot.

There is an exception to this procedure: If one of the persons involved in the tie represents a racial minority, as defined by the National Spiritual Assembly, that person should be given priority without question.

See also:

Election Procedures — National Assembly Definition of Minorities for Election Purposes, Ch. 2

In case by reason of a tie vote or votes the full membership of an elected body is not determined on the first ballot, then one or more additional ballots shall be taken on the persons tied until all members are elected.

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, Article VI

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 4, 1972, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 47

See also:

Qualifications of the Elected — Representation of Minorities Desirable, Ch. 2

Minorities

If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise. ... So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots have been cast in an election, or where the qualifications for any office are balanced between the various races, faiths or nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 35

There are so many varieties of situations which can occur in respect to minorities, and in so many different circumstances in different parts of the world, that it is impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule. The two guiding principles are the beloved Guardian's statement, which is well known to you, and it's concomitant that whenever there is doubt as to what is a minority or whether all other matters are equal a re-vote should be taken.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated September 27, 1973, to a National Spiritual Assembly

What is not clearly defined is "majority" and "minority." The Guardian refers to "various races, faiths or nationalities." Where this is obvious, e.g., in the United States a white American and a Negro, there is no problem. In all cases of doubt a re-vote should be held.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated June 30, 1966, to a National Spiritual Assembly

National Assembly Definition of Minorities for Election Purposes

[T]he 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.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated March 5, 1986, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 84

The National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand has decided that, for the time being, a member of a minority is a person “who is identified primarily with any race other than Europeans.” The only exception to this is Persians. Some significant minorities are Māori, Pacific Islanders, Chinese, and Indians, and there are many others. Members of the majority (i.e. those who do not benefit from the minority preference), are defined as those who are identified primarily as persons of European descent, whether born in New Zealand or from the United Kingdom, Europe, United States, Canada, Australia, South Africa or elsewhere. For the purposes of Bahá'í elections, Persian believers are also regarded as members of the majority and not eligible for the minority preference. The National Spiritual Assembly wishes to apply the minority principle at present only on the basis of race/nationality, and not with regard to religious background or any other characteristic.

Minority Definitions Based on National Pattern

The categories for tie-breaking are based upon national patterns and apply regardless of the racial/ethnic breakdown of an individual Bahá'í community or in a specific governmental jurisdiction. For example, if there is a tie vote between a believer of European ethnicity and a Māori believer, and the majority of the Bahá'í community consists of Māori believers, the Māori believer would be considered a minority and, thereby, elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly.

COLLECTING THE BALLOTS

In areas where it is likely that a large percentage of the believers will not attend the election meeting, it may be advisable to visit the Bahá'ís to encourage their participation. If a believer will not be able to attend the annual meeting, absentee voting should be encouraged.

COUNTING BALLOTS

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 21, 1971, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 80

Mistake in Counting Ballots

In the event a mistake in counting ballots occurs that is not discovered until after the election, the new Assembly should meet as soon as possible to correct it using the ballots which should have been maintained. If the error involves unopened ballots, they should be opened in the presence of the convened Assembly.

When the ballots are recounted and a tie occurs that cannot be resolved through the principle of giving the tie to a person from a minority group, then a by-election must be held to break the tie.

Whether or not a by-election becomes necessary, should correcting the error result in a change in Assembly membership, the corrected results must be reported as soon as possible to the community and to the National Spiritual Assembly.

See Also:

Tie Votes, Ch. 2

Vacancies and By-elections, Ch. 2

Invalid Ballots

Entire Ballot Invalid

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 29, 1971 to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 82

Only Part of Ballot Invalid

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.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 29, 1971 to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 82

This includes someone who has withdrawn from the Faith prior to the annual meeting.

Preservation of Teller's Report and Ballots

The tellers' report is kept in the permanent records of the Local Spiritual Assembly. The ballot papers are retained for one year only.

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 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.

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 22, 1980, *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 26-27

UNUSUAL OR EXTENUATING ELECTION CIRCUMSTANCES

Resignation of Newly Elected Assembly Member

If one of the elected members declines service on the Assembly, the resignation must be submitted to the newly elected Assembly. The resignation cannot be considered by the community at the Annual Meeting, but should be the topic of consultation within the Assembly. Generally, it is preferable to encourage the member not to resign, but if they insist, the Local Assembly should inform the National Assembly, providing background information along with the Local Assembly's recommendation on whether to accept the resignation. No action should be taken until the National Assembly responds. If a vacancy is subsequently declared, a by-election should be called.

Your Assembly should first have considered whether to accept Miss ...'s resignation, and then, if the Assembly had accepted her resignation, the vacancy should have been filled by a By-election... .

Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, July 6, 1981, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 25

See also:

Reporting Election Results, Ch. 2

Vacancies and By-Elections, Ch. 2

Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Dissatisfaction with Officers, Ch. 3

Resignation from Assembly, Ch. 3

Election of a Believer Who Has Requested No Mail

If a person who has requested no communications is elected to the Assembly, please contact the National Assembly and it will help determine what to do on a case-by-case basis after considering why the request for no mail had been made.

Election of a Believer Who Has Moved out of the Community

If, after the Assembly is elected, it is discovered that a person elected to the Assembly moved out of that community prior to the election, then the votes cast for that individual must be considered invalid. The person with the next highest number of votes will become a member of the Assembly.

Election of a Believer Who Has Withdrawn from the Faith

[I]f, 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.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 11, 1979, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 48

See also:

Reporting Election Results, Ch. 2

Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Dissatisfaction with Officers, Ch. 3

Handling Requests for Withdrawal — Withdrawal of a Member of a Local Assembly, Ch. 5

ANNOUNCING ELECTION RESULTS

As to whether a voter in a Bahá'í election has the right to know how many votes he may have received in that election even if he was not elected, it is inappropriate for an individual to raise such a question ...

The procedure which applies in the reporting of the results of a Bahá'í election is as stated in the letter of 16 December 1965 addressed to your National Assembly by the Universal House of Justice and is recited as follows for your ready reference:

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.*

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 4, 1984, to a National Spiritual Assembly

* The same principle applies to local elections as well.

COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE OF RESULTS

Once Assembly elections are over, the results should be conscientiously and 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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated July 10, 1939, to an individual believer, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 46

FORMING THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

ELECTIONS HELD ON FIRST DAY OF RIDVÁN

Note: The first day of the Festival of Ridván is now set according to the Badí' calendar, as implemented under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

In developing the Administrative Order, the Guardian established the First Day of Ridván as the day when all Local Spiritual Assemblies should be elected. During his own lifetime, this practice was followed as the number of Local Assemblies steadily grew to over one thousand.

... beginning at Ridván 1997, the practice of electing all Local Spiritual Assemblies on the First Day of Ridván will be reinstated. We recognize that the immediate result may be a reduction in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies at Ridván 1997, but we are confident that subsequent years will witness a steady increase.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 26, 1995, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, in *Turning Point, Selected Messages from the Universal House of Justice and Supplemental Material, 1996-2006*, par. 1.25, 1.28

[O]bservance of the Nineteen Day Feast and Holy Days remain binding, such as the beginning of the day at sunset, the suspension of work, and the hours at which certain Holy Days are commemorated.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 10, 2014, to the Bahá'ís of the World

With the adoption of the Badí' calendar worldwide in B.E. 172 (2015), the First Day of Ridván will be April 20 in a year when Naw-Rúz is the same as March 20, and April 21 in a year when Naw-Rúz is the same as 21 March. A listing of dates of Naw-Rúz for 50 years beginning in BE 172 is listed in Chapter 8.

See also:

When to Observe Holy Days — Other Significant Bahá'í Dates (Holy Days and Feasts), Ch. 8

BAHÁ'ÍS IN LOCALITY RESPONSIBLE FOR ELECTING ASSEMBLY

[I]n principle, the initiative and responsibility for electing a Local Spiritual Assembly belong primarily to the Bahá'ís in the locality, and assistance from outside is ultimately fruitful only if the friends become conscious of this sacred responsibility. As progress is made in the training of human resources and in the development of the entire range of Bahá'í community life, the capacity of the friends to elect their Local Spiritual Assemblies on their own will certainly grow.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 26, 1995, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors, in *Turning Point, Selected Messages from the Universal House of Justice and Supplemental Material, 1996-2006*, par. 1.27

ELECTION HELD AT ANNUAL MEETING

It is incumbent upon each local Bahá'í community having more than nine adult members to hold an annual election meeting. All members of the community, adult and youth, should be invited to attend.

The Annual Meeting of the Corporation at which its Trustees shall be elected shall be held on the first Day of Ridván based on the Badí' calendar at an hour and place to be fixed by the Assembly, which shall give not less than fifteen days' notice of the meeting to all members of the local Bahá'í community.

Section 1. The Spiritual Assembly shall accept those votes transmitted to the Assembly before the election by members who by reason of sickness or other unavoidable reason are unable to be present at the election in person.

Section 2. The election of members to the Spiritual Assembly shall be by plurality vote [whereby candidates that have obtained the highest number of votes, regardless of whether they received a majority of the votes cast, are elected].

All members of the local Bahá'í community who may hold elective office are eligible for election as members of the Spiritual Assembly.

Section 4. The Spiritual Assembly shall prepare an agenda for the Annual Meeting in which shall be included reports of the activities of the Assembly since its election, a financial statement showing all income and expenditure of its fund, reports of its committees and presentation of any other matters pertaining to the affairs of the Bahá'í community. The Assembly, both preceding and following the Annual Election, shall invite discussion and welcome suggestions from the community in order that its plans may reflect the community mind and heart.

Section 5. The result of the election shall be reported by the Spiritual Assembly to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand: By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article XI

As to the annual election meeting, if the sun sets late on the evening of 20 April* there would be no objection to starting the meeting before sunset so that it may end at a reasonable time that evening. Similarly, if the election meeting is to be held on the 21 April*, it may be completed after sunset, provided that it begins before sunset on that date.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated May 13, 2010, to an individual believer

* In a year when the first day of Ridván falls on 20 April according to the Badi' calendar, the dates in the above guidance should be read as "19 April" and "20 April" respectively. (The above guidance was written prior to the worldwide introduction of the Badi' calendar.)

Preparation for Annual Meeting and Election

Please note that the following instructions relate to a single-stage election. Many of the details are different for a two-stage election process, as has been introduced in Auckland. The National Assembly has provided specific guidance to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Auckland to fit their situation.

The Local Spiritual Assembly may wish to begin in early March to prepare for the Annual Meeting and Assembly Election by taking the following steps:

- Schedule the Annual Meeting to take place on the first day of Ridván, according to the Badi' calendar. A meeting held during daylight on the first day of Ridván may end after sunset, as long as it begins before sunset. An annual meeting may be held after sunset on the day before the first day of Ridván. An annual election held at any other time may invalidate the election.
- Determine the place of the meeting. The Annual Meeting and election should be held within the locality of jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly.
- If the Assembly is to be re-formed, identify the eligible voters. (See various topics under Eligibility to Vote or Hold Office; and Distribution of the Voting List.)
- Ensure the election call is conveyed to all eligible voting members, notifying them of the time and place of the Annual Meeting at least fifteen days prior to the election. (See Election Process — Election Call; and Election Process — Absentee Voting)
- Appoint at least two tellers to count the votes at the election and designate one as head teller. The head teller should be 21 years old or over. The head teller is responsible for organising the work of the tellers, announcing the results of the election and any other relevant information, and for having the election report signed by all the tellers. (See Forming the Assembly — Tellers)
- Instruct the tellers in the correct procedures for validating and counting the ballots and make provisions for them to carry out their functions. (See Forming the Assembly — Tellers)
- Ensure that the community understands the Bahá'í electoral process and that voters are aware of the qualities they should be looking for in Assembly members.
- Obtain ballot papers, envelopes and pens to offer voters
- Update the voting list to be available at the Annual Meeting (this should be done as close to the date as possible to make the list as current as can be). This list may be posted or simply made available in print or electronic form to the tellers. Where providing a voting list to every adult member is not feasible, which is likely to be the case in larger communities, a copy or copies of the adult membership list must be available at the time of the election to those who wish to refer to it. This list should be made available in print form to the tellers.
- Give all absentee ballots that arrive up until the election meeting to the head teller.

- Prepare annual report (see section below entitled “Annual Report”).
- Plan the agenda of the annual meeting according to the requirements of the *By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly*.
- Carefully prepare uplifting devotions for the annual meeting and select individuals who will deliver prayers, readings and musical devotions.

ANNUAL MEETING AND REPORT

SETTING THE AGENDA FOR ANNUAL MEETING

The following instructions apply to a single-stage election process. Anyone interested in the procedures for two-stage elections, such as are held in Auckland, please contact the National Spiritual Assembly for information. However, please note that Local Assemblies utilising the two-stage method are only those identified by the House of Justice.

The Head Teller conducts the election itself, but the Local Assembly is responsible for chairing the meeting both before and after the election, and for recording the recommendations made by the friends. A possible programme is:

- Opening Devotions
- Introduction of tellers. Head teller then conducts the following:
 - Instructions on voting procedure, qualifications for voting, provision of ballot papers if required
 - Final call for any absentee ballots Some prayers and readings to create a spiritual atmosphere and enhance the sacredness of the election process
- Voting
- Collecting of ballots by tellers (then tellers retire to count the votes and outgoing chairperson continues to guide the consultation)
- Consideration of the annual report of the Local Assembly
- Consultation
- Tellers' report and acceptance by those present
- Closing prayer

As much time as possible should be allowed at the annual meeting for the community to consult and make recommendations to the incoming Assembly.

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

An annual report is an important record of the community's undertakings and progress during the year, and provides significant historical/archival details. It must be kept in the Local Assembly's permanent records, and please send copies to the National Assembly at nationaloffice@bahai.org.nz. You may find the following statements, from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to National Assemblies on 17 February 2016, helpful in your preparations for writing the annual report:

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to call to your attention the importance of the annual report and to review some of its basic functions.

As most of you are well aware, the primary aim of the annual report is to give the delegates assembled at the National Convention as well as the members of the community a concise and accurate review of the major activities and achievements of the community as viewed within the context of the Plan. The report may discuss themes, including achievements and challenges, that will assist the delegates in understanding the condition and progress of the Bahá'í community and will stimulate and give direction to their deliberations. It is part of the National Assembly's attempt, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, to “radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares.”

A National Assembly's annual report constitutes a record of the activities of the Faith in its country and, as such, is a document whose research potential is of great historical importance.

The following information should also be included: Name of the Spiritual Assembly; Period covered (e.g. 179 B.E. 2022-2023); Results of the last annual election and any by-elections; Assembly membership and attendance record; Vital statistics (membership of the community; adults, youth, children; enrolments; transfers in and out; marriages; births; deaths; Nineteen Day Feast attendance).

The Annual Report is a summary of the community's goals, concerns, activities, and progress of the past year. Among other aspects, it should reflect the nature of the participation of the Assembly and the community in the national and global plans of the Faith, particularly emphasising the progress of the institute process and teaching efforts. Altogether, the yearly reports prepared by the Assembly, its task forces and other appointees constitute the Annual Report of the Local Spiritual Assembly which must be kept in the permanent files of the Assembly.

The Annual Report is normally distributed to the community prior to the election of the Assembly, either at the Annual Meeting or in a mailing before the Annual Meeting. A copy of the Annual Report should be sent to the National Spiritual Assembly and to the relevant Regional Bahá'í Council by 30 April each year. It may also be shared with the Auxiliary Board member(s).

The following basic information should be included in the Assembly's report:

- Name and location of the Spiritual Assembly
- Date of report
- Period covered (Naw-Rúz to Naw-Rúz; 21 March to 20 March)
- Results of the last annual election and any by-elections
- Assembly membership and attendance record
- Vital statistics:
 - total membership of the community
 - makeup of membership — adults, youth, children
 - enrolments, transfers in and out, withdrawals, deprivations of administrative rights
 - marriages, births, deaths
- Nineteen Day Feast attendance (percentage of community attendance)
- Participation in the institute process, for example
 - How many Assembly members/believers/seekers completed each course
 - How many Assembly members/believers completed the sequence of courses
 - How many tutors are actively engaged in tutoring and teaching
 - How many junior youth groups were established
- Results of teaching efforts, for example
 - How many individual and collective teaching projects occurred
 - What was learned
 - How many seekers attended core activities
 - How many new believers (adults, youth, junior youth and children) were enrolled or registered
 - How these new believers were confirmed and consolidated
- Progress in other aspects of national and global plans of the Faith, including, for example:
 - participation in other Plan and cluster activities
 - pioneers sent out, both homefront and international
- Other major local projects and activities and their progress to date, for example social action endeavours
- Other noteworthy developments
- Efforts made to improve the functioning of the Local Spiritual Assembly including courses or workshops taken, goals set, etc.
- Financial record:
 - total contributions received to date
 - expenditures
 - percentage of community participating in the Fund

ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT OR BALANCE SHEET

As a charitable organisation registered under the Charitable Trusts Act 1957, a Local Assembly is not required to submit an annual statement or balance sheet to the Justice Department. However, the National Spiritual Assembly is required to provide a consolidated financial report to Charities Services on behalf of the group of all Bahá'í institutions in New Zealand. The Local Spiritual Assembly must therefore promptly send its annual financial report to the National Treasury Department, for inclusion in the national figures.

See also:

Compliance with Charities Act, Ch. 3

Incorporation is Legal Foundation for Local Spiritual Assemblies — Incorporated Status May Not Be Lost If Assembly Cannot Re-Form, Ch. 3

Reports of Task Forces and Other Appointees

The Assembly should ask task forces and other appointees to submit reports in order to assist it with completion of its annual report. Reports should be submitted to the Assembly well before the Annual Meeting. The Assembly will need time to review the reports and to decide what to include in its own general report to the community; or the Assembly may simply add the reports as an addendum to its own report.

ASSEMBLY FORMATION BY JOINT DECLARATION

The Declaration of Trust of the National Spiritual Assembly specifies:

“When ... the number of Bahá'ís in any authorised civil area is exactly nine, these shall on the first day of the Festival of Ridván according to the Badí' calendar, as implemented under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice 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 as set forth in this instrument.

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. ...

It should also be noted that although the Constitution specifies that the joint declaration is to be made on the First Day of Ridván, it does not state the manner in which it is to be made. Such subsidiary details are left to the decision of each National Spiritual Assembly.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated October 12, 1969, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 19

If a Local Spiritual Assembly is being formed by joint declaration, all members should sign the Local Spiritual Assembly Joint Declaration Report Form (provided by the National Office). Those who are unavailable to sign at the same time as the others may sign their names earlier or later.

If all signatures cannot be obtained or if any difficulties arise, the Assembly should still form and send the joint declaration form to the National Spiritual Assembly as soon as possible after Ridván. The Local Assembly should include a letter explaining any difficulties and give the reasons for any missing signatures. The joint declaration should be considered valid unless the community is notified otherwise by the National Assembly.

FIRST-TIME FORMING BY JOINT DECLARATION

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

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 2, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 18

The above guidance applies only to the first formation of an Assembly. If an Assembly is re-formed by joint declaration in a subsequent year, regardless of whether there have been intervening years in which the

Assembly has been formed by election or has lapsed, the guidance in “Re-Formation by Joint Declaration” should be followed.

RE-FORMATION BY JOINT DECLARATION

When a Local Spiritual Assembly is to be re-formed by joint declaration, 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. 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.

It is not necessary that all nine members sign the joint declaration together. One or more may happen to be physically absent on the first day of Ridván and in such cases the absent members could sign the declaration at a later date, or take part in the joint declaration in such a manner as the National Spiritual Assembly may decide.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated August 10, 1987, to a National Spiritual Assembly

All nine believers must be resident in the locality on the first day of Ridván for a Local Spiritual Assembly to reform at Ridván, unless information satisfactory to the National Spiritual Assembly is provided. For the meaning of the word “resident”, please see the section headed “Residency Requirements”, above in this chapter.

REFUSAL TO PARTICIPATE IN JOINT DECLARATION

The following extract from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to [a] National Spiritual Assembly ... is pertinent to the treatment of the believer, or believers, who refuse to take part in the declaration:

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 offense, but should lovingly and patiently educate the friends in the importance of their responsibilities.

Amendment to a letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated April 5, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

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

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated December 2, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 18

ACTIONS AFTER ANY TYPE OF ASSEMBLY FORMATION

Once an election or joint declaration takes place, it may be considered valid and the Assembly can begin functioning. If unusual or extenuating circumstances were involved in the formation of the Assembly, a letter explaining the circumstances should be submitted to the National Assembly with the election report or joint declaration form. The Local Assembly should continue to operate unless the National Assembly determines, following receipt of the letter and formation report, that the Assembly cannot be recognised.

Among the first actions for an Assembly to undertake is to elect its officers. Another is to ensure that its election or joint declaration report is fully completed and communicated to the National Spiritual Assembly as soon as possible. In addition, it is recommended that any members who have not already signed a confidentiality agreement should sign one. Other tasks could include giving members keys, passwords, any needed training and appropriate documentation for their offices.

See also:

Member Confidentiality Agreement, Ch. 3

REPORTING ELECTION RESULTS

The result of the election shall be reported by the Spiritual Assembly to the National Spiritual Assembly.
By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article XI, Section 5

The National Spiritual Assembly sends instructions to Local Spiritual Assemblies for reporting election results. Assemblies submit their reports through online forms. It is vital that this information is provided as soon as possible after the election date and that the section regarding the Charities Act must be completed. The forms are:

- The Assembly Election Form, which should be used for reporting the members of an Assembly formed either by election or by joint declaration. Please fill in this form immediately after the election, and note that the section regarding the Charities Act **MUST** be completed.
- If there are only nine adults in the community an additional Joint Declaration Form should be signed by all nine members in order confirm that the Assembly was formed by Joint Declaration. This form is normally supplied to Assemblies that may need it, prior to Ridván. If not received in good time, please request it from the National Office
- The Assembly Officers Form, an online form which lists the elected officers' names and contact details. If the Assembly elects temporary officers, please report the details of these temporary officers, and report again when permanent officers are elected.

See also:

Convening the Assembly and Electing Officers — Election of Officers, Ch. 3

Charities Act Requirements

From the Charities Services website; "The Update Charity Details form asks for the full name, date of birth and home address details of your charity's officers. The Information Privacy Principles in the Privacy Act 1993 enable agencies, including Charities Services, to collect personal information for lawful purposes connected with a function or activity of the agency. Previously we have only collected an officer's first and last name. This is not enough information for us to accurately identify officers when we need to. The date of birth and residential address information will not be publicly available, and will only be used by Charities Services and other agencies where authorised by law."

Please note that reference to "officers" in the extract above, refers to ALL Local Assembly members. The report should also confirm that the elected members are not disqualified under the Charities Act 2005 from serving as officers of a Charity. The requirements are summarised as follows. The individual must not be:

- an undischarged bankrupt
- younger than 16
- subject to a property order under the Protection of Personal and Property Rights Act 1988, or have their property managed by a trustee corporation under section 32 of that Act
- prohibited from being involved with the management of a company under sections 382, 383 or 385 of the Companies Act 1993
- convicted of a crime of dishonesty or for an offence under [section 143B](#) of the Tax Administration Act 1994 and sentenced within the last 7 years
- disqualified from being an officer by the Commission under section 31(4) of the Charities Act
- a body corporate that is being wound up, in liquidation or receivership or subject to statutory management under the Corporations (Investigation and Management) Act 1989
- disqualified from being an officer under the rules of their organisation.

IMPORTANT: If a member elected to a Local Spiritual Assembly is disqualified under the Act for any of the reasons listed above, they should NOT resign from the Assembly, but the matter should be submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly, which will take appropriate action, which may include applying to the Charities Commission for exemption from the requirements of the Act in respect of the particular individual, or any other step that the National Assembly deems appropriate.

See also:

Legal Matters Involving Incorporation and Insurance — Compliance with the Charities Act, Ch. 3
Election Procedures — Unusual or Extenuating Election Circumstances, Ch. 2

CONVENING THE FIRST MEETING

The first meeting of a newly elected Spiritual Assembly shall be called by the member elected to membership by the highest number of votes, or in case two or more members have received the same said highest number of votes, then by the member selected by lot from among those members; and this member shall preside until the permanent Chairman shall be chosen.

Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States: By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article VIII

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

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.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 27, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 96

See also:

Convening the Assembly and Electing Officers — Election of Officers, Ch. 3

Reporting Election of Officers

Please use the *Election of Officers Report Form*, an online form with fields for the elected officers' names and contact details, and the Assembly's postal address. A link to the form is sent to all Local Assemblies before Ridván each year. This form should be submitted as soon as possible after officers are elected. If the Assembly elects or appoints temporary officers, please report the details of these temporary officers, and report again when permanent officers are elected.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RECOGNITION OF FORMATION

Automatic Recognition of Assembly Election

Elected Assemblies that submit complete election results as described above and have satisfied the following requirements will automatically be recognised:

- The election was held on the first day of Ridván, according to the Badi' calendar. Note that a day in the Badi' calendar runs from sunset to sunset.
- The meeting was held within the jurisdiction of the Assembly.
- The election call was sent to all adult believers in the community at least fifteen days before the election.
- At least five ballots were cast in the election.

The Local Assembly should retain the completed and signed tellers' report in its permanent records.

Once an election or joint declaration takes place, it may be considered valid and the Assembly can begin functioning. If unusual or extenuating circumstances were involved in the formation of the Assembly, a letter explaining the circumstances should be submitted to the National Assembly with the election report or joint declaration form. The local Assembly should continue to operate unless the National Assembly determines, following receipt of the letter and formation report, that the Assembly cannot be recognized.

See also:

Forming the Local Assembly — Election Held at Annual Meeting, Ch. 2

CELEBRATING AND ANNOUNCING FIRST FORMATION

When a community first forms their Local Spiritual Assembly, they may want to mark it in some way that expresses their joy at the milestone and perhaps draws it to the attention of the wider community. An announcement or invitation could be sent to local officials, friends of the Faith, like-minded organisations, and other Bahá'í communities of the cluster. A press release could be issued. The National Spiritual Assembly would be happy to provide advice about how to go about inviting officials and/or preparing a press release. The ceremonial occasion involving the public would of course be a separate occasion from the annual election meeting which is for Bahá'ís only.

See also:

Contacts and Supplies, Ch. 6

ASSEMBLY SERVICE

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, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 80

Service on the institutions and agencies of the Faith is indeed a tremendous privilege, but not one that is sought by the individual; it is a duty and responsibility to which he or she may be called at any given time. It is understandable, of course, that all those involved in Bahá'í administration would rightly feel they have been invested with a singular honour in forming part, in whatever way, of a structure designed to be a channel through which the spirit of the Cause flows. Yet they should not imagine that such service entitles them to operate on the periphery of the learning process that is everywhere gaining strength, exempt from its inherent requirements. Nor should it be supposed that membership on administrative bodies provides an opportunity to promote one's own understanding of what is recorded in the Sacred Text and how the teachings should be applied, steering the community in whatever direction personal preference dictate. Referring to members of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian wrote that they "must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í Community and promote the common weal." Bahá'í institutions do exercise authority to guide the friends, and exert moral, spiritual and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. However, such functions are to be performed with the realization that an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá'í institutional identify. Qualifying authority and influence in this manner implies sacrifice on the part of those entrusted to administer the affairs of the Faith. Does not 'Abdu'l-Bahá tell us that "when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire's distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it." As He averred, "ye must in this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice."

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated December 28, 2010, to the Continental Board of Counselors

UNUSUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Refusal to Serve

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 dissociate 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. ... The believers, for the sake of the Cause, now in the period of its infancy, should accept their duties in a spirit of self-sacrifice, and should be animated by the desire to uphold the verdict of the electorate, and to lend their share of assistance, however difficult the circumstances, to the effective administration of the affairs of the Faith.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated January 15, 1942 to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Directives from the Guardian*, no. 59

While it is true that refusal to serve can ultimately incur the forfeiture of administrative rights, the House of Justice feels that your Assembly should bear in mind the caution voiced on behalf of the Guardian in the letter published on pages 86 and 87 of *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*: “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.” At the present stage ... far more beneficial results are likely to be achieved by encouragement of the believers and by their education in the principles and significance of Bahá'í administration than by the threat or imposition of sanctions. Indeed the latter, if applied unwisely, could achieve the very opposite of what your Assembly is hoping to accomplish.

Generally the membership of small local communities includes some believers who are new in the Faith and need to be lovingly nurtured in the responsibilities of being a Bahá'í, and others who are overburdened by a multitude of cares. How often one finds in small [meaning numerically small communities] Assemblies¹ members who, although devoted believers, have non-Bahá'í spouses and families to care for and are very limited in the time they can spend in Bahá'í administrative activities. Such believers should be encouraged, and loving appreciation should be shown for whatever services they can render, and nothing should be done, however unintentionally, to make them feel that they are living under a threat of administrative expulsion if they do not attend every Assembly meeting or decline a request to serve on a committee.

There may, of course, be cases of believers who, without any good reason, refuse to shoulder the responsibilities of membership in the Bahá'í community. It is to such extreme cases that you would be justified in applying sanctions if, after “repeated exhortations, pleas and warnings” they persist in their attitude.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated July 8, 1980, to a National Spiritual Assembly

¹ The term “small Assemblies” refers to Assemblies in numerically small communities, confirmed as correct in a July 30, 2001 email from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice to the United States Bahá'í Publishing Trust

See also:

Election of Officers — Assembly Member May Request Not To Be Officer, Ch. 3

Resignation from Assembly

The general topic of resignations from the Assembly is covered under: Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Resignation from Assembly, Ch. 3.

Specifically with reference to the annual elections, if one of the elected members declines service on the Assembly, the resignation must be submitted to the newly elected Assembly, just as any other resignation would be. The resignation cannot be considered by the community at the Annual Meeting, but should be the topic of consultation within the Assembly.

See also:

Reporting Annual Election Results, Ch. 2

Vacancies and By-elections, Ch. 2

Election of Officers — Assembly Member May Request Not To Be Officer, Ch. 3

Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Dissatisfaction with Officers, Ch. 3

Interpersonal Relations — Disputes — Disputes between Believers, Ch. 10

Removal of a Member

This topic is covered under: Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Removal from Assembly Membership, Ch. 3

VACANCIES AND BY-ELECTIONS

Vacancies in the membership of the Spiritual Assembly shall be filled by election at a special meeting of the local Bahá'í community duly called for that purpose by the Assembly. In the event that the number of vacancies exceeds four, making a quorum of the Spiritual Assembly impossible, the election shall be under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand: By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article IX, Section 2

When it is necessary to fill a vacancy on the Local Assembly, a by-election should be called. Written notices should be sent to all eligible adult members in the community at least 15 days before the date of the election. The notice may include a voting list made up of the names of all eligible adult members who are not already serving on the Assembly. The list should include the names of the person or persons who may have resigned from the Assembly. Although a person may have resigned, he or she is still considered eligible to serve on the Assembly.

The National Office can create by-election voting lists (18+ Eligible to vote, 21+ Eligible to be voted for). Please request, and provide the date of the by-election.

Vacancies may occur for the following reasons:

- An Assembly member leaves to reside in another locality. (See: Election Eligibility — Residency Requirements, Ch. 2.)
- A member resigns from the Local Assembly and his or her resignation is accepted, with the approval of the National Spiritual Assembly. (See: Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Resignation from Assembly, Ch. 3.)
- A member passes away.
- The National Spiritual Assembly removes a member from the Assembly. (This is a rare occurrence and will only be done in cases of serious misconduct. See: Responsibilities of Assembly Membership — Removal from Assembly Membership, Ch. 3.)

A by-election is held only if there are more than nine adults in the community. Otherwise, any vacancy is filled automatically as soon as an adult believer becomes available to serve. If two believers simultaneously become available to serve a by-election must then be called. Any changes in Assembly membership should be recorded in the minutes.

It may not be necessary to hold a by-election if only a short period remains before Ridván. In such a situation, please ask the National Spiritual Assembly for advice.

As soon as possible after a change in the Assembly membership, please remember to share the details with the National Office. There are a number of processes which must be kept up to date. For example, Charities Services requires that current details for each Local Assembly member be entered on their website.

The tellers' report from the by-election should be retained permanently in the Assembly's files.

See also:

- Election Procedures, Ch. 2
- Election Procedures – Election Call – Voting Lists, Ch. 2
- Qualifications of the Elected, Ch. 2
- Election Eligibility — Who is Eligible to Vote or Hold Office, Ch. 2

WHEN THERE ARE MORE THAN FOUR VACANCIES

A different process than a by-election needs to take place when the number of vacancies on an Assembly make it impossible to convene a quorum. An Assembly falling below a quorum may happen when several believers move from the area at once, among other reasons. Please contact the National Spiritual Assembly in this case.

See also:

Participation — Quorum — If Assembly Unable to Maintain Quorum, Ch. 4

ASSEMBLIES IN JEOPARDY OF DISSOLUTION

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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated March 31, 1945, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 22

Once formed, an Assembly continues to exist until the next annual election at Ridván or until the National Spiritual Assembly acts to declare the Assembly dissolved. If the number of adult Bahá'ís in the community falls below nine, or if conditions arise which make it impossible for the Local Assembly to function, such as an inability to achieve a quorum, the facts should be reported to the National Assembly, the Regional Bahá'í Council and the Auxiliary Board members. The Regional Bahá'í Council may assist the remaining active adult believers in determining what activities would be most conducive to the growth of the community and the re-formation of the Assembly.

See also:

Participation — Appointment of Temporary Administrative Committee When Not Functioning, Ch. 4

PREPARATION FOR LOSS OF ASSEMBLY STATUS

When there is a strong probability of Assembly dissolution as Ridván approaches, the Local Spiritual Assembly should decide how it will be handled if the dissolution should occur. The Assembly has the responsibility to provide for an orderly process. The Assembly should develop a simple contingency plan according to the following guidelines, and then turn all attention to teaching.

See also:

Participation — Appointment of Temporary Administrative Committee When Not Functioning, Ch. 4

Suggested actions which a jeopardised Assembly might take:

- Vital to every community, small or large, rural or urban, is a pattern of action conducive to growth. Initially, this pattern will include the basic elements of study, action and reflection. For example, an individual might study a message from the Universal House of Justice, take action to hold a weekly devotional meeting, and reflect on the conversations that you are developing about the spiritual dimension of human existence. Praying and reflecting with others on spiritual principles is an essential part of life. Devotional meetings stimulate a spiritual awareness within our inner selves and create stronger, deeper bonds in our neighbourhoods and among our friends. Of course, if it is possible to form a small team to initiate this together, then the pattern will be strengthened by mutual support and the power of consultation.

As individuals, or in a small team—and to the extent individuals are able—they may wish to carry out simple acts of service that strengthen the bonds of unity and trust amongst the friends. This

could be holding a devotional meeting, a visit to another's home for meaningful conversation, study of a Ruhi book or a recent message from the Universal House of Justice.

- Consult with the Regional Bahá'í Council, the Auxiliary Board Members and their assistants about your situation and plans and activities.

What to Do with On-going Personal Status Cases If Assembly Lapses

In the event the Assembly does lapse, generally the National Assembly will assign responsibility for handling any on-going cases to another Local Spiritual Assembly. If the Assembly has personal status cases pending, it should briefly review them, make sure all information is up-to-date, and write a separate report or letter for each case to inform the National Assembly of the circumstances. Writing them separately helps to preserve confidentiality in record-keeping.

All the parties involved in pending cases should be contacted and informed that the National Assembly will assign another local Assembly to handle the matter. If the parties involved have a preference for another Assembly, the lapsing Assembly should note it on the letter(s) or report(s) it will send to the National Assembly. It should then promptly send the letter(s) or report(s) to the National Assembly informing it directly of its change in status and include copies (not originals) of all documents, including new information, for any cases which have not been previously reported, along with any comments or recommendations the Assembly may have concerning the cases. Originals should be stored as covered below.

What to Do with Assembly Records If Assembly Lapses

A willing Assembly member should be selected, if willing, to store Assembly records until another Assembly is elected, or for two years, maintaining full confidentiality concerning the records. If the Assembly does not re-form within two years, or no one is willing to continue storing them securely and transfer them intact to the new Assembly the next time it is formed, the records should be transferred to the Bahá'í National Office. If a situation arises during the hiatus between formations indicating a need to access confidential records, the individual storing the records should refrain from accessing them and should contact the National Spiritual Assembly for guidance.

See also:

Record-keeping, Ch. 4

JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES OF LOCAL ASSEMBLIES

DEFINITION OF A BAHÁ'Í LOCALITY

A Bahá'í locality is the area in which a Bahá'í community is situated. The jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly corresponds to the boundaries of the Bahá'í locality. Generally, the boundaries of Bahá'í localities follow those of the smallest unit of civil jurisdiction, such as the boundaries of an incorporated city, or, outside of a city, the boundaries of a district. Whenever the boundaries for a locality are uncertain, boundary clarification can be requested from the National Spiritual Assembly.

BAHÁ'Í BOUNDARIES DETERMINED BY CIVIL BOUNDARIES

He wishes me to stress the fact that from now on any group that is formed must belong to one civil community, as otherwise endless confusion and misunderstanding would ensue. The limits of each civil community must be clearly recognized, and no overlapping should be allowed under any circumstances. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í News, no. 132, January 1940, p. 4

The Guardian fully realizes that the process of splitting up large communities into smaller ones, each existing within its own civil units, has been difficult for the Australian friends. What they do not seem to fully appreciate is that this has been done in Canada and the United States as well, and is only in order to

organize the assemblies on a logical basis, and one with a firmer legal foundation. The fact that this may create more assemblies in the end, and that it sometimes breaks up existing ones, is only incidental; the important point is to consolidate the communities on a sound basis, i.e., every assembly within the limits of the Municipality its members reside in.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 28, 1950, in *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 83

Regarding the formation of local Assemblies, the Guardian does not advise any departure from the principle that every civil community should have its own independent Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 51

He realizes that the enforcement of the general rule that an Assembly must function within civic limits has caused considerable havoc in Britain, as well as other countries. However, it enables the friends, through splitting up into smaller communities, to have before their eyes the appetizing prospect of forming yet another Spiritual Assembly, all on their own, so to speak. It gives more believers the opportunity to serve on these Administrative Bodies, challenges the teaching activities of them all, and stimulates them to fresh efforts in the hope of early victory.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated August 8, 1957, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Baha'i Community of the British Isles*, p. 381

Changes in Boundaries

Suburban or unincorporated areas surrounding a central city or town can only be included in the Local Assembly area of the central entity if they are annexed by the civil authorities. ...

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated November 29, 1981, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Each Bahá'í locality or area of jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly must have clearly defined boundaries. The National Spiritual Assembly has decided that in New Zealand, for the time being, Local Assembly areas will correspond to City and District areas as defined by the New Zealand Government.

Civil boundaries are sometimes changed by government. A Local Spiritual Assembly already established within such boundaries should not automatically change its area of jurisdiction, but it should inform the National Spiritual Assembly of the government action. No Local Assembly may change its area of jurisdiction without the explicit approval of the National Assembly.

A Local Assembly has no authority outside its area of jurisdiction.

AREAS OF JURISDICTION OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES

The National Spiritual Assembly shall have exclusive jurisdiction and authority over all the activities and affairs of the Bahá'í Faith throughout its area.

Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, p. 9

Among its more specific duties a Local Spiritual Assembly shall have full jurisdiction of all Bahá'í activities and affairs within the local community subject, however, to the exclusive and paramount authority of the National Spiritual Assembly as defined herein.

Articles of Incorporation, Constitution, and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand: By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article III

[W]ithin 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.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated June 13, 1936, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, p. 130

Since a Local Spiritual Assembly has full jurisdiction of all Bahá'í activities and affairs within its local community, individuals, groups, and Assemblies that may wish to hold a Bahá'í activity within another Assembly's jurisdiction should first seek its approval. If there is a group rather than an Assembly in the area, it would be courteous, and probably valuable, to consult with them about such plans ahead of time, even though the approval of the group is not technically necessary.

See also:

Relationship between the Assembly and the Neighbouring Bahá'í Communities, Ch. 1
The Administration of Justice, Ch.10

REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL ELECTIONS

One of the subtle qualities of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the balance between centralization and decentralization. This balance must be correctly maintained, but different factors enter into the equation, depending upon the institutions involved. For example, the relationship between a National or Local Spiritual Assembly and its committees is of a different nature from that between National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. The former is a relationship between a central administrative body and “its assisting organs of executive and legislative action”, [Letter from Shoghi Effendi, dated October 18, 1927 to a National Spiritual Assembly] while the latter is a relationship between national and local levels of the House of Justice, each of which is a divinely ordained institution with clearly prescribed jurisdiction, duties and prerogatives.

Regional Bahá'í Councils partake of some, but not all, characteristics of Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provide a means of carrying forward the teaching work and administering related affairs of a rapidly growing Bahá'í community in a number of situations. Without such an institution, the development of a national committee structure required to cover the needs in some countries would run the danger of over-complexity through adding a further layer of committees under the regional committees, or the danger of excessive decentralization through conferring too much autonomy on committees which are characterized by the Guardian as “bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants.” The distinguishing effects of the establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils are the following:

It provides for a level of autonomous decision making on both teaching and administrative matters, as distinct from merely executive action, below the National Assembly and above the Local Assemblies.

It involves the members of Local Spiritual Assemblies of the area in the choice of the members of the Council, thus reinforcing the bond between it and the local believers while, at the same time, bringing into public service capable believers who are known to the friends in their own region.

It establishes direct consultative relationships between the Continental Counsellors and the Regional Bahá'í Councils.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 30, 1997, to all National Spiritual Assemblies

FORMATION OF REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS

We are pleased to convey that the House of Justice has decided to approve the formation of two Regional Bahá'í Councils in New Zealand on 26 November 2010, one to serve the North Island of the country and the other to serve the South Island.

Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 24 August 2010

As described in a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly to all Local Spiritual Assemblies on 17 August 2018:

The purpose of our Regional Bahá'í Councils is to focus very carefully on the expansion and consolidation work, in close collaboration with the Local Assemblies and the believers within their areas of jurisdiction, while also working closely with Auxiliary Board members and the Regional Institute Board and Regional Institute Coordinators. They help to nurture the capacities of cluster agencies, transfer the learning of more advanced clusters to emerging clusters, and plan the deployment of resources accordingly, thereby facilitating the movement of clusters in their region.

The same letter noted: “The two Regional Councils in New Zealand make a significant contribution to the advancement of the Faith, and serve not as an additional layer of administration, but rather as a decentralisation mechanism, where the Councils can be closely in touch with the growth of the Faith at the grassroots.”

Balloting takes place among members of Local Spiritual Assemblies in the region ... but the outcome of the voting constitutes a confidential list of nominations for the National Spiritual Assembly, which appoints the members of the Council from among these nominees and others, including persons proposed by the members of the Auxiliary Boards within whose areas of responsibility the region lies.

“The Establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils in Certain Countries, their Characteristics and Functions”, guidelines issued by the Universal House of Justice on 30 May 1997

The Regional Bahá'í Council for the North Island has nine members (the maximum allowed by the Universal House of Justice), and currently, the Regional Bahá'í Council for the South Island has five members. The National Spiritual Assembly may in future decide to increase the number of members for the South Island Council.

Regional Bahá'í Council elections are held by secret ballot annually. Balloting occurs in August-September to allow time for the National Assembly to consider the results in order that Council members may begin their service on the Day of the Covenant, 26 November. Voting instructions are sent out to Local Spiritual Assemblies in early August with a return deadline in mid-September.

All Local Spiritual Assemblies are encouraged to cast their ballots while meeting together as this has proven to be the most effective method for ensuring participation. However, a member who is unable to attend the meeting may prepare his or her ballot individually. Also, a Local Assembly may decide that all its members will prepare their ballots individually. Those casting their ballots individually are especially requested to carry out the procedure without delay.

All adult believers in full possession of their administrative rights who live within the region (North Island or South Island respectively) are eligible for election. Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members are not eligible for service on a Regional Bahá'í Council. With the specific duties of the Councils in mind, it is clear that the individuals best suited to serving on these institutions are those women and men who, through their proven experience in the activities of the Plan, their capacity to participate in the learning process, and their upright character and constructive attitudes, can best advance the process of growth in the various regions.

See also:

Relationship between the Local Spiritual Assembly and the Regional Bahá'í Council, Ch. 1

UNIT CONVENTIONS

It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings that these National Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the Friends; that is, the Friends in every country must elect a certain number of delegates, who in their turn will elect from among all the Friends in that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly. ... These secondary electors will then, either through correspondence, or preferably by gathering together, and first deliberating upon the affairs of the Cause throughout their country ... , elect from among all the Friends in that country nine who will be the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 39-40

[H]e wishes to stress the importance of reminding the believers that they should make every possible effort to attend the meeting for the election of the State or Province delegates, in order to stimulate a larger group consciousness which will greatly facilitate the process of the believers becoming acquainted with each other, and provide an intermediary state – which will become increasingly valuable and necessary – between the local organization, represented by the group or Assembly, and national collective action, represented by the activities of the Convention and the institution of the National Assembly.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 16, 1943, to a National Spiritual Assembly

UNIT CONVENTION IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

A three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the “secondary House of Justice (i.e., National Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal one,” it is obvious that the members

of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 84

It is expressly recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings that these National Assemblies must be indirectly elected by the Friends; that is, the Friends in every country must elect a certain number of delegates, who in their turn will elect from among all the Friends in that country the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 39–40

The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of believers through the local Spiritual Assemblies.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated November 18, 1933, to a National Spiritual Assembly

Each electoral Unit Convention will be called by a Convenor appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly, or by a committee it may appoint to organize the electoral Unit Convention, and as soon as the Unit Convention has come to order it will elect its own Chairman and Secretary.

The Universal House of Justice, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*, p. 98

The Guardian believes that the right to elect the chair and the secretary of the Convention should be vested in the assembled delegates, lest any objection be raised that that the members of the outgoing National Assembly are seeking to direct the course of the discussions in a manner that would be conducive to their own personal interests.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated August 18, 1933

It is up to the chair, when necessary, to keep before the Convention the purpose of consultation at the Annual Convention and to exercise a certain amount of control over the proceedings, while not infringing on the freedom of the delegates to take part in discussion and to initiate motions. Any delegate may raise any issues for consultation, but it is for the convention to decide whether it wishes to consult on it.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated July 7, 1991, to a National Spiritual Assembly

At the Unit Convention, election of delegates is carried out by the entire body of the eligible voters in that unit. It is the first stage of a three-stage divine process involving the election of the National Spiritual Assembly and culminating on a five-year cycle in the election of the Universal House of Justice, as envisioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The purposes of Unit Convention are to elect delegate(s) to the National Convention, who will in turn elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly; to provide an opportunity for the believers to consult on local and regional issues and concerns with the goal of the advancement of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh; and to make recommendations to the National Assembly.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY AND ITS OFFICES

The National Spiritual Assembly establishes all electoral unit boundaries, as instructed by the Universal House of Justice, by apportioning equally the entire body of believers in electing 57 delegates (the number presently assigned by the Head of the Faith for New Zealand) to the National Convention. Unit boundaries are adjusted periodically to accommodate geographic changes in the distribution of believers throughout the country.

The National Assembly appoints host Assemblies to organise the Convention for their electoral units, and guides them with Convention planning, including the appointment of tellers, and encourages the robust publicising of Convention details.

The National Assembly provides the Head Teller for every unit with comprehensive guidelines on how to perform his or her role, including training of the other tellers.

Following Unit Conventions, the National Assembly receives reports from unit convention secretaries, which contain recommendations to the National Assembly. The National Assembly reviews all

recommendations from the Conventions and proceeds to communicate with all elected delegates about arrangements for the forthcoming National Convention.

See also:

Election Procedures, Ch. 2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HOST ASSEMBLY

For each Unit the National Spiritual Assembly appoints a Local Spiritual Assembly as the host responsible for making arrangements. Briefly, the responsibilities of the host Assembly include:

1. Appointing a head teller and assistant tellers
2. Deciding on a mailing address for postal ballots.
3. Booking an appropriate venue.
4. Informing the National Office of these details.

Host Assemblies receive guidelines covering education and promotion, organisation, facilities, and the programme. It is recommended that each host Assembly appoints a well-motivated task force to ensure that everything is in place for a high-quality occasion. Members of the task force may be drawn not only from the host community but also the others in the unit area.

The National Assembly provides the Head Teller with comprehensive guidelines on how to perform his or her role. On the day, the Head Teller (appointed by the Host Assembly) is responsible for running the elections of the Unit Convention Chair and Secretary and the Unit's delegates. Afterwards the Head Teller mails the election report form and ballot papers to the Bahá'í National Office.

The National Assembly encourages all Local Assemblies to offer opportunities for the friends in their communities to deepen on the importance of participating in Bahá'í elections. It hopes to see ever-increasing participation in this important aspect of the Administrative Order.