

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL, CLUSTER AGENCIES AND INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN GLOBAL PROSPERITY

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REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCIL

How is the election of the Regional Bahá'í Council conducted?

The election of each Regional Bahá'í Council takes place once a year on a designated day prior to the Day of the Covenant, November 26, the day on which the newly elected members take office.

The Universal House of Justice decides which Regional Bahá'í Councils are formed entirely by election and which are formed by appointment by the National Spiritual Assembly. Currently (2013), the Councils for England and Scotland, which consist of nine members each, are elected by the members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in each region by secret ballot. Tie votes are broken by lot, as it is impracticable to hold a revote. Further, any vacancy which arises on the Council through the next year will be filled by the individual with the next highest number of votes.

The Councils for Northern Ireland and Wales, which have five members each, are appointed in the following manner:

[b]alloting 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.

Universal House of Justice, The Establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils in Certain Countries, Their Characteristics and Functions, 30 May 1997

Thus, the appointments of these Councils as well as the filling of any vacancies are ultimately made by the National Spiritual Assembly in close consultation with the Institution of the Counsellors.

For all Regional Councils, members of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental Board of Counsellors are ineligible for election. Auxiliary Board members may be voted for, but must choose between continuing to serve on the Auxiliary Board or accepting service on the Regional Bahá'í Council.

What is the relationship between the Regional Bahá'í Council and local Spiritual Assemblies?

The Regional Bahá'í Council is an institution of the Faith under the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly. The Council guides, stimulates, gives direction, and sets out plans for the Local Spiritual Assemblies and clusters within its region. For those clusters where a Council has appointed an Area Teaching Committee (see below), this task can be carried out through that committee. Thus Local Spiritual Assemblies work closely with their Regional Council or their Area Teaching Committee to develop and carry out plans for expansion and

consolidation. The adoption and implementation of the plans of the Regional Council and their Area Teaching Committee by Local Assemblies and clusters is a key element in the successful expansion and consolidation of the Faith:

The main task of a Regional Bahá'í Council is to devise and execute expansion and consolidation plans in close collaboration with the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the believers within its area of jurisdiction. Its goal is to create strong Local Spiritual Assemblies which will be the focal centres of Bahá'í activity, will exercise their vitally

important role in the development of the Faith and will demonstrate their ability to regulate the affairs of their local communities.

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

Over time, the scope of the responsibilities of Regional Bahá'í Councils will evolve, and part of this organic change will affect the way they relate to the Local Spiritual Assemblies. Throughout this transition, a balanced relationship must exist between these institutions that allows for the autonomy of the Local Assembly to be safeguarded while still maintaining close collaboration with its Council.

Should a Local Assembly send minutes of its meetings to the Regional Bahá'í Council?

No. The Regional Council is not responsible for the review of the minutes of Local Spiritual Assemblies under its jurisdiction.

Must a Local Spiritual Assembly go through its Regional Council to access the National Spiritual Assembly?

No. Although the responsibilities of the Regional Council will increase over time, the Local Spiritual Assembly retains the right to access the National Spiritual Assembly directly:

The working relationship between the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly in an area where there is a Regional Bahá'í Council will depend upon the range of functions and responsibilities conferred by the National Assembly upon the Council. The right of direct access to the National Assembly by the Local Spiritual Assembly is preserved.

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

May a Local Spiritual Assembly appeal a decision of the Regional Bahá'í Council?

Yes. A Local Spiritual Assembly does not, however, have the right to openly or widely criticise a decision of the Regional Bahá'í Council. If the Assembly believes that an action of the Regional Bahá'í Council is adversely affecting the welfare of its community, it should seek direct consultation with the Council to resolve the difference. If the Local Spiritual Assembly is still not satisfied with the outcome of the consultations it may appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly.

CLUSTERS

What is a cluster, and what is its purpose?

The Universal House of Justice describes the concept of a cluster as “*a geographic construct intended to facilitate thinking about the growth of the Faith*”. A cluster usually consists of a small geographic region including several localities.

How are cluster areas determined?

Cluster boundaries are determined by the Regional Bahá'í Council following consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly, the Continental Counsellors and the believers in the areas affected.

How does a cluster develop?

Under a wide diversity of conditions, in virtually any cluster, it is possible for an expanding nucleus of individuals to generate a movement towards the goal of a new World Order. A decade ago, when we introduced the concept of a cluster – a geographic construct intended to facilitate thinking about the growth of the Faith – we provided an outline of four broad stages along the path of its development. As the Bahá'í community set about implementing the provisions of the Plan, this outline proved immensely useful in giving shape and definition to what is essentially an ongoing process. The abundant experience which has since accrued enables the believers now to conceive of the movement of a population, propelled by mounting spiritual forces, in terms of a rich and dynamic continuum.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010

Invariably, opportunities afforded by the personal circumstances of the believers initially involved – or perhaps a single homefront pioneer – to enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents dictate how the process of growth begins in a cluster. A study circle made up of a few friends or colleagues, a class offered for several neighbourhood children, a group formed for junior youth during after-school hours, a devotional gathering hosted for family and friends – any one of these can serve as a stimulus to growth.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010.

How are cluster activities administered?

There are three ‘agencies’ that operate at the level of the cluster: Training Institute Coordinators, Area Teaching Committees, and Auxiliary Board members. Coordinators for study circles, children’s classes and junior youth groups are appointed by the relevant Regional Training Institute Board. Area Teaching Committees (ATCs) often have three members at the present time and are appointed by the Regional Bahá'í Council. Auxiliary Board members are appointed by the Continental Board of Counsellors and usually serve several neighbouring clusters.

It is important to note that, as a programme of growth is being brought into existence, an emergent community spirit begins to exert its influence on the course of events. Whether activities are scattered across the cluster or concentrated in one village or neighbourhood, a sense of common purpose characterizes the endeavours of the friends. Whatever level of organization served to channel the early manifestations of this spirit, the systematic, coordinated multiplication of core activities necessitates that higher levels soon be attained. Through various measures, greater structure is lent to activity, and initiative, shaped largely by individual volition before, is now given collective expression. A complement of coordinators appointed by the institute moves into place – those for study circles, for junior youth groups, and for children’s classes. Any order of appointment is potentially valid. Nothing less than an acute awareness of circumstances on the ground should make this determination, for what is at stake is not compliance with a set of procedures but the unfoldment of an educational process that has begun to show its potential to bring about the spiritual empowerment of large numbers.

Parallel to the establishment of mechanisms to support the institute process, other administrative structures are gradually taking shape. Out of the occasional meetings of a few believers emerge the regular deliberations of an expanding core group of friends concerned with channelling into the field of service an increasing store of energy. As the process of growth continues to gather momentum, such an arrangement ultimately fails to satisfy the demands of planning and decision making, and an Area Teaching Committee is constituted, and reflection meetings institutionalized. In the joint interactions of the Committee, the institute and the Auxiliary Board members, a fully fledged scheme for the coordination of activities becomes operational – with all the inherent capacity needed to facilitate the efficient flow of guidance, funds, and information. By now, the process of growth in the cluster will conform to the rhythm established by pronounced cycles of expansion and consolidation, which, punctuated every three months by a meeting for reflection and planning, are unfolding without interruption.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010

Whatever the nature of the arrangements made at the cluster level for coordinating large-scale activity, continued progress will depend on the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies and on the increased capacity of Regional Bahá’í Councils and ultimately National Spiritual Assemblies.

Ibid.

What is the role of the Local Spiritual Assembly in a cluster?

What needs to occur in the first instance is relatively straightforward: Individual awareness of the process of growth gathering momentum in the village, born of each member’s personal involvement in the core activities, must coalesce into a collective consciousness that recognizes both the nature of the transformation under way and the obligation of the Assembly to foster it. Without doubt, some attention will have to be given to certain basic administrative functions – for example, meeting with a degree of regularity, conducting the Nineteen Day Feast and planning Holy Day observances, establishing a local fund, and holding annual elections in accordance with Bahá’í principle. However, it should not prove difficult for the Local Assembly to begin, concomitant with such efforts and with encouragement from an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member, to consult as a body on one or two specific issues with immediate relevance to the life of the community: how the devotional character of the village is being enhanced through the efforts of individuals who have completed the first institute course; how the spiritual education of the children is being addressed by teachers raised up by the institute; how the potential of junior youth is being realized by the programme for their spiritual empowerment; how the spiritual and social fabric of the community is being strengthened as the friends visit one another in their homes.

As the Assembly consults on such tangible matters and learns to nurture the process of growth lovingly and patiently, its relationship with the Area Teaching Committee and the training institute gradually becomes cemented in a common purpose. But, of still greater importance, it will begin to lay the foundations on which can be built that uniquely affectionate and genuinely supportive relationship, described by the beloved Guardian in many of his messages, which Local Spiritual Assemblies should establish with the individual believer.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010

The above passage provides an excellent foundation for the agenda of a local Spiritual Assembly at the present time, as it details the main areas that require its attention.

Basic administrative functions:

- meeting with a degree of regularity;
- conducting the Nineteen Day Feast and planning Holy Day observances;
- establishing a local fund;
- and holding annual elections in accordance with Bahá'í principle.

Issues of immediate relevance to community life:

- how the devotional character of the village is being enhanced through the efforts of individuals who have completed the first institute course;
- how the spiritual education of the children is being addressed by teachers raised up by the institute;
- how the potential of junior youth is being realised by the programme for their spiritual empowerment;
- how the spiritual and social fabric of the community is being strengthened as the friends visit one another in their homes.

What is the responsibility of a Local Spiritual Assembly for institute training?

...in the system thus created to develop its human resources, the community of the Greatest Name possesses an instrument of limitless potentialities. Under a wide diversity of conditions, in virtually any cluster, it is possible for an expanding nucleus of individuals to generate a movement towards the goal of a new World Order.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010

A Local Spiritual Assembly might consider the following passages in fostering the Training Institute process in their community:

What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of ... training institutes on a scale never before attempted

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 153

Ample opportunities should be given to them to put into practice what they have learned, and in this connection, you will need to create within your community an encouraging environment, one in which the friends feel empowered to step forward, whatever their capacities may be, and take up the work of the Faith.

The Universal House of Justice, quoted in Training Institutes and Systematic Growth, p. 9

Do individuals trained as tutors of an institute course require the permission of a Local Assembly to begin a study circle?

No. Local Assemblies are not responsible for study circle tutors. Any queries or requests should be directed to the Cluster Institute Coordinator. The Local Assembly should encourage the activities of the study circle, particularly in its service components, and remain aware of the trained human resources it has available in its community.

How are cluster activities funded?

The Regional Bahá'í Council can receive donations towards cluster activities. The friends within a cluster are encouraged to fund their own activities wherever possible, but lack of funds should not be a barrier to progress. The Area Teaching Committee or the Regional Council can be turned to, if financial support is needed for activities. .

May a Local Assembly within a cluster collaborate on inter-community activities with other Local Assemblies outside the cluster?

Yes. The boundaries of a cluster are created to plan for growth on a manageable scale and to systematise the practice of inter-community activity but collaboration outside a cluster may nevertheless be conducted in much the same way as within it. Local Assemblies are encouraged, however, not to neglect thereby the progress of communities within their cluster. By developing their own cluster's resources and preparing and implementing intensive programmes of growth they may, by having such a focus, achieve more than if their energies are widespread.

INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN GLOBAL PROSPERITY

What is the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity?

The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) is an agency of the Universal House of Justice that has, since 2008, been running seminars for Bahá'í undergraduate students each summer in the UK. These seminars take place in the summer and are around 10-12 days long. Postgraduate seminars are also periodically held in Europe. The aim of these seminars is to help raise capacity in young people to contribute to the prevalent discourses of society, and more generally to help participants shape a life of service to humanity. The undergraduate seminars also assist participants in overcoming specific challenges that they often face at university, such as encountering materialistic frameworks of thought that leave no room for dialogue between science and religion.

Further information about the purpose and form of the seminars can be found in the following letter dated 14 October 2013 from the National Assembly to Local Assemblies: <http://admin.bahai.org.uk/institute-for-studies-in-global-prosperity/> In addition, information can be found on the official website of ISGP: <http://www.globalprosperity.org/>

How can Local Assemblies support the work of ISGP?

Local Assemblies should warmly encourage young Bahá'ís in their communities, who are at or approaching university age, to attend the ISGP seminars. This may, for example, involve announcements at the Nineteen Day Feast, visits to individual youth or groups of youth, and discussion with parents to help them also understand the great value of their children being able to attend.

In addition, Local Assemblies should be attentive to opportunities to offer practical support to the youth to ensure that as many as possible can attend. This might involve the Local Assembly contributing to participants' costs, if required, offering transport to and from the seminars, and so forth.

Details about the seminars are usually announced to the community via NEWS and other means. The coordinating team for ISGP in the UK can be contacted directly at isgpuk@gmail.com