

RELATIONS WITH AUXILIARY BOARD MEMBERS AND ASSISTANTS

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The Universal House of Justice, in 2001, published a document entitled *The Institution of the Counsellors*, as

... a digest of the guidance previously given on this subject, which we hope will increase the friends' understanding of not only the responsibilities of the Counsellors and their auxiliaries but also the workings of the Administrative Order in general.

The quotations on this topic come from that document unless otherwise stated.

What is the system of institutions within the Administrative Order and how do they relate to one another?

The Administrative Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh accomplishes its divinely ordained purpose through a system of institutions, each with its defined sphere of action. The central governing body of the Order is the Universal House of Justice, whose terms of reference are the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh together with the interpretations and expositions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. Under its guidance, legislative, executive and judicial authority over the affairs of the Bahá'í community is exercised by Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. This authority is also exercised by Regional Councils, committees and other agencies established by these institutions, to the extent that it is so delegated.

Together with the authority vested in elected corporate bodies to make decisions binding on the community is the spiritual, moral and intellectual influence that the Administrative Order exerts on both the lives of believers and the work of the Faith's institutions. This influence acquires a special character through the services performed by those individuals who are appointed to the high rank of Counsellors and by their deputies. More specifically, the Continental Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants are charged with functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith. In carrying out their duties, the Continental Counsellors receive their guidance from the International Teaching Centre, an institution whose mandate is global and which functions in close proximity to the Universal House of Justice.

Acting in their respective roles, the two institutions of the Counsellors and the Spiritual Assemblies share responsibility for the protection and propagation of the Faith. The harmonious interaction between them ensures the constant flow of guidance, love and encouragement to the believers and invigorates their individual and collective endeavours to advance the Cause. ...

Freed from those administrative functions assigned to elected bodies, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members are able to concentrate their energies on the task of promoting adherence to principle on the part of individual Bahá'ís, Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í communities. Their understanding of the Teachings, together with the wisdom that comes from the experience gained through intimate involvement in the many aspects of Bahá'í activity, especially qualifies them to offer advice that assists the work of elected bodies. Further, the fact that they occupy a rank higher than that of the Spiritual Assemblies ensures that they are kept properly informed and that Spiritual Assemblies give due consideration to their advice and recommendations. The administrative processes of the Faith are not only concerned with judicial matters, laws and regulations, and programmes that direct action, but also embrace those

measures that elicit from the friends wholehearted response and channel their energies. Counsellors and their auxiliaries bring to bear on all such administrative processes their ability as individuals of proven devotion and consecrated spirit. Similarly, they play a vital part in encouraging the friends and in fostering individual initiative, diversity and freedom of action...

What are the specific tasks of the Auxiliary Board members?

Referring to the International Teaching Centre, the Universal House of Justice has stated that its establishment brought to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause Residing in the Holy Land. The Teaching Centre is charged with the tasks of coordinating, stimulating and directing the activities of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and acts as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice.

In the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice it is stated:

The institution of the Boards of Counsellors was brought into being by the Universal House of Justice to extend into the future the specific functions of protection and propagation conferred upon the Hands of the Cause of God. The members of these Boards are appointed by the Universal House of Justice.

In the same document the two Auxiliary Boards originally established by the beloved Guardian are described:

In each zone there shall be two Auxiliary Boards, one for the protection and one for the propagation of the Faith, the numbers of whose members shall be set by the Universal House of Justice. The members of these Auxiliary Boards shall serve under the direction of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and shall act as their deputies, as assistants and advisers.

...The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation have distinct functions. They do have certain tasks in common, however, especially in the area of deepening and consolidation. From the outset, the Guardian envisioned that the Auxiliary Boards would assist the Hands 'in the discharge of their dual and sacred task of safeguarding the Faith and of promoting its teaching activities.' Among the tasks defined by the Guardian for the Auxiliary Board members are: to stimulate and strengthen the teaching work in cooperation with existing administrative bodies; to help activate weak centres, groups and Assemblies through their visits; to assist in the efficient and prompt execution of plans; to keep in touch with pioneers, helping them to persevere and pointing out to them the sacredness of their responsibility; to encourage individuals and Assemblies through correspondence and through visits; to impress upon the believers that the foundation of all Bahá'í activity is unity; to encourage the friends to contribute freely to the various Funds; and to bring to their attention the importance of individual effort and initiative. Further, Shoghi Effendi assigned to the Protection Board the specific duty of watching over the security of the Faith. Members of the Auxiliary Board for Protection, as experience shows, also assist in propagating the Cause, but focus much of their energies on deepening the friends' knowledge of the Covenant and fostering a spirit of love and unity. Their efforts contribute significantly to the growth of the Bahá'í community, for the protection of the Faith is intimately linked to its propagation.

How do the Auxiliary Board members carry out their functions within the administrative order?

The flexibility and ease with which the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members can respond to a perceived need in the community – such as the need for encouragement, explanation of plans, deepening in the Teachings, protection of the Covenant – are notable elements of their functioning. This flexibility enables them to operate as occasions demand, whether it is in giving counsel at a meeting, advising an individual in private, helping the friends to understand and obey a ruling of the Spiritual Assembly, or dealing with issues of the Covenant. In all these settings they are able to draw attention to relevant Texts, to impart information, explore situations, and acquaint themselves with conditions in ways not always possible to a Spiritual Assembly. They are able then to share with Spiritual Assemblies, as deemed necessary, ideas, analyses, perceptions and advice, which inevitably enhance the ability of these Assemblies to serve their communities. Where Local Assemblies are new or weak, Auxiliary Board members encourage them to organize their work. In all cases, they rally the local believers in support of the Assembly's initiatives.

What is the role of the assistants to the Auxiliary Board member?

As to the role of the assistants, they have the general responsibility of aiding the Auxiliary Board members to carry out their functions. The nature of their contribution, however, is reflected in the range of specific tasks assigned to each by the Auxiliary Board member whom he or she assists. The precise character of such tasks is determined by the Board member's perception of the needs and potential of the communities that he or she serves, and it is in this context, for the most part, that the orientation and guidance of assistants become significant.

How does information flow between the institutions?

The manner in which interactions between the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National Assemblies and their agencies, on the other, take place is regulated in order to maintain dynamic interdependence...

The effective discharge of their responsibilities by both the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies calls for regular and frequent exchange of information. The National Spiritual Assembly is in contact with all the elements of its community through national committees, Regional Councils, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and other agencies. The Auxiliary Board members also have direct contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups, and individual believers and thus keep current with developments in the community. Naturally, both institutions welcome all the information that they regularly receive from each other.

Regular contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies in the area assigned to an Auxiliary Board member is an indispensable requirement of his or her functioning. In most areas, frequent consultations are only possible through assistants. The nature of these consultations, of course, depends on the tasks that the assistant is carrying out on behalf of the Auxiliary Board member.

Should minutes of meetings be shared with the Auxiliary Board member?

Although a National Spiritual Assembly may decide to encourage the Local Assemblies under its jurisdiction to share their minutes with the Auxiliary Board members in their area in order to develop close communication, Local Assemblies are not required to do so. This is left to their discretion.

How do the Auxiliary Board members and the Local Spiritual Assembly attend to the development of local communities?

One of the greatest challenges before all the institutions of the Faith during this Formative Age is the development of local communities, communities that are characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and a collective will. It is these communities that serve as the environment in which the capacities of all components – men, women, youth and children – are developed and their powers are multiplied in unified action.

At the heart of the community must function a strong Local Spiritual Assembly. When a community is blessed with such an institution, the earnest collaboration between the Auxiliary Board members and the Local Assembly generates the dynamics of a joyous and active life conducive to spiritual transformation and systematic growth. Together, while each works within the sphere of activity assigned to it, these institutions create an atmosphere of learning and disciplined behaviour, characterized by patience and forbearance toward mistakes. They build and maintain unity of thought and action in an environment free of excessive criticism, of backbiting, of conflict and contention, which at the same time welcomes the expression of concern on the part of every believer. Through wise counsel and loving support, they educate the friends to hearken to the Assembly's decisions and to align their behaviour with the exigencies of harmonious community life.

... It is clear that such a formidable set of responsibilities cannot be discharged properly by one or two individuals in relation to a growing number of local communities. It is here that the significance of the freedom given the Auxiliary Board members to name assistants for a wide variety of tasks, to direct them and to lovingly supervise their activities becomes evident. Oftentimes, the work of the Board members is not carried out in the context of communities that enjoy the leadership of a mature Spiritual Assembly. In a community where the Local Assembly is at the very early stages of its development, the role of the assistants in promoting the establishment of study groups, devotional meetings, classes for the spiritual education of children, and the Nineteen Day Feast is even more crucial. Further, the Auxiliary Board members give attention to strengthening the Local Spiritual Assemblies, helping them to master the art of consultation, to gain confidence in making decisions, to adhere courageously to principle, and to learn how to mobilize the friends in unified action.

It is not necessary for an Auxiliary Board member to deputize an assistant to meet with a Local Spiritual Assembly. Assistants may meet with Local Spiritual Assemblies as they pursue the specific tasks assigned to them by the Board members. There are, of course, occasions when an Auxiliary Board member asks an assistant to meet with an Assembly on a particular matter.

How should the relationship be between the Auxiliary Board members and the Local Spiritual Assemblies?

Auxiliary Board members do not direct Local Spiritual Assemblies or individual believers in their activities, but are entirely free to make suggestions and recommendations they judge wise and necessary. Further, they help Local Assemblies to achieve the level of spiritual unity, activity and development enjoined in the writings. It falls on the Auxiliary Board members to build up a warm and loving relationship with Local Spiritual Assemblies and believers so that they will spontaneously turn to them for advice and assistance.

In the relationship between Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies, to overstress distinctions is not only unnecessary but detrimental to the spirit of loving collaboration and encouragement which is essential to the progress of the Faith in every locality. The differentials of rank, functions or procedures between agencies of the Bahá'í administration are meant to canalize, not obstruct, the work of the Cause; all these features of the administration are properly viewed in the context of humble service to the Blessed Perfection, which is the loftiest objective of all who gather under the banner of the Most Great Name.

It should not be assumed that collaboration between the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and Assemblies and their agencies, on the other, implies that they must be actively involved in the same project at the same time. No doubt, in many cases simultaneous participation would be useful and even necessary, but the work of the Counsellors, of the National Spiritual Assembly and of all their subsidiary institutions can well be carried on separately and at different times, provided that they do not conflict and that information on the work done and the results achieved is shared fully and freely.

What is the role of the Auxiliary Board member in the formulation and implementation of plans?

National plans, formulated in the context of the global plans of the Faith, serve as the framework within which the friends can undertake action. Through them, National Assemblies not only set goals to be pursued by themselves and their agencies, but also give direction to the believers...

The plans of action that Regional Councils, Area Teaching Committees and Local Spiritual Assemblies devise in the ensuing process need to go beyond the mere enumeration of goals to include an analysis of approaches to be adopted and lines of action to be followed. Indeed, at this level, planning and implementation must go hand in hand. If learning is to be the primary mode of operation in a community, then visions, strategies, goals and methods have to be re-examined time and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied and lessons learned, modifications have to be made in goals and approaches, but in a way that continuity of action is maintained.

The involvement of the Auxiliary Board members in this process of design and implementation is multifaceted. They contribute to deliberations in which the worldwide aims and accomplishments of the Faith are analysed, the condition of society and the forces operating within it are examined, opportunities and needs are detected. They bring their knowledge of the Faith to bear on consultations that generate shared vision and strategies for growth.

Their familiarity with the friends and their talents, particularly as these are developed through the efforts of the training institute, enables them to draw attention to the characteristics of plans of action that are realistic and within the grasp of the believers. The network of assistants they each can name provides them with the means for stimulating activity at the local level and following it to completion. And above all, the love and respect in which they are held create for them the opportunity to act as standard-bearers and lead the community in action.

How do the institutions work together for the protection of the Cause?

In discharging their obligations related to protection, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members endeavour to nourish the roots of certitude, fan the flame of an all-embracing love in the hearts of the friends, combat the age-old habit of conflict and contention and fortify bonds of friendship and unity, promote adherence to principle and the ethical standards enshrined in the Teachings, raise the believers' sight above the limitations of self-centredness that they may dedicate their energies to the welfare of the human race, and strengthen their allegiance to the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Helping the believers to meet high moral standards does not require prying into their private lives. The nature of this responsibility is essentially educative. The loving advice Board members offer Local Assemblies, on the one hand, and the warm fellowship they and their assistants cultivate with the friends, on the other, are ready means through which they are able to advance this educational process. The cumulative effect of these efforts, combined with the benefits the friends derive from formal courses, for instance those offered by the training institute, contributes greatly to the creation of healthy and vibrant local communities. This educational process includes the imposition of sanctions by the Spiritual Assemblies, whenever it becomes absolutely necessary. In such cases the advice of the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members to the Assembly can be of particular value.

Although deepening the friends' understanding of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it are of paramount importance, the duties of the Auxiliary Board members for Protection do not end here. The Board members must remain ever vigilant, monitoring the actions of those who, driven by the promptings of ego, seek to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of the friends and undermine the Faith. In general, whenever believers become aware of such problems, they should immediately contact whatever institution they feel moved to turn to, whether it be a Counsellor, an Auxiliary Board member, the National Spiritual Assembly or their own Local Assembly. It then becomes the duty of that institution to ensure that the report is fed into the correct channels and that all the other institutions affected are promptly informed. Not infrequently, the responsibility will fall on an Auxiliary Board member, in coordination with the Assembly concerned, to take some form of action in response to the situation. This involvement will include counselling the believer in question; warning him, if necessary, of the consequences of his actions; and bringing to the attention of the Counsellors the gravity of the situation, which may call for their intervention.

Do the Auxiliary Board members deal with personal problems or conflicts between believers?

In general, it is not the task of Auxiliary Board members, but rather that of the Spiritual Assemblies, to deal with the personal problems of individuals and conflicts between them and with disciplinary matters. However, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants are vital elements of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, with functions which include the counselling of believers. If a believer approaches an Auxiliary Board member or an assistant with a personal matter, it is for the Board member or assistant to decide whether to give advice or ask the believer to turn to the Spiritual Assembly.

Which Board member to turn to – Propagation or Protection?

The question as to which of the two Boards – Propagation or Protection – a Local Spiritual Assembly or individual believer should turn to on a particular issue is not a matter to be regulated, but can be gradually clarified as experience is gained at the local level. If an Auxiliary Board member feels that a matter would have been better referred to his or her colleague, this could easily be arranged.

Can Auxiliary Board members and assistants serve on National, Regional or Local administrative bodies?

All adult Bahá'ís, 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.

It is preferable for an Auxiliary Board member not to be elected as an officer of a unit convention; however, if so elected, he or she may accept, without having to resign from the Auxiliary Board.

A ballot in the election of a Spiritual Assembly or Regional Council or for the delegates to a National Convention should not be invalidated because it contains the name of a member of an Auxiliary Board.

As with the Counsellors, should the membership of a community drop to nine, an Auxiliary Board member may serve temporarily on the Local Spiritual Assembly, and as an officer if elected, until a replacement is available.

Officers of elected bodies may be appointed assistants to Auxiliary Board members.

Believers can serve at the same time both as assistants to Auxiliary Board members and on Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Councils and committees, and function as their officers. Thus, the appointment of a believer as a Board member's assistant does not require the resignation of that person from other administrative bodies, nor does it, in and of itself, constitute a reason for accepting such a resignation.

Assistants who are members of a Spiritual Assembly, Regional Council, or committee do not function as assistants in the context of that membership, and they have the same duty to observe the confidentiality of its consultations as does any other member.

Should the Assembly contact the Auxiliary Board member or wait to be contacted?

...we feel it important to stress that the relationship between Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies should not be hampered by regulations... The relationship between Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies should not be a matter of rights and prerogatives; it should be one of loving and wholehearted collaboration, in the spirit of the beloved Guardian's statement that 'the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation'.

From a memorandum of the Universal House of Justice to the Hands of the Cause of God
in the Holy Land, 7 October 1970