

RESIGNATION FROM BAHÁ'Í MEMBERSHIP

Contents

When may a resignation be accepted?	2
How should the local Spiritual Assembly deal with a request for resignation?	2
How should a Local Spiritual Assembly deal with situations where the individuals wish to remain 'inactive'?.....	4
How should a Local Spiritual Assembly deal with situations where the individuals are 'inactive' or their whereabouts are not known?.....	4
What if a person wishes to resign in order to break Bahá'í law?	5
What is the status of a person who claims to still believe in Bahá'u'lláh but refuses to accept some fundamental principle of the Faith, such as the authority of the administrative institutions?	6
What happens if a resignation from membership coincides with a local Assembly election?	6
What happens if someone verbally tells another Bahá'í that they no longer wish to be a Bahá'í but does not put this in writing?	6
Reinstatement of membership.....	6

Resignations or withdrawals of membership are only accepted from individuals who no longer fulfil the requirements set out for membership of the Bahá'í community. Thus, the person may no longer accept the station and authority of Bahá'u'lláh; they may accordingly have committed themselves to membership of another faith community, or they may have ceased to believe in God altogether.

However, a person may have other reasons for stating their wish to withdraw from membership and each individual request for withdrawal needs therefore to be considered carefully by the local Spiritual Assembly before it recommends to the National Spiritual Assembly that that resignation be accepted.

Where there is no local Spiritual Assembly, any request for resignation should be handled by the National Spiritual Assembly.

When may a resignation be accepted?

Should one who is a member of the Bahá'í Community lose his faith or find that he had not really believed from the beginning he would notify the Spiritual Assembly of his withdrawal from the community.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
15 May 1967

With regard to those who do not consider themselves Bahá'ís on the basis of the argument that they signed the declaration card without actually knowing the significance of what they were doing ... you should deepen their knowledge of the Faith. If they feel, after receiving sufficient information, that they do not wish to be Bahá'í, then their names should be removed from the Bahá'í membership list.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, to a National Spiritual Assembly, 23 June 1985. *Lights of Guidance* par. 2085

Any member of the Bahá'í community who finds that he does not believe in Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation is free to withdraw from the Faith and such a withdrawal should be accepted. But a Bahá'í who continues to believe in Bahá'u'lláh cannot withdraw from the Bahá'í community. While he believes in this Revelation he is subject to its laws.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 8 July 1970

How should the local Spiritual Assembly deal with a request for resignation?

Where a withdrawal or resignation request is received from a believer in a local Assembly area by the National Spiritual Assembly, it is usually referred back to the local Assembly for its recommendation as to whether to accept the resignation or not. The following passages and comments will guide the local Assembly in assessing the situation:

A Local Spiritual Assembly should consider each request to resign on its merits. The Universal House of Justice has specifically advised that 'the expressed wish

to withdraw from the Faith should not be acted upon in a routine or bureaucratic manner’.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 2 September 1987

... if a person makes it quite clear that he does not wish to be a Bahá’í, his name should be removed from the membership list. Normally, therefore, tenders of resignation, however they are expressed, may be accepted.

Cited in a letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 10 November 1971

Where the request for withdrawal is for some other reason than loss of faith, or where the reason is not clear from that person’s written request to resign, the Assembly may feel that consultation with the believer could help resolve his or her difficulties. The aim should not be just to clarify an individual’s Bahá’í status – it is to endeavour to draw ambivalent Bahá’ís closer to the Faith. For those experiencing doubts or difficulties, a meeting with a mature and deepened believer to discuss their beliefs and their questions, may prove helpful. Dealing with the matter in a less personal way, by correspondence or telephone, is likely not to be helpful and should be avoided if possible.

If, for example, it is felt that loving consultation will clear up misunderstandings and possibly lead to reaffirmation of faith, the Spiritual Assembly should be free, within the limits of discretion, to make an attempt.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 10 November 1971

When a person wishes to withdraw, he may state that he no longer accepts the claim of Bahá’u’lláh. The Assembly must then determine, to the extent possible, whether this really is the case, or whether in fact he is making this statement for other reasons: for example, he may be a believer who is reacting to the distress he is experiencing from an unfortunate occurrence in his Bahá’í community life ...

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 2 September 1987

... believers need to be educated to realise that resignation from the Faith is a serious step which has a profound effect on their spiritual development, since it involves a repudiation of the claim of Bahá’u’lláh. Believers who express their disagreement with a decision of an Assembly, local or national, by resigning from the Faith, should be urged to consider carefully the implications of their actions in light of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 14 October 1988

... resignations from the Faith should be accepted only if the Assembly feels that the person does not believe in the Manifestation of God; that an individual has been a trouble-maker, or has seriously disturbed the unity of the community, is not sufficient reason to accept his resignation from the Faith, unless the Assembly feels that his actions provide sufficient evidence of a lack of belief in the claim of Bahá’u’lláh.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 14 October 1988

How should a Local Spiritual Assembly deal with situations where the individuals wish to remain 'inactive'?

If a person makes it quite clear that they do not wish to be considered an active member of the Bahá'í community and be affiliated with it and exert their

voting right, then their name should be removed from the voting list; but if a person considers himself or herself a Bahá'í, and for various reasons is not able to be active in the affairs of the Community, then they should certainly not be removed from our voting list...

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 2, 1951, to a National Spiritual Assembly, in *Lights of Guidance*, par. 300

In cases where it is felt that the believer's name should be withdrawn from the voting list, the National Assembly should be informed with full background information on the individual and the reason for the recommendation.

How should a Local Spiritual Assembly deal with situations where the individuals are 'inactive' or their whereabouts are not known?

Whilst it is embarrassing to leave names of inactive believers on a membership list, inactivity and lack of attendance at Bahá'í meetings are not the bases for removing the names of believers from the membership roster. A name should be removed only when the person clearly states that he no longer believes in Bahá'u'lláh and wishes his name to be removed from Bahá'í membership. If the believer's whereabouts are unknown, his name should still not be removed from membership, but kept in a special list of believers whose addresses are unknown, and who obviously are not counted in determining the allocation of delegates.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Malaysia, 25 September 1973: *Lights of Guidance*, p. 84.

The House of Justice has asked us to point out that normally once a person has declared his belief in Bahá'u'lláh and this declaration has been accepted by the Assembly it should be assumed that he continues to be a Bahá'í until he states the contrary. If believers become inactive it is naturally desirable that the Local Spiritual Assemblies attempt to maintain contact with them and encourage them to become active unless, of course, it is obvious that their personal situation precludes such activity. For example, a Bahá'í who is married to a non-Bahá'í may well have to limit his activities to some degree in order to maintain the unity of his family. If during this process of encouragement it becomes apparent that the Bahá'í in question has in fact ceased to believe in Bahá'u'lláh and wishes not to be a member of the Bahá'í community, the Assembly would be fully justified in accepting his withdrawal.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Spain, 7 May 1975. *Lights of Guidance*, par. 86.

In cases where a believer's whereabouts is unknown, the National Assembly should be informed and provided with any background that may be helpful for it to record for future reference.

What if a person wishes to resign in order to break Bahá'í law?

To deny that one is a Bahá'í while one still believes in Bahá'u'lláh is not withdrawal, it is dissimulation of one's faith, and Bahá'í law does not countenance the dissimulation of a believer's faith for the purpose of breaking the law. If a believer who did not like a particular law were to be permitted to leave the community to break the law, and then rejoin with impunity, this would make a mockery of the Law of God ... It is abundantly clear from his letters that he has continually believed in Bahá'u'lláh, that he knew the law that marriage is conditioned on the consent of parents, that he dissimulated his faith in order to be able to break this law with impunity. He must, therefore, be regarded as a Bahá'í without administrative rights.

Letter written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
15 May 1967

Where a Local Spiritual Assembly has reason to believe that a Bahá'í is attempting to dissimulate his or her faith, it should advise the National Spiritual Assembly of this when forwarding the resignation.

If a person breaks Bahá'í law in such a way that the loss of voting rights is justified, he or she will continue to be regarded as a Bahá'í but not one who is, administratively, in good standing. It is important that the Assembly distinguishes between a situation where a person wishes to resign in order to break Bahá'í law and one where a person breaks Bahá'í law because he or she no longer believes in Bahá'u'lláh.

At some time or other, every Law of Bahá'u'lláh may impose a test upon the faith of a believer and the question is whether the believer will meet the test or not. As you are aware, withdrawal from the Faith in order to evade a Law of Bahá'u'lláh is not possible to a true believer.

Letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, 22 August 1968. *Lights of Guidance*, par. 371.

We note the case in which believers have evidently attempted to withdraw from the Faith in an effort to evade the Bahá'í law requiring consent of parents. This, of course, should not be permitted and such believers are subject to administrative expulsion (i.e. loss of voting rights) on the same basis as if they had not made that attempt.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
7 September 1965

As you know, a believer cannot escape administrative expulsion by the ruse of resigning from the faith in order to break its law with impunity. However, the Assembly should be satisfied that there was indeed such an ulterior motive behind the withdrawal. A believer's record of inactivity and his general attitude to the Faith may well lead the Assembly to conclude that his withdrawal was bona fide, even though immediately succeeded by marriage, and in such a case withdrawal may be accepted.

Letter written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
20 May 1971

What is the status of a person who claims to still believe in Bahá'u'lláh but refuses to accept some fundamental principle of the Faith, such as the authority of the administrative institutions?

... To accept the Cause without the administration is like to accept the Teachings without acknowledging the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. To be a Bahá'í is to accept the Cause in its entirety. To take exception to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, and therefore is to deny the Cause...

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly,
30 May 1930

In such a situation, the local Spiritual Assembly should help to deepen the believer in question so that they come to understand the full significance of the inseparability of belief in Bahá'u'lláh and acceptance of His Administrative Order and obedience to the Institutions of the Faith.

What happens if a resignation from membership coincides with a local Assembly election?

... if, 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 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 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador, 11 December 1979. *Lights of Guidance* par. 13

What happens if someone verbally tells another Bahá'í that they no longer wish to be a Bahá'í but does not put this in writing?

If a Local Assembly receives a verbal request for withdrawal from a reliable third party it should first look into the matter and—if possible and if deemed appropriate—should endeavour to contact the individual directly, or perhaps through a suitable member of the community. If contact is established, the guidance as stated above would naturally become relevant. If contact is not possible or appropriate, the facts of the matter and the Local Assembly's view of the situation should be forwarded to the National Assembly for its consideration.

Reinstatement of membership

If a person has resigned from the Faith and then wishes to rejoin, the Local Spiritual Assembly or Bahá'í teacher should follow the normal declaration procedure, except that the person is not to be considered as a Bahá'í and may not attend Bahá'í-only functions

until the National Spiritual Assembly notifies the Local Spiritual Assembly that it has accepted the re-declaration. The Local Spiritual Assembly must, when recommending the person's acceptance to the National Spiritual Assembly, note that he or she is seeking to 're-enrol'. An explanation of how the person has overcome the problems that led to his or her resignation in the first place would also be useful. It must be made clear to the applicant that the decision to enrol in the Faith is a serious one and not to be taken lightly. The Local Spiritual Assembly must be quite sure of the person's sincerity before recommending his or her re-enrolment.