

ENROLMENTS

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What are the guidelines for determining whether an individual should be accepted into the Faith?

The following passage sets out the pre-requisites for determining whether an individual should be accepted into the Faith:

The prime motive should always be the response of man to God's Message, and the recognition of His Messenger. Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the Teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance, p. 32

Shoghi Effendi has warned of the need to avoid the extremes of, on the one hand, allowing people to come into the Faith before they have understood its meaning; and, on the other, making the conditions of entry too difficult:

The believers must discriminate between the two extremes of bringing people into the Cause before they have fully grasped its fundamentals and making it too hard for them, expecting too much of them, before they accept them. This requires truly keen judgement, as it is unfair to people to allow them to embrace a movement the true meaning of which they have not fully grasped. It is equally unfair to expect them to be perfect Bahá'ís before they can enter the Faith. Many teaching problems arise out of these extremes.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 November 1941 [See further Lights of Guidance {revised edition} nos. 232-66.]

Does the individual have to be living according to Bahá'í standards before declaring?

No. It is not necessary that individuals be living according to Bahá'í standards at the time of their declaration, provided they are told of the laws that would affect their personal conduct and it is understood that they will take steps to conform to those laws after declaring:

The acceptance of a person into the Bahá'í community should be based not on whether he is leading an exemplary life, but on whether the Assembly is reasonably certain that he is sincere in his declaration of faith in Bahá'u'lláh and that he knows of the laws which would affect his personal conduct, so that he does not enter the community under a misapprehension.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 April 1981

Which laws should the individual be made aware of before enrolment in the Faith?

In addition to the spiritual obligation of daily prayers, fasting, the recitation of the Greatest Name 95 times a day and the payment of Ḥuququ'lláh, the individual should be made aware of the spiritual laws of prayer and fasting. They should also be made aware of those Bahá'í laws that might affect their personal conduct, such as:

- Marriage and Divorce
- Avoidance of drinking alcohol
- Avoidance of use of drugs (including marijuana)
- Obedience to the law of the land
- Non-involvement in Politics
- Chastity
- Burial law

On becoming a Bahá'í, it is particularly important that the individual is made aware of those laws relevant to them otherwise problems are likely to arise after enrolment.

What steps should be taken by the Bahá'í teacher or the Local Assembly when an individual expresses the wish to become a Bahá'í?

The person needs to make a declaration of Faith orally or in writing to the following effect:

I accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this Day, and wish to become a member of the Bahá'í Faith.

The spiritual implications of a declaration of faith are between the individual and God.

This declaration can be made by the individual themselves directly to the National office, through their Bahá'í teacher or through the Local Assembly. Once the Bahá'í teacher or Local Assembly is satisfied in their mind that the individual has a proper understanding of the Faith, as outlined above, the Bahá'í teacher/Local Assembly should provide the Records office with the individual's full details, namely their:

- full name as it appears on their passport
- full postal address
- email address
- phone number(s)
- date of birth

and

- the date of their declaration.

The individual can be assured that his details will be handled in strict confidence in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Incorrect details of the individual may delay the process of registration, so it is imperative that Local Assemblies provide accurate information.

To whom should the declarant's personal details be sent?

The National Assembly no longer produces declaration cards, however, the details should be sent to the Records office of the National Assembly at records@bahai.org.uk or posted to the National Bahá'í Centre. If the declarant resides in a Local Spiritual Assembly area the Records office will inform them of the declaration if it has been sent direct to the

National Office. If the declarant does not reside in a Local Spiritual Assembly area the Records office will inform the relevant Board members for that area.

What are the responsibilities of a Local Spiritual Assembly when it is made aware of a new declaration, i.e. once registration is complete?

The local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for fostering the spark of Faith in the newly declared believer. Thus it might be helpful:

- To invite and if necessary arrange for them initially to be accompanied to Feasts and Holy days to familiarize themselves with the life of the community.
- To accompany, encourage and ensure the continued participation and consolidation of the declarant in the Institute process.
- To ensure that the declarant receives regular updates and is in contact with the local community.

Whilst waiting for the registration process to be completed, declarants should be regarded as Bahá'ís. This means, if of age, they may be elected to an Assembly, become a delegate, or be appointed to a committee, give to the fund, and may exercise the right to vote; in short, all the rights and responsibilities of Bahá'ís in good standing. If attending a Bahá'í-only function at which credentials must be shown they may be vouched for by other believers. There are exceptions to this general rule – please read the rest of this chapter carefully.

When the National Spiritual Assembly has approved a declaration, it will send a welcome pack to the individual. The local Assembly will be informed that the declaration has been approved.

The Feast may be a fitting time to welcome the declarant into the local Bahá'í community. The new declarant should be entered on the community's membership list.

In rare instances the National Spiritual Assembly will not accept a declaration. Should this occur, the Assembly will be advised and given guidance on the steps to be taken.

Above all, the utmost endeavor should be exerted by your Assembly to familiarize the newly enrolled believers with the fundamental and spiritual verities of the Faith, and with the origins, the aims and purposes, as well as the processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, to acquaint them more fully with the history of the Faith, to instill in them a deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to enrich their spiritual life, to rouse them to a greater effort and a closer participation in both the teaching of the Faith and the administration of its activities, and to inspire them to make the necessary sacrifices for the furtherance of its vital interests. For as the body of the avowed supporters of the Faith is enlarged, and the basis of the structure of its Administrative Order is broadened, and the fame of the rising community spreads far and wide, a parallel progress must be achieved, if the fruits already garnered are to endure, in the spiritual quickening of its members and the deepening of their inner life.

*Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly,
26 June 1956*

When enrolling new believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles in their way that they feel it impossible to accept the Faith. On the other

hand, once accorded membership in the Community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live up to His Teachings, and to show forth the signs of a noble character in conformity with His Laws. This can often be done gradually, after the new believer is enrolled.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly, 25 June 1953) [For further information and suggestions on how to deepen new believers see Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 31–36]

We have noted that you have advised that Local Spiritual Assemblies to meet new believers at the time of their enrollment in the Faith. While it would be desirable for new believers to become acquainted with the elected members of their community, this should not be a requirement for acceptance of the new believer in the community

Letter written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 28 February 1973

Are there any circumstances in which a declaration should not be accepted?

An Assembly may refuse to accept a declaration if it feels that the person does not meet the guidelines set out above. For instance, if the person thinks that Bahá'u'lláh is a wise man but not a Manifestation of God.

The Universal House of Justice has also noted that:

... an individual may be encouraged to become better acquainted with the spirit, laws, and principles of the Faith before submitting his application...

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly, 4 April 1977

As Shoghi Effendi has advised against being too rigid in our requirements, it should not often happen that a declaration is refused. Nevertheless, should a Local Spiritual feel it has good reason not to accept a declaration, it has the right to do so. If the declarant still wishes to become a Bahá'í and believes the Local Spiritual Assembly has made a wrong decision, their Bahá'í teacher involved may refer the matter to the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Spiritual Assembly is not required to advise the National Spiritual Assembly that it has doubts about a possible declaration, although it may do so if it wishes. There are some exceptional situations in which it will be advisable to postpone enrolment, even though the Local Spiritual Assembly is satisfied as to the sincerity of the declarant's belief. These situations are covered later in this chapter.

What if the declarant does not live in a Local Spiritual Assembly area?

If the new declarant is not in an Assembly area, the relevant Board members for that area will be informed of the declarant and they will then decide amongst themselves who is best placed to nurture the new declarant.

What happens if a believer has homes in more than one Council area?

The chosen residence of a believer will normally be in the area where the believer resides for the greater part of a year. Where there is doubt, please consult the National Assembly.

What is the procedure for a person who wishes to re-enrol in the Faith?

If a person has resigned from the Faith and then wishes to re-join, 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.

DECLARATION AND ENROLMENT – SPECIAL CASES

May citizens of Israel be enrolled as Bahá'ís?

The Bahá'í Faith is not taught in Israel and there is no Bahá'í community in Israel apart from those serving at the World Centre. Israelis who learn about the Faith outside Israel and wish to become Bahá'ís may be enrolled only if they intend living permanently outside of Israel. They must be advised that it is not possible for them to return to Israel, even for a brief visit, without the prior permission of the Universal House of Justice. They would also have to be willing to accept the restriction placed on teaching the Faith in Israel. The Local Spiritual Assembly should satisfy itself that the declarant's depth of understanding is sufficient to enable them to appreciate their situation and to remain firm in the Faith under these circumstances. If they intend to return to Israel formal enrolment is not possible. This, of course, does not affect the status of their personal belief in Bahá'u'lláh:

As you know, it has been a policy of long standing that we do not enrol believers in the Holy Land. The Writings and Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are available for everyone, including those who live here. However, when it comes to enrolment, those deeply interested in the Faith must be lovingly informed that aside from the World Centre, there is no Bahá'í community in the Holy Land and that for many reasons it is not propitious to establish local Bahá'í communities here. Furthermore, Bahá'ís are only permitted to come to the Holy Land for pilgrimage or for brief visits. Only those associated with the work at the World Centre are permitted to reside here. Therefore, if they ... expect to return to the Holy Land for purposes of residence, they should be counselled that they cannot be formally enrolled. What they do about Bahá'u'lláh and His Teachings as a matter of personal belief, is another matter.

*Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
11 August 1972*

In the case of an Israeli, of whatever background, you should explain that the Faith is not taught in Israel; that if he is planning to return to Israel to reside, he cannot be accepted into the Bahá'í community; and that if he is planning to continue to reside outside Israel he may be accepted but that he will be subject to the same restrictions as other Bahá'ís with respect to visiting Israel, namely he could do so only with the express permission of the Universal House of Justice. In any event, the Universal House of Justice should be informed of such declaration.

*Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
8 March 1974*

For your further information, when Israeli citizens who are permanently resident elsewhere learn of the Faith, study it and wish to become Bahá'ís, they may be welcomed and accepted fully into the Bahá'í community. Before such a declaration is accepted, however, certain steps must be taken. The respective Spiritual Assembly should satisfy itself that the declarants' depth of understanding is sufficient to enable them to appreciate the particular problems that will face them as Israeli Bahá'ís, and is satisfied they will remain firm under these circumstances. As in the case of all Bahá'ís, they would not be permitted to reside permanently in Israel, although they would normally be given permission to come and visit any family members they may have here, whenever they wish to do so. They would also have to understand that Bahá'ís do not teach the Faith in Israel, and be willing to abide by this restriction. The reasons for this should be explained in a loving way by the Spiritual Assembly concerned.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 5 September 1990

Israelis who are permanently resident outside of Israel, who wish to become Bahá'ís, should complete the declaration procedure in the usual way. The Local Spiritual Assembly should meet with them to assess their knowledge and sincerity; to advise them of the particular situation facing Israeli Bahá'ís, as outlined above; and to assess whether they would remain firm under these circumstances. If the Assembly believes they fulfil all these conditions, it should send their details to the National Spiritual Assembly, together with full background information about the declarant's situation and a written recommendation that they believe the declarant to be sincere, and willing and able to abide by the above guidelines. The National Spiritual Assembly must refer the declaration to the Universal House of Justice and obtain its consent to the declarant's enrolment; therefore, until a reply has been received from the National Spiritual Assembly, the Local Assembly should treat the declarant with kindness and friendship, but they must not be considered as Bahá'ís. That is to say, they may not attend Bahá'í-only functions and may not exercise the rights and duties specific to a Bahá'í in good standing.

May those from countries where it is unsafe to be a Bahá'í, including Iran, enrol in the Faith?

An individual from a country where it is unsafe to be a Bahá'í, such as Iran, may be enrolled as normal on condition that he or she has British citizenship, or otherwise has permanent residency in the United Kingdom.

If however the individual is an asylum seeker or a refugee, or has only a temporary visa to stay in the UK, the case should be referred to the National Assembly. Their enrolment request will then be looked into by a Task Force that has been appointed by the National Assembly to deal with such cases. Until confirmation of the enrolment is received from the National Assembly, the individual should be treated as a friend of the Faith.

The House of Justice has indicated that wisdom and circumspection should be exercised in interactions with asylum seekers and refugees who wish to enrol. In this respect, please be aware of the following guidance, which the House of Justice shared in a letter dated 17 November 2009 and which guides the work of the Task Force:

... lack of permanent residence in a country no longer disqualifies anyone from enrolment in the Faith.

Naturally, when considering the possible enrolment of a refugee or asylum seeker from a place where it is unsafe to be a Bahá'í, caution is necessary. It is important that would-be declarants appreciate the implications of their taking such a step, giving thought to how family members will react and the difficulties that may arise if one day they return to their homeland. Moreover, you should be conscious that, in many countries, being a Bahá'í strengthens a claim to refugee status and to the right of residence in the place where an individual has sought asylum. Given this consideration, it is necessary that, in each case, you pause to consider whether a person's desire to register as a Bahá'í has arisen from his or her genuine recognition of the Manifestation of God for today.

For your information, an asylum seeker is any person who has made an application for asylum in the United Kingdom and is waiting to hear the decision of his/her application. A refugee is any person who has received a positive decision on their asylum application and who is recognised as a refugee under the UN 1951 Convention on Refugees and has been given leave to remain in the country where they applied for asylum, in this case, the United Kingdom.

What guidance applies to Iranian believers who, for reasons of safety, do not wish to formally enrol?

Iranians whose declaration is accepted may choose not to formally enrol for reasons of safety. In a letter dated 1 May 2008, the House of Justice offered the following guidance in relation to such cases:

... regarding the participation in the Nineteen Day Feast of Iranian friends who have embraced the Faith but, for reasons of safety, have asked not to be formally registered as members of the community, we have been instructed to convey the following response. For those friends who are sincere in their belief and accept full responsibility for abiding by the laws and Teachings of the Faith yet do not wish to be registered as Bahá'ís because of repercussions they believe may ensue, the question is primarily a procedural one, and their request not to have their names added to the membership list may be honoured. These individuals will have the rights and obligations of Bahá'ís, including attendance at the Nineteen Day Feast. However, it should be pointed out that such a request would necessarily have certain consequences; they would not, for example, be able to vote or be voted for in Bahá'í elections and they would not have a Bahá'í credential, which would mean that they may not be able to attend the Feast in other communities where they are not known as believers.

Iranian believers who have declared their faith but have not formally registered are permitted by the House of Justice to contribute to the Fund, attend meetings such as Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days and allowed to attend and participate in both unit and National Convention. However, as they are not formally registered they are not able to take part in voting, or be voted for, as by doing so their names would be made public.

Can Local Spiritual Assemblies involve themselves in supporting Iranian Asylum Seeker Legal Cases?

No. If an individual, a solicitor or the Home Office requests information or a confirmation of status from your Local Assembly in connection with an application for

asylum, please refer it immediately to the National Spiritual Assembly. No other action should be taken by the Local Assembly.

If however such a request is received by an individual Bahá'í, providing they are acting in an individual capacity and not as a member of any institution of the Faith, they may assist as they deem appropriate.

The Bahá'í institutions, when it comes to Iranian refugees, have only one obligation, to introduce those individuals who were members of the Bahá'í community in Iran to the appropriate authorities. Apart from providing this confirmation of the Bahá'í status of individuals as appropriate, Bahá'í institutions should not get involved in individual cases. Bahá'í institutions have no influence on the application for refugee status, as it is a matter for the government to decide.

You explain that you receive requests from legal representatives on behalf of Iranian asylum seekers who have been participating in Bahá'í activities in the United Kingdom, such as devotional meetings and study circles, for letters stating their clients' association with the Faith and that if they were to return to Iran, this association could place them in jeopardy. You may respond to the asylum seekers' legal representatives that the involvement of the institutions of the Bahá'í community in Iranian refugee cases is limited to that of providing verification of whether an individual was a member of the Bahá'í community in Iran, and you are therefore unable to provide their clients with any documentation of their association with the British Bahá'í community...

*Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly,
16 February 2003*

May Chinese who are permanent residents of United Kingdom be enrolled in the Faith?

Yes. Chinese who are permanent residents of United Kingdom may be enrolled according to the ordinary enrolment procedure. The Local Spiritual Assembly should work closely with available Chinese Teaching Committees or working groups when teaching and enrolling Chinese residents.

May citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC) be enrolled in the Faith?

Yes. Citizens of the PRC may be enrolled in the Faith. They may participate in the social life of the community, in Feasts and deepenings, and should be shown hospitality and friendship. Citizens of the PRC are, however, in a sensitive position as the Faith is not formally established on the Chinese mainland. For their own protection and that of the future of the Faith in the PRC, the Universal House of Justice has established the following policies with regard to their participation in Bahá'í community life:

1. Chinese believers who are citizens of the PRC should be introduced to each other as Bahá'ís only if they are willing for this to be done. Given the possibility of meeting other Chinese citizens at Bahá'í functions, it is recommended that it be left up to the individual believer to decide which functions to attend.
2. Citizens of the PRC should be left free to choose the extent of their involvement in the Bahá'í Community. If they so wish, they can be granted full administrative

rights as any other believers of good standing, including service on a Bahá'í committee of a Spiritual Assembly, if elected.

From guidelines from the Universal House of Justice, 19 April 1989 and a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 2 October 1989

Further In a letter dated 31 December 2005 to an institution, the Universal House of Justice gives the following guidance:

As you point out in your letter, a citizen of China who accepts the Faith is not required to formally enroll at this time. In the case of a Chinese citizen residing outside the mainland, irrespective of whether he has permanent residency in another country, he should be left free to decide whether to enroll officially or not and to choose the extent of his involvement in the Baha'i community. In other words, he may be accepted as a Baha'i in good standing based on his verbal declaration of faith even if he does not wish to be officially registered as a believer with an Assembly or prefers not to be considered for election to a Baha'i administrative body or appointment to a committee.

Therefore, we see no reason why these friends should not be registered as Baha'is in your country.

In the same 31 December 2005 correspondence, the Universal House of Justice continues:

If a citizen of the People's Republic of China living abroad does ask to be registered and chooses to participate in Baha'i community life, the normal enrollment procedures should be used, and, should he wish, he may be granted full administrative rights. This policy applies to those who have nonimmigrant status in the country of their temporary residence, as well as to those who have been granted permanent residence in another country.

Our wish is that Mrs. and Mr. will be encouraged to become involved in the core activities of the Five Year Plan while in the United Kingdom so that after a year they may return to their home country to share the message with their fellow countrymen, especially members of their families and trusted friends. Inevitably, the major share of the teaching and consolidation work of the Faith in China will fall on the shoulders of the Chinese believers themselves.

Can non-registered Chinese Bahá'ís participate in Nineteen Day Feasts and give to the Funds of the Faith?

Yes. Non-registered Chinese Bahá'ís are able to participate in the Nineteen Day Feast as well as give to the Funds of the Faith. However, only those registered believers are able to participate in Bahá'í elections and are eligible for service on the elected institutions of the Faith, i.e. to vote and to be voted for.

The Local Spiritual Assembly must also note the following points:

1. All communication with a Bahá'í from the PRC must be oral, unless the Bahá'í clearly indicates otherwise.
2. It could be dangerous for them to carry any form of written identification of their membership in the Faith. This means they must not be sent official correspondence - for example, election calls or community newsletters - through the post, without their prior permission. The National Spiritual Assembly does

not send *UKBahá'í* or any other mail outs to these believers. The best way of keeping in touch with the Chinese friends is through an informal social network.

May prisoners be enrolled in the Faith?

Yes. Prisoners may be enrolled in the Faith in the normal way. However, they cannot exercise their voting rights until released from prison:

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 to a National Spiritual Assembly,
8 December 1969*

Should the Local Spiritual Assembly feel that there are particular circumstances which could necessitate the withholding of voting rights once the prisoner has been released, it should send a full report to the National Spiritual Assembly.

May individuals with learning difficulties, mental illnesses, drug addicts and alcoholics be enrolled in the Faith?

Yes such individuals can be enrolled in the Faith. Only in cases of extreme illness should membership be denied to such a person:

The question of mental instability has no bearing upon the acceptance of an enrolment unless it is of such a nature that it affects the ability of the declarant to judge whether or not he believes in Bahá'u'lláh.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 April 1981

Shoghi Effendi has clarified that by mental unfitness was meant a condition much more serious than any temperamental deficiency or disinclination to conform to the principle of majority rule. He said:

Only in rare cases when a person is actually unbalanced, and is admittedly proved to be so, should the right of membership be denied him. The greatest care and restraint should be exercised in this matter.

*Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly,
15 May 1940*

The individual taking drugs or alcohol should be made aware of the relevant Bahá'í principles at the time of enrolment and be given sufficient time to rectify the situation after becoming a Bahá'í. After the passage of a reasonable period of time, should the person's habits remain contrary to Bahá'í laws the question of deprivation of voting rights may arise. The Local Spiritual Assembly should provide the person with every assistance and encourage him or her to seek professional help:

Concerning the acceptance into the Faith of individuals who have mental problems or are drug addicts, etc., the House of Justice instructs us to say that if the Assembly

is satisfied that the person is sufficiently in command of his faculties to understand what his declaration of faith implies, he may be accepted as a believer. In other words you should apply the normal guidelines of acceptance of new believers. In such cases, however, you may have to ensure that special steps are taken to deepen the understanding of the new Bahá'í. A drug addict or alcoholic should, of course, be told that the taking of drugs and alcohol is strictly forbidden in Bahá'í law, and he will have to do whatever is necessary to break himself of the addiction. You may find it necessary and helpful to put him in touch with organizations which specialize in helping such cases. If a case is severe you may have to warn the person that if he does not overcome this problem within a reasonable time you may have to consider depriving him of his voting rights.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 12 May 1982

If the problem is severe, the Local Spiritual Assembly may also consider the possibility of postponing enrolment until it is overcome.

May a person who belongs to an organisation to which Bahá'ís may not belong be enrolled in the Faith?

In considering the enrolment of a person who belongs to an organisation to which Bahá'ís may not belong, the Assembly has two choices:

- The normal procedure is for the Local Spiritual Assembly to accept the declaration of the person in the usual way, making sure that he or she is aware that continued membership in the organisation is not permissible under Bahá'í law. The person should then be given a reasonable time to withdraw from the organisation. Should the person fail to pay attention to the Local Spiritual Assembly's warnings on the matter, the question of deprivation of voting rights may arise.
- The alternative is to advise the person of the Bahá'í law on the matter and suggest that enrolment be postponed until he or she has had the opportunity to withdraw from the organisation. This option may be preferable for a person holding a political post, for example:

It may well be, however, that in a particular case, it is preferable to explain the matter to the individual concerned and advise the postponement of the registration of his acceptance of the Faith until such time as he has been able to rectify his situation. This has happened, for example, in some countries where a person who holds a prominent political post has accepted the Faith and needs to complete his term of office before being able to withdraw honourably from politics.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 18 June 1985

Shoghi Effendi states:

There may be occasions when an enrollment must be postponed, as in the case of someone holding a political post, unless that person is able and can, in good conscience, resign from such a post immediately. Other cases may permit acceptance but indicate a need for fixing a time when the individual will be required to conform to certain laws, such as membership in the Masonic Order, church, or other ecclesiastical organizations. Still other times an individual may be encouraged to become better acquainted with the spirit, laws, and principles of the Faith before submitting his application. However, the Guardian has cautioned us

not to be too rigid in our requirements for accepting new believers or to place hindrances in their way. The question of conforming one's character and the pattern of one's life to the standards of conduct uphold in the Bahá'í way of life is a matter which should be inculcated in the new believer in the course of his spiritual education and deepening.

Letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 13 May 1979

However the Assembly chooses to handle the matter, it should be wary of placing too many obstacles in the way of a person's enrolment. It is generally expected that individuals will gradually adjust their lives to conform to Bahá'í standards after they enrol.

Could a person living in an immoral relationship be accepted into the Faith?

Yes. Again, the conditions outlined above apply:

The young lady in question should be advised by you or the believer with whom she has been studying that the decision as to whether or not she wishes to enrol in the Faith rests with her and her alone. Your Assembly should not prevent her from enrolling should she so decide, but if she does apply for membership in the community, she obviously should understand that she will be expected to conduct herself as a Bahá'í by adjusting her relationship to the man with whom she is presently living. This means that either they must become legally married or she should sever the existing relationship between them. Your Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible to guide and assist this young lady...

*Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly,
4 April 1977*

If the other party to the relationship does not wish to become a Bahá'í it may nevertheless be desirable to consult with that person at the same time so that any uncertainties may be resolved. Note also that if the couple plan to adjust their relationship by getting married, it is not necessary for them to separate in the meantime:

As the friends are very new in the Faith and are willing to abide by the Bahá'í laws regarding marriage, it would be better not to be rigid in this case by insisting that the couple separate until legally married.

*Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly,
8 December 1974*

In the case of homosexual relationships, the House of Justice gives the following guidance:

Bahá'í teachings on sexual morality centre on marriage and the family as the bedrock of the whole structure of human society and are designed to protect and strengthen that divine institution. Thus Bahá'í Law restricts permissible sexual intercourse to that between a man and the woman to whom he is married.

Thus, it should not be so much a matter of whether a practicing homosexual can be a Bahá'í as whether, having become a Bahá'í, the homosexual can overcome his problem through knowledge of the teachings and reliance on Bahá'u'lláh.

*Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer,
14 March 1973*

ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Are children born of Bahá'í parents considered to be Bahá'ís?

Yes.

Unlike the children of some other religions, Bahá'í children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents. However, the parents are responsible for the upbringing and spiritual welfare of their children, and Spiritual Assemblies have the duty to assist parents, if necessary, in fulfilling these obligations, so that the children will be reared in the light of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and from their earliest years will learn to love God and His Manifestations and to walk in the way of God's Law. It is natural, therefore, to regard the children of Bahá'ís as Bahá'ís unless there is a reason to conclude the contrary. It is quite wrong to think of Bahá'í children as existing in some sort of spiritual limbo until the age of 15 at which time they can 'become' Bahá'ís.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

The National Spiritual Assembly sends a welcome card to every youth who turns 15 years of age.

Should the Local Spiritual Assembly register the births of children born to Bahá'í parents?

Yes.

Children born to a Bahá'í couple are regarded as Bahá'ís from the beginning of their lives, and their births should be registered by the Spiritual Assembly.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

The National Spiritual Assembly needs to be informed of all children who are registered as Bahá'ís in order to keep the national membership list up to date. Should there be a particular reason for the parents not to want their children registered as Bahá'ís, the Local Spiritual Assembly may, at its own discretion, decide not to register them:

...although children of Bahá'í parents, under age 15, are generally considered Bahá'ís, there may be circumstances in which they should not be registered as such, and this is also left to your discretion. Local Spiritual Assemblies should help by advising the parents to consider it one of their primary obligations to raise their children in a spirit of love and dedication towards the Faith.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 3 October 1976

What if the child has only one Bahá'í parent?

The child should be registered as a Bahá'í unless the non-Bahá'í parent objects:

The birth of a child to a couple, one of whom is a Bahá'í, should also be registered unless the non-Bahá'í parent objects.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

May a Local Spiritual Assembly accept a declaration from a child, neither of whose parents are Bahá'ís?

Yes. The Local Spiritual Assembly may register such a child as a Bahá'í, provided the parents consent:

A Spiritual Assembly may accept the declaration of faith of a child of non-Bahá'í parents, and register him as a Bahá'í child, provided the parents give their consent.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

What is the procedure for Bahá'í youth to re-affirm their faith when they turn 15?

The Universal House of Justice has stated that the procedure to be followed is for the National Spiritual Assembly of each country to decide. It has, however, provided the following guidelines:

... a Bahá'í child is not becoming a Bahá'í at that age, but is simply affirming his faith on his own behalf.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

In whatever procedure it adopts a National Spiritual Assembly must wisely steer a course between seeming to doubt the faith of a child who has been brought up as a devout Bahá'í on the one hand, and seeming to compel a child to be a member of the Bahá'í community against his will, on the other.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

If a youth at the age of 15 should wish to formally reaffirm their faith, this is wonderful, but there is no requirement to do so. With the above guidance in mind, the National Spiritual Assembly has decided that youth may re-affirm their belief in Bahá'u'lláh in one of the following ways:

- orally or in writing indicate to their local Spiritual Assembly that they re-affirm their Faith and the local Spiritual Assembly must duly inform the National Spiritual Assembly at records@bahai.org.uk.
- write to the National Spiritual Assembly directly to indicate they are reaffirming of their Faith.

The Local Spiritual Assembly should adopt the following procedure:

1. Lovingly communicate with the junior youth in their community well before they turn 15, either orally or in writing, to prepare them for the Bahá'í responsibilities and privileges which come with reaching the age of spiritual maturity. They should know that they have all the rights and responsibilities of Bahá'í adults, except the right to vote or to be elected to an administrative position (they may serve on committees). Youth who re-affirm in group areas may serve as office holders. Youth should also be advised at this time of the above choices available to them for re-affirming their Faith.
2. Those who make it known to their local Spiritual Assembly or the National Spiritual Assembly that they do not wish to be regarded as Bahá'ís will be taken

off the list of believers. Of course every effort should be made by the local Assembly to assist the youth to understand the station of Bahá'u'lláh and to embrace the Faith before such a measure is taken. .

3. A youth who does not feel that they need to specifically reaffirm their Faith when they reach the age of 15, should automatically be regarded as a Bahá'í by the institutions and the community.
4. Upon reaching the age of 15, all youth get a card signed by the National Spiritual Assembly along with a Bahá'í ID card and letter confirming that they are considered Bahá'ís.
5. Upon reaching the age of 18, all youth receive a letter from the National Assembly welcoming them as voting members of their community, although they would not be eligible to be elected until they have reached the age of 21.
6. Upon reaching the age of 21, all youth receive a letter from the National Assembly informing them that they are now eligible to be elected and advising them of their rights and responsibilities as a Bahá'í on reaching 21.

May declarations be accepted from youth between the ages of 15 and 21 whose parents are not Bahá'ís?

Yes. From the age of 15 youth may declare their Faith without requiring parental consent. They must, however, consider their parents' wishes in deciding how much involvement they will have in Bahá'í activities:

Declarations of faith from non-Bahá'í youth between the ages of 15 and 21, whose parents are not Bahá'ís, may be accepted without the consent of their parents unless this is contrary to the civil law. However, the importance of respect for one's parents must not be forgotten, and such youth may need to be counselled to give heed to their parents' wishes as far as the degree of their activity on behalf of the Faith is concerned, and even, if the parents are very antagonistic, to be completely inactive for a time.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 19 July 1982

If the youth was a member of a Church and the parents object to their child's withdrawal from the Church then, for the sake of family unity, membership may be retained in the Church until the age of 21:

Your letter of 25th October has been received and we fully appreciate the problem, posed in the case of youth who accept Bahá'u'lláh but whose parents strongly oppose their withdrawal from the Church. In such cases where the parents oppose their withdrawal and insistence upon it by the youth would undermine the unity of the family it is permissible for the withdrawal to be postponed until the youth attain the age of 21. This would not, of course, in any way affect his acceptance into the Bahá'í community. As you mention, this is the very time at which such a newly-declared believer needs all the deepening and confirmation he can receive.

Letter from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 6 November 1972