

membership elected by the Bahá'í community. Bahá'u'lláh called these institutions into being; their establishment, definition, training and development came later, in the ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá and in that of the Guardian appointed in `Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament.

Since the passing of `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the formation of Local Spiritual Assemblies has multiplied in East and West, and the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly has become firmly established. Concerning this national administrative body Shoghi Effendi has provided clear information and direction. Its purpose, its power, its responsibility and its functions and duties are definitely prescribed.

`Its immediate purpose is to stimulate, unify and co-ordinate by frequent personal consultations the manifold activities of the friends [believers] as well as the Local Assemblies; and by keeping in close constant touch with the Holy Land [Bahá'í World Centre], initiate measures, and direct in general the affairs of the Cause in that country.

`It serves also another purpose, no less essential than the first

...

in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, to elect directly the members of the International House of Justice, that Supreme Council that will guide, organize and unify the affairs of the [Faith] throughout the world.

`

...

it has to exercise full authority over all the Local Assemblies in its province, and will have to direct the activities of the friends, guard vigilantly the Cause of God, and control and supervise the affairs of the [Faith] in general.

`Vital issues, affecting the interests of the Cause in that country

...

that stand distinct from strictly local affairs, must be under the full jurisdiction of the National Assembly. It will have to refer each of these questions

...

to a special committee, to be elected by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly, from among all the friends in that country

...

`With it, too, rests the decision whether a certain point at issue is strictly local in its nature

...

or whether it should fall under its own province and be regarded as a matter which ought to receive its special attention.'

1

`The need for the centralization of authority in the National Spiritual

Assembly, and the concentration of power in the various Local Assemblies, is
...
manifest.'

2

'The authority of the National Spiritual Assembly is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith [throughout its country].'

3

The individual Bahá'í has spiritual citizenship in a world community of believers acting through local, national and international bodies. There is no division of interest or conflict of authority among these institutions, for ever since the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892 His Faith has possessed infallible guidance by virtue of His Covenant, which specifically provides it. The action of a Bahá'í administrative body, therefore, while rationally determined by constitutional principles, operates in a spiritual realm revealed by the Manifestation of God and maintained free from political pressure and the influence of materialism. Apart from the appointed Interpreter, no Bahá'í has individual authority. Decisions are confined to the sphere of action and are made by a body of nine persons.

The advice and direction clarifying the nature and operation of a National Spiritual Assembly have been compiled by the American Bahá'ís from letters written to them by Shoghi Effendi.

4

1

Bahá'í Administration
(1960 edition) pp. 39-40.

2

ibid., p. 42

3

Bahá'í Procedure
(1949), p. 63.

4

Bahá'í Administration
: Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States.

page 537

During the ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá, after He had approved the petition submitted to Him by the American Bahá'ís expressing their desire to construct a House of Worship, these Bahá'ís formed a national body known as Bahá'í

Temple Unity, incorporated for the purpose of gathering funds and co-ordinating plans to erect the Temple in Wilmette. That body, though national in scope and elected by delegates representing the various local Bahá'í communities, was not a National Spiritual Assembly. It is interesting to note that in Bahá'í Temple Unity the American Bahá'ís established a body reflecting their own national historical experience. The local communities preceded the national body in time and each exercised an independent authority in the conduct of its own affairs. When their representatives agreed to form a national Bahá'í body with full jurisdiction over Temple matters, they transferred to it powers which vested final decision, not in its directors, but in the Annual Convention. The vital distinction between Temple Unity and the National Spiritual Assembly when later established lay in this field of ultimate authority. The National Spiritual Assembly possessed original authority, powers and functions of its own. It came into existence through election of its nine members at a National Convention but constituted a continuing authority derived from the Bahá'í teachings and not conferred by any action of the believers, whether as local communities or as delegates. This authority emerged supreme in relation to Bahá'í matters within the national community but subject to the higher authority of the Guardian and also of the future International House of Justice.

1

Within its own realm the National Spiritual Assembly is an institution created by the teachings of the Faith independent of the Bahá'ís who elect its members and of the Bahá'ís composing its membership. In no way does this institution reflect either the political or the ecclesiastical influences of its environment, whether in America, Europe or the East. This fact has paramount importance. On the one hand it reveals the existence of an organic religious society; on the other hand it demonstrates the freedom of this new community from the legalisms and devices acting within every human institution.

While the transition from Bahá'í Temple Unity to National Spiritual Assembly in North America emphasizes certain principles inherent in Bahá'í institutions, the formation of a National Spiritual Assembly in a new area represents more profoundly the creation of a new type of society. Every national Bahá'í community has gone through some evolution reflecting its historical background before its National Assembly was established.

The functions of a National Spiritual Assembly are manifold: the publication of Bahá'í literature; national teaching plans; supervision of local communities; encouragement and direction of all the Bahá'ís in their service to the Faith; and representation of the Bahá'ís in relation to the civil authorities. Each national body prepares and adopts its own constitution, formulated on the basis of the model approved by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. All the National Spiritual Assemblies collectively, under the title of the Bahá'í International Community, constitute an international non-governmental organization whose delegates are accredited by United Nations for attendance and participation in its regional conferences.

Through the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly, Bahá'ís are enabled to carry out plans of considerable magnitude, collaborate with Bahá'ís of all other lands in matters of international interest, maintain common standards of administrative principle, and take advantage, in the appointment of committees, of particular talents and aptitudes possessed by individual believers. The National Spiritual Assembly stands as one of the pillars supporting the Bahá'í world community. Participation in national Bahá'í activities serves to insulate the individual Bahá'í from infection by the psychic ills which afflict modern society as a result of its lack of faith and spiritual direction. Within the shelter of this emerging order the storms of partisanship cannot engulf the soul.

— H

ORACE

H

OLLEY

1

Written in 1954.

2

Consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council was obtained on 27 May 1970.

page 538

2. A MODEL DECLARATION OF TRUST AND BY-LAWS

FOR A NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

T

HE

1926-27 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada completed a task which, while pertaining to the outer and more material aspects of the Cause, nevertheless has a special significance for its spirit and inward sacred purpose. This task consisted in creating a legal form which gives proper substance and substantial character to the National Spiritual Assemblies and the administrative processes embodied in the Bahá'í teachings by a form of incorporation recognized under common law. This Declaration of Trust, with its attendant By-Laws, became the model to be followed, with adaptations as local laws and circumstances required, by other National Spiritual Assemblies. The years following the election of the Universal House of Justice witnessed a great increase in the number of National Spiritual Assemblies (from 57 in 1963 to 135 by Ridván 1983) and the House of Justice itself provided a model document, largely based on the one devised by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, to be followed as closely as possible by all new National Spiritual Assemblies as they became incorporated, which they were required to do under the Nine Year Plan.

Careful examination of the Declaration and its By-Laws will reveal the fact

that this document contains no arbitrary elements nor features new to the Bahá'í Cause. On the contrary, it represents a most conscientious effort to reflect those very administrative principles and elements already set forth in the letters of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, and already determining the methods and relationships of Bahá'í collective association. The provision both in the Declaration and in the By-Laws for amendments in the future will permit the National Spiritual Assemblies to adapt this document to such new administrative elements or principles as may at any time be given forth. The Declaration, in fact, is nothing more nor less than a legal parallel of those moral and spiritual laws of unity inherent in the fullness of the Bahá'í Revelation and making it the fulfillment of the ideal of religion in the social as well as spiritual realm. Because, in the Bahá'í Faith, this perfect correspondence exists between spiritual and social laws, the Bahá'ís believe that administrative success is identical with moral success, and that nothing less than the true Bahá'í spirit of devotion and sacrifice can inspire with effective power the world-wide body of unity revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

DECLARATION OF TRUST

By the NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF...

W
E,

duly chosen by the representatives of the Bahá'ís of

...

at the Annual Meeting held at

...

on

...

to be the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

...

with full power to establish a Trust as hereinafter set forth, hereby declare that from this date the powers, responsibilities, rights, privileges and obligations reposed in said National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

...

by Bahá'u'lláh, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, by `Abdu'l-Bahá, its Interpreter and Exemplar, by

page 539

Shoghi Effendi, its Guardian, and by the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His sacred Writings as the supreme body of the Bahá'í religion, shall be exercised, administered and carried on by the aboved-named

National Spiritual Assembly and their duly qualified successors under this Declaration of Trust.

The National Spiritual Assembly in adopting this form of association, union and fellowship, and in selecting for itself the designation of Trustees of the Bahá'ís of

... ,

does so as the administrative body of a religious community which has had continuous existence and responsibility for

... .

In consequence of these activities the National Spiritual Assembly is called upon to administer such ever-increasing diversity and volume of affairs and properties for the Bahá'ís of

... ,

that we, its members, now feel it both desirable and necessary to give our collective functions more definite legal form. This action is taken in complete unanimity and with full recognition of the sacred relationship thereby created. We acknowledge in behalf of ourselves and our successors in this Trust the exalted religious standard established by Bahá'u'lláh for Bahá'í administrative bodies in the utterance:

Be ye Trustees of the Merciful One among men

; and seek the help of God and His guidance in order to fulfill that exhortation.

(Signatures of the nine members)

Date

A

RTICLE

I

The name of said Trust shall be the `National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

... !

A

RTICLE

II

Sharing the ideals and assisting the efforts of our fellow Bahá'ís to establish, uphold and promote the spiritual, educational and humanitarian teachings of human brotherhood, radiant faith, exalted character and selfless love revealed in the lives and utterances of all the Prophets and Messengers of God, Founders of the world's revealed religions — and given renewed creative energy and universal application to the conditions of this age in the life and utterances of Bahá'u'lláh — we declare the purposes and objects of this Trust to be to administer the affairs of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh for the benefit of the Bahá'ís of

... .

according to the principles of Bahá'í affiliation and administration created and established by Bahá'u'lláh, defined and explained by `Abdu'l-Bahá, interpreted and amplified by Shoghi Effendi, and supplemented and applied by the Universal House of Justice.

These purposes are to be realized by means of devotional meetings; by public meetings and conferences of an educational, humanitarian and spiritual character; by the publication of books, magazines and newspapers; by the construction of temples of universal worship and of other institutions and edifices for humanitarian service; by supervising, unifying, promoting and generally administering the activities of the Bahá'ís of

...

in the fulfilment of their religious offices, duties and ideals; and by any other means appropriate to these ends, or any of them.

Other purposes and objects of this Trust are:

a. The right to enter into, make, perform and carry out contracts of every sort and kind for the furtherance of the objects of this Trust with any person, firm, association, corporation, private, public or municipal connection, and in all transactions under the terms of this Trust, to do any and all things which a co-partnership or natural person could do or exercise, and which now or hereafter may be authorized by law.

b. To hold and be named as beneficiary under any trust established by law or otherwise under any will or other testamentary instrument in connection with any gift, devise, or bequest in which a trust or trusts is or are established in any part of the world as well as in

...;

to receive gifts, devises or bequests of money or other property.

c. All and whatsoever the several purposes and objects set forth in the written utterances of Bahá'u'lláh,

page 540

`Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and enactments of the Universal House of Justice, under which certain jurisdiction, powers and rights are granted to National Spiritual Assemblies.

d. Generally to do all things and objects which in the judgement of the Trustees, i.e., the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

...

are necessary, proper and advantageous to promote the complete and successful administration of this Trust.

A

RTICLE

III

S

ECTION

1. All persons, firms, corporations and associations extending credit to, contracting with or having any claim against the Trustees, i.e., the National Spiritual Assembly, and the members thereof, of any character whatsoever,

whether legal or equitable and whether arising out of contract or tort, shall look solely to the funds of the Trust and to the property of the Trust estate for payment or indemnity, or for payment of any debt, damage, judgement or decree or any money that may otherwise become due or payable from the Trustees, so that neither the Trustees nor any of them, nor any of their officers or agents appointed by them hereunder, nor any beneficiary or beneficiaries herein named shall be personally liable therefor.

S
ECTION

2. Every note, bond, proposal, obligation or contract in writing or other agreement or instrument made or given under this Trust shall be explicitly executed by the National Spiritual Assembly, as Trustees, by their duly authorized officers or agents.

A

RTICLE

IV

The Trustees, i.e., the National Spiritual Assembly, shall adopt for the conduct of the affairs entrusted to them under this Declaration of Trust, such by-laws, rules of procedure or regulations as are required to define and carry on its own administrative functions and those of the several local and other elements composing the body of the Bahá'ís of

...

not inconsistent with the terms of this instrument and all in accordance with the instructions and enactments of the Universal House of Justice.

A

RTICLE

V

The central office of this Trust shall be located in

...

A

RTICLE

VI

The seal of this Trust shall be circular in form, bearing the following inscription:

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

...

A

RTICLE

VII

This Declaration of Trust may be amended by majority vote of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of

...

at any special meeting duly called for that purpose, provided that at least thirty (30) days prior to the date fixed for said meeting a copy of the proposed amendment or amendments is mailed to each member of the Assembly by the Secretary.

page 541

BY-LAWS OF THE NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

A

RTICLE

I

T

HE

National Spiritual Assembly, in the fulfilment of its sacred duties under this Trust, shall have exclusive jurisdiction and authority over all the activities and affairs of the Bahá'í Cause throughout

...

including paramount authority in the administration of this Trust. It shall endeavour to stimulate, unify and coordinate the manifold activities of the Local Spiritual Assemblies (hereinafter defined) and of individual Bahá'ís in

...

and by all possible means assist them to promote the oneness of mankind. It shall be charged with the recognition of such Local Assemblies, the scrutiny of all membership rolls, the calling of the Annual Meeting or special meetings and the seating of delegates to the Annual Meeting and their apportionment among the various electoral districts. It shall appoint all national Bahá'í committees and shall supervise the publication and distribution of Bahá'í literature, the reviewing of all writings pertaining to the Bahá'í Cause, the construction and administration of the Ma

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riqul-A

dh

kár and its accessory activities, and the collection and disbursement of all funds for the carrying on of this Trust. It shall decide whether any matter lies within its own jurisdiction or within the jurisdiction of any Local Spiritual Assembly. It shall, in such cases as it considers suitable and necessary, entertain appeals from the decisions of Local Spiritual Assemblies and shall have the right of final decision in all cases where the qualification of an individual or group for continued voting rights and membership in the Bahá'í body is in question. It shall furthermore represent the Bahá'ís of

...

in all their co-operative and spiritual activities with the Bahá'ís of other lands, and shall constitute the sole electoral body of

...

in the election of the Universal House of Justice provided for in the sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Cause. Above all, the National Spiritual Assembly shall ever seek to attain that station of unity in devotion to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh which will attract the confirmations of the Holy Spirit and enable the Assembly to serve the founding of the Most Great Peace. In all its deliberation and action the National Assembly shall have constantly before it as Divine guide and standard the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh:

It behooveth them

(i.e., members of Spiritual Assemblies)

to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly.

A

ARTICLE

II

The Bahá'ís of

...

for whose benefit this Trust is established shall consist of all persons of the age of 15 years or over resident in

...

who are accepted by the National Spiritual Assembly as possessing the qualifications of Bahá'í faith and practice required under the following standard set forth by the Guardian of the Faith:

Full recognition of the station of the Báb, the Forerunner; of Bahá'u'lláh, the Author; and of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í religion; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of `Abdu'l-Bahá's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of Bahá'í Administration throughout the world.

Those residing in the area of jurisdiction of any Local Spiritual Assembly recognized by the National Assembly may declare their faith to, and be enrolled by, the Local Spiritual Assembly; those living outside any such area of local Bahá'í jurisdiction shall be enrolled in such manner as shall be prescribed by the National Assembly.

Upon attaining the age of 21 years, a Bahá'í is eligible to vote and to hold elective office.

A

ARTICLE

III

The National Assembly shall consist of nine members chosen from among the Bahá'ís of

...

who shall be elected by the said Bahá'ís in manner hereinafter provided, and who shall continue for the period of one year, or until their successors shall be elected.

A

ARTICLE

IV

The officers of the National Spiritual Assembly shall consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and such other officers as may be found necessary for the proper conduct of its affairs. The officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the entire membership of the Assembly taken by secret ballot.

A

ARTICLE

V

The first meeting of the newly-elected National Assembly shall be called by the member elected to membership by the highest number of votes or, in case two or more members have received the same said highest number of votes, then by the member selected by lot from among those members; and this member shall preside until the permanent Chairman shall be chosen. All subsequent meetings shall be called by the Secretary of the Assembly at the request of the Chairman or, in his absence or incapacity, of the Vice-Chairman, or of any three members of the Assembly; provided, however, that the Annual Meeting of the Assembly shall be held at a time and place to be fixed by a majority vote of the Assembly, as hereinafter provided.

A

ARTICLE

VI

Five members of the National Assembly present at a meeting shall constitute a quorum, and a majority vote of those present and constituting a quorum shall be sufficient for the conduct of business, except as otherwise provided in these By-Laws, and with due regard to the principle of unity and cordial fellowship involved in the institution of a Spiritual Assembly. The transactions and decisions of the National Assembly shall be recorded at each meeting by the

Secretary, who shall supply copies of the minutes to the Assembly members after each meeting, and preserve the minutes in the official records of the Assembly.

A

RTICLE

VII

Whenever in any locality of

...

the number of Bahá'ís resident therein recognized by the National Spiritual Assembly exceeds nine, these shall on April 21st of any year convene and elect by plurality vote a local administrative body of nine members, to be known as the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of that community. Every such Spiritual Assembly shall be elected annually thereafter upon each successive 21st day of April. The members shall hold office for the term of one year or until their successors are elected and qualified.

When, however, the number of Bahá'ís in any authorized civil area is exactly nine, these shall on April 21st of any year, or in successive years, constitute themselves the Local Spiritual Assembly by joint declaration. Upon the recording of such declaration by the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, said body of nine shall become established with the rights, privileges and duties of a Local Spiritual Assembly as set forth in this instrument.

S

ECTION

1. Each newly-elected Local Spiritual Assembly shall at once proceed in the manner indicated in Articles IV and V of these By-Laws to the election of its officers, who shall consist of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and such other officers as the Assembly finds necessary for the conduct of its business and the fulfilment of its spiritual duties.

Immediately thereafter the Secretary chosen shall transmit to the Secretary of the National Assembly the names of the members of the newly-elected Assembly and a list of its officers.

page 543

S

ECTION

2. The general powers and duties of a Local Spiritual Assembly shall be as set forth in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and as laid down by the Universal House of Justice.

S

ECTION

3. Among its more specific duties, a Local Spiritual Assembly shall have full jurisdiction of all Bahá'í activities and affairs within the local

community, subject, however, to the exclusive and paramount authority of the National Spiritual Assembly as defined herein.

S
ECTION

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

S
ECTION

5. The business of the Local Assembly shall be conducted in like manner as provided for the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly in Article VI above.

S
ECTION

6. The Local Assembly shall pass upon and approve the qualifications of each member of the Bahá'í community before such members shall be admitted to voting membership; but where an Individual is dissatisfied with the ruling of the Local Spiritual Assembly upon his Bahá'í qualifications, such individual may appeal from the ruling to the National Spiritual Assembly, which shall thereupon take jurisdiction of and finally decide the case.

S
ECTION

7. On or before the 1st day of November of each year the Secretary of each Local Assembly shall send to the Secretary of the National Assembly a duly certified list of the voting members of the local Bahá'í community for the information and approval of the National Assembly.

S
ECTION

8. All matters arising within a local Bahá'í community which are of purely local interest and do not affect the national interests of the Cause shall be under the primary jurisdiction of the Spiritual Assembly of that locality; but decision whether a particular matter involves the interest and welfare of the national Bahá'í body shall rest with the National Spiritual Assembly.

S
ECTION

9. Any member of a local Bahá'í community may appeal from a decision of his Spiritual Assembly to the National Assembly, which shall determine whether it shall take jurisdiction of the matter or leave it to the Local Spiritual Assembly for reconsideration. In the event that the National Assembly assumes jurisdiction of the matter, its findings shall be final.

S

SECTION

10. Where any dissension exists within a local Bahá'í community of such character that it cannot be remedied by the efforts of the Local Spiritual Assembly, this condition shall be referred by the Spiritual Assembly for consideration to the National Spiritual Assembly, whose action in the matter shall be final.

S

SECTION

11. All questions arising between two or more Local Spiritual Assemblies, or between members of different Bahá'í communities, shall be submitted in the first instance to the National Assembly, which shall have original and final jurisdiction in all such matters.

S

SECTION

12. The sphere of jurisdiction of a Local Spiritual Assembly, with respect to residential qualification of membership, and voting rights of a believer in any Bahá'í community, shall be the locality included within the recognized civil limits.

All differences of opinion concerning the sphere of jurisdiction of any Local Spiritual Assembly or concerning the affiliation of any Bahá'í or group of Bahá'ís in

...

shall be referred to the National Spiritual Assembly, whose decision in the matter shall be final.

A

ARTICLE

VIII

The members of the National Spiritual Assembly shall be elected at an annual meeting to be known as the National Convention of the Bahá'ís of

...

This Convention shall be held at a time and place to be fixed by the National Assembly. The National Convention shall be composed jointly of representatives chosen by the Bahá'ís of each

...

under the principle of proportionate representation, and the members of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Notice of the annual meeting shall be given by the National Assembly sixty days in advance in the Convention Call which sets forth the number of delegates assigned to the various electoral units in proportion to the number of Bahá'ís resident in each unit, to a total of

...

delegates

S
ECTION

1. All delegates to the Convention shall be elected by plurality vote. Bahá'ís who for illness or other unavoidable reasons are unable to be present at the election in person shall have the right to transmit their ballots to the meeting by mail. The meeting held in each

...

for the election of delegates shall be called by the National Spiritual Assembly and conducted by the Bahá'ís present under whatever procedure may be uniformly laid down by said body. Immediately after the meeting a certified report of the election containing the name and address of each delegate shall be transmitted to the National Spiritual Assembly.

S
ECTION

2. All delegates to be seated at the Convention must be recognized Bahá'ís and residents of the

...

represented by them.

S
ECTION

3. The rights and privileges of a delegate may not be assigned nor may they be exercised by proxy.

S
ECTION

4. The recognition and seating of delegates to the National Convention shall be vested in the National Spiritual Assembly.

S
ECTION

5. Delegates unable to be present in person at the Convention shall have the right to transmit their ballots for election of the members of the National Assembly under whatever procedure is adopted by the National Assembly.

S
ECTION

6. If in any year the National Spiritual Assembly shall consider that it is impracticable or unwise to assemble together the delegates to the National Convention, the said Assembly shall provide ways and means by which the annual election and the other essential business of the Convention may be conducted by mail.

S
ECTION

7. The presiding officer of the National Spiritual Assembly present at the Convention shall call together the delegates, who after roll call shall proceed

to the permanent organization of the meeting, electing by ballot a Chairman, a Secretary and such other officers as are necessary for the proper conduct of the business of the Convention.

S
ECTION

8. The principal business of the annual meeting shall be consultation on Bahá'í activities, plans and policies, and the election of the nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly. Members of the National Assembly, whether or not elected delegates, may take a full part in the consultation and discussion but only delegates may participate in the election of Convention officers or in the annual election of the members of the National Assembly. All action by the delegates, other than the organization of the Convention, the transmission of messages to the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith, and the election of the National Assembly, shall constitute advice and recommendation for consideration by the said Assembly, final decision in all matters concerning the affairs of the Bahá'í Faith in

...

being vested solely in that body.

S
ECTION

9. The general order of business to be taken up at the Annual Convention shall be prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly in the form of an agenda, but any matter pertaining to the Bahá'í Faith introduced by any of the delegates may upon motion and vote be taken up as part of the Convention deliberations.

S
ECTION

10. The election of the members of the National Spiritual Assembly shall be by plurality vote of the delegates recognized by the outgoing National Spiritual Assembly, i.e., the members elected shall be the nine persons receiving the greatest number of votes on the first ballot cast by delegates present at the Convention and delegates whose ballot has been transmitted to the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly by mail. In case, by reason of a tie vote or votes, the full membership is not determined on the first ballot, then one or more additional ballots shall be taken on the persons tied until all nine members are elected.

S
ECTION

11. All official business transacted at the National Convention shall be recorded and preserved in the records of the National Assembly.

S
ECTION

12. Vacancies in the membership of the National Spiritual Assembly shall be filled by a plurality vote of the delegates composing the Convention which elected the Assembly, the ballot to be taken by correspondence or in any other

manner decided upon by the National Spiritual Assembly.

page 545

A

ARTICLE

IX

Where the National Spiritual Assembly has been given in these By-Laws exclusive and final jurisdiction, and paramount executive authority, in all matters pertaining to the activities and affairs of the Bahá'í Cause in

... ,

it is understood that any decision made or action taken upon such matters shall be subject in every instance to ultimate review and approval by the Universal House of Justice.

A

ARTICLE

X

Whatever functions and powers are not specifically attributable to Local Spiritual Assemblies in these By-Laws shall be considered vested in the National Spiritual Assembly, which body is authorized to delegate such discretionary functions and powers as it deems necessary and advisable to the Local Spiritual Assemblies within its jurisdiction.

A

ARTICLE

XI

In order to preserve the spiritual character and purpose of Bahá'í elections, the practice of nominations or any other electoral method detrimental to a silent and prayerful election shall not prevail, so that each elector may vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold.

Among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Cause as members of Local or National Spiritual Assemblies are:

To win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve; to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments and the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote; to purge their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs of self-contained aloofness, the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness and of every word and deed that may savour of partiality, self-centredness and prejudice; and while retaining the sacred right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, ventilate grievances, welcome

advice and foster the sense of inter-dependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between themselves and all other Bahá'ís.

A

RTICLE

XII

These By-Laws may be amended by majority vote of the National Spiritual Assembly at any of its regular or special meetings, provided that at least fourteen days prior to the date fixed for the said meeting a copy of the proposed amendment or amendments is mailed to each member of the Assembly by the Secretary.

page 546

3. A PROCEDURE FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE ANNUAL BÁHÁ'Í CONVENTION

I. C

ONVENTION

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National Spiritual Assembly determines the date, duration and place of the Annual Convention and provides for such meetings in connection with the Convention as it may feel are desirable.

II. C

ONVENTION

P

ROCEDURE

The Twenty-sixth Annual Convention [of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada], held in 1934, voted a recommendation calling upon the National Spiritual Assembly to supply a parliamentary procedure for the conduct of the Annual Convention, and the present material has been prepared to meet the need indicated by that recommendation.

Order of Business

Prayer and devotional readings, provided by the outgoing National Spiritual Assembly.

Opening of the Convention by the Presiding Officer of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Roll call of delegates by the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Election by secret ballot of Convention Chairman and Secretary. The Convention Officers are to be elected by the assembled delegates from among the entire number of delegates who are present at the Convention.

Annual Report of National Spiritual Assembly.

Annual Financial Report of National Spiritual Assembly.

Convention message to the World Centre of the Bahá'í Faith.

Annual Committee Reports: These are to be considered as part of the report of the National Spiritual Assembly. They are whenever possible published in Bahá'í News in advance of the Convention date, for the information of the delegates.

Subjects for Consultation: Any delegate may, before the Convention convenes, recommend to the National Assembly such topics as he deems of sufficient importance to be included in the Convention agenda; and the National Spiritual Assembly, from the list of topics received from delegates, and also suggested by its own knowledge and experience, is to prepare an agenda or order of business as its recommendation to the Convention.

This agenda may include, as part of the National Assembly's annual report, the presentation of special subjects by well qualified members, committee representatives or non-Bahá'í experts whose exposition is necessary or desirable for the information of the delegates.

On motion duly made, recorded and voted, any such subject may be omitted, and also on motion duly made, recorded and voted, any other subject may be proposed for special consideration.

Annual Election: The election of members of the National Spiritual Assembly is to take place approximately midway during the Convention sessions, so as to enable the delegates to consult with both the outgoing and incoming Assemblies, in accordance with the Guardian's expressed desire.

Conduct of Business

Every deliberative body, to fulfil its functions, must conduct its deliberations in accordance with some established rules of order. The parliamentary procedure here set forth for the Convention is based upon the procedure already adopted for meetings of Local Assemblies and communities. It accordingly extends to sessions of the Annual Convention, the same procedure under which the delegates, in their other Bahá'í activities, are accustomed to conduct discussions and consultation.

The purpose of consultation at the Annual Convention is threefold: to arrive at full and complete knowledge of the current conditions, problems and possibilities of the Faith in America; to give the incoming National Assembly the benefit of the collective wisdom, guidance and constructive suggestions of the assembled delegates, and to contribute to the unity, in spirit and in action, of the entire American Bahá'í community.

The freedom of each and every delegate to take part in discussion and to initiate motions is untrammelled save as the undue activity of one delegate might hamper the rights of the other delegates. Any necessary limitation to be placed upon individual discussion shall be determined by the Chairman in the absence of any specific motion voted by the delegates themselves.

page 547

It shall be the duty of the Chairman to encourage general consultation and make possible the active participation of the greatest possible number of delegates.

The Chairman has the same power and responsibility for discussion and voting upon motions as other delegates. Members of the outgoing and incoming National Assembly who are not delegates may participate in the consultation but not vote.

A resolution, or motion, is not subject to discussion or vote until duly made and seconded. It is preferable to have each resolution clear and complete in itself, but when an amendment is duly made and seconded, the Chairman shall call for a vote on the amendment first and then on the motion. An amendment must be relevant to, and not contravene, the subject matter of the motion.

The Chairman shall call for votes by oral expression of ayes and nays, but where the result of the vote is doubtful then by a show of hands or a rising vote. A majority vote determines.

Discussion of any matter may be terminated by motion duly made, seconded and voted, calling upon the Chairman to bring the matter to an immediate vote or proceed to other business.

The transactions of the Convention shall be recorded by the Secretary, and when certified by the Convention officers shall be given to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Annual Election

The electors in the Annual Election shall consist of those delegates included in the roll call prepared by the National National Assembly. Ballots and tellers' report forms shall be provided by the National Assembly.

The election shall be conducted by the Convention, but delegates unable to attend the Convention shall have the right to vote by mail.

The Chairman shall appoint three tellers, chosen from among the assembled delegates.

The electoral method shall be as follows:

1. The Convention Secretary shall call the roll of delegates, whereupon each delegate, in turn, shall place his or her ballot in a ballot box; and as the names are called ballots received by mail shall be placed in the ballot box by the Secretary of the National Assembly.
2. The ballot box shall then be handed to the tellers, who shall retire from

the Convention hall to determine the result of the election.

3. The result of the election is to be reported by the tellers, and the tellers' report is to be approved by the Convention.

4. The ballots, together with the tellers' report, certified by all the tellers, are to be given to the National Spiritual Assembly for preservation.

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The permanent record of each successive Annual Convention shall consist of the following — (1) Convention Call as issued by the National Spiritual Assembly; (2) List of selected delegates; (3) Annual Reports of the National Spiritual Assembly and of its Committees; (4) Messages sent to and received from the World Centre; (5) Resolutions and other transactions of the assembled delegates; (6) The result of the Annual Election.

page 548

4. New National Spiritual Assemblies

Two Pictures:

1980

Caption of Top Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Transkei.

1981

Caption of Bottom Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bermuda.

page 549

1981

Two Pictures:

Caption of Top Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Bophuthatswana.

Caption of Bottom Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Leeward Islands, (one member absent).

page 550

1981

Two Pictures:

Caption of Top Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of South West Africa/Namibia.

Caption of Bottom Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Tuvalu. The Hand of the Cause H. Collis Featherstone is seen fourth from the right in the back row.

page 551

Two Pictures:

1981

Caption of Top Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Windward Islands.

1983

Caption of Bottom Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Dominica (two members absent). The Hand of the Cause

Dh

ikru'lláh

Kh

ádém is seen seated in the front row, second from the left, and Counsellor Ruth Pringle in the back row, second from the right.

page 552

1983

Two Pictures:

Caption of Top Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of St. Lucia. The Hand of the Cause

Dh

ikru'lláh

Kh

ádém and Counsellor Ruth Pringle are seen seated in the front row, third and fourth from the right.

Caption of Bottom Picture:

Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih

Kh

ánúm (centre) with delegates and friends who attended the inaugural Convention for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Leeward Islands;

1981.

page 553

Two Pictures:

Caption of Top Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Uganda; re-established 1981. Counsellor Kolonario Oule is seen fourth from the right.

Two Pictures:

Caption of Bottom Picture:

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Nepal; re-established 1982.

back to

Bahá'í World

volume 18

table of contents

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