

Seeking to end prejudice

Anderson, David E

Chicago Defender (Daily Edition) (1973-); Aug 18, 1975;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender

pg. 5

Baha'i faith

Seeking to end prejudice

By DAVID E. ANDERSON

WASHINGTON (UPI)—In case you hadn't noticed, the United States is in the midst of a campaign "for the reconstruction of human life on this planet."

The gentle Baha'i faith, one of America's oldest "new" religions, is marking its 50th anniversary in the United States by trying to "build a community more or less from scratch in which children are free from prejudice."

The Baha'is follow the teaching of the Persian prophet Baha'u'llah, whom they revere as a latter-day version of Moses, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mohammed and Krishna.

The Baha'i faith does not claim any exclusiveness for the prophet

Baha'u'llah as a savior or Messiah.

Instead, according to Dr. Daniel Jordan and Miss Magdalene Carney, two members of the faith's National Spiritual Assembly, Baha'i stresses the essential unity of all major religious prophets.

The exact number of Baha'is in the United States is unknown. There are about 1,000 local assemblies or congregations, with headquarters in the Wilmette, and the goal of the anniversary campaign is 1,400 congregations by 1979.

The aim of the Baha'i faith, which stresses the wholeness of the human race, is the unity of all mankind in one social order. For

that reason, much of the emphasis within the church is on eliminating prejudice, especially in children.

"There are hundreds and hundreds of Baha'i babies on the way," Jordan said.

Miss Carney said: "We work closely with children, including them in the family structure. Prejudice is passed on, especially through education, but we try to deal with the whole range of prejudice-religious, racial, economic.

"We see that the prophets are all one. Our children are raised to cherish Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and there is rejoicing at their names."

Baha'is believe in progressive revelation, or the idea that religion is the evolution of one

central faith which shows up in different forms at different times in history.

The church also attempts to bridge the chasm between religion and science.

"Religion and science must go hand-in-hand," Jordan said. "Faith may transcend it, but it doesn't deny it."

The Baha'i faith began in the mid-19th Century when Baha'u'llah, son of a wealthy Persian nobleman, attracted a wide following as self-proclaimed successor to earlier religious prophets, including Mohammad.

An embarrassment to Turkish authorities, Baha'u'llah was shifted from jail to jail for years before he was finally released. He died in 1892 at age 75.

During his 40 years of im-

prisonment and exile, the prophet wrote 100 books and pamphlets which form the basis of the Baha'i faith.

Baha'u'llah's teaching were carried to the Western world by his son, who as early as 1912 defined race as America's primary spiritual problem.

He urged whites and blacks to join in a single spiritual assembly, and to "put such love into their hearts that they shall not only unite but even intermarry."

"Prejudice," Jordan said, "is still the chief force that inhibits unity."

Baha'is are not liturgy minded. The church has no priesthood. Religious services are based on readings from the prophets instead of sermons.