

Developing the Secretariat of a Local Spiritual Assembly

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I. Introduction

In His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh established the institution of local Houses of Justice:

“The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Baha...”¹

In their current embryonic stage of development, Local Houses of Justice are known as Spiritual Assemblies.² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has assured us that He will defend and protect Assemblies.³ Shoghi Effendi has called Assemblies “the representatives and custodians of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh” and the “chief sinews of Bahá'í society”.⁴

Bahá'u'lláh explained that teaching was one of the key functions of the Spiritual Assembly:

“When in session it behooveth them to converse, on behalf of the servants of God, on matters dealing with the affairs and interests of the public. For instance, teaching the Cause of God must be accorded precedence, inasmuch as it is a matter of paramount importance, so that thereby all men may enter the pavilion of unity and all the peoples of the earth be regarded even as a single body...”⁵

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has clarified a number of the functions of an Assembly above and beyond teaching:

- 1 Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Most Holy Book.* Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa: 1993. P. 29.
- 2 Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, 1965. P. 331.
- 3 Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*, P. 332.
- 4 Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, 1965. P. 331.
- 5 *The Local Spiritual Assembly*, Compilation by the Universal House of Justice. Quote from Bahá'u'lláh. P. 11.

*“Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word.”*⁶

In a letter to several National Spiritual Assemblies the Guardian listed the principal duties of Spiritual Assemblies:

*“The matter of Teaching ... constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablets will reveal that other duties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends in every locality. It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy. They must endeavour to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted cooperation for the service of the Cause. They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of colour, caste and creed. They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá’í educational institutions...”*⁷

The Assembly, much like a Board of Directors of a company, carries out its work on three levels:

- **Leadership:** Creating new and exciting directions for the Bahá’í community

An example of leadership might be the creation of a Four Year Plan for the local Bahá’í community from the National and International Four Year Plan. The Guardian told us that:

*“The first quality of leadership both among individuals and Assemblies is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exist in the rank and file of its followers.”*⁸

6 *The Local Spiritual Assembly.* Quote from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. P. 14.

7 *The Local Spiritual Assembly.* Quote from Shoghi Effendi. P. 15.

8 *The Local Spiritual Assembly.* Quote from Shoghi Effendi. P. 22.

- **Management:** Improving the system, policies or goals.
An example of management might be the appointment, training and monitoring of an External Affairs Committee to handle public relations with the media and dignitaries.
- **Administration:** Carrying out the policies and decisions of the Assembly.
Examples of administration include finding feast hosts, supervising cleaning of the Bahá'í centre and insuring that the librarian receives allotted funds to purchase books.

Many Assemblies become so bogged down in administration that they have insufficient time and energy to devote to the activities which can only be performed by the full Assembly: leadership and management.

This paper will describe the background for delegating administrative activities of the Assembly to a secretariat.

II. Delegation by Assemblies and Bahá'í Institutions

The Guardian explained the necessity for Assemblies to delegate work when he said:

“In whatsoever locality the Cause has sufficiently expanded, and in order to insure efficiency and avoid confusion, each of these manifold functions will have to be referred to a special Committee, responsible to that Assembly, elected by it from among the friends in that locality, and upon whose work the Assembly will have to exercise constant and general supervision.”⁹

In a letter to the National Assembly of the United States, Shoghi Effendi described the benefits of strong and capable committees working under an Assembly:

“I very highly approve of the arrangements you have made for centralizing the work in your hands and of distributing it to the various committees, who each in its own sphere, have so efficiently and thoroughly undertaken the management of their own affairs.”¹⁰

Shoghi Effendi further described the functioning of national Bahá'í committees:

⁹ Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, 1968. P. 39.

¹⁰ Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration*. P. 28.

“...the role of these [national] committees... is chiefly to make thorough and expert study of the issue entrusted to their charge, advise by their reports, and assist in the execution of the decisions, which in vital matters are to be exclusively and directly rendered by the National Assembly.”¹¹

The Guardian warned National Assemblies against:

“...the evils of overcentralization, which clog, confuse and in the long run depreciate the value of the Bahá’í services rendered shall on one hand be entirely avoided, and on the other the perils of utter decentralization with the consequent lapse of governing authority from the hands of the national representatives of the believers definitely averted. The absorption of the petty details of Bahá’í administration by the personnel of the National Spiritual Assembly is manifestly injurious to efficiency and an expert discharge of Bahá’í duties, whilst the granting of undue discretion to bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants would jeopardize the very vital and pervading powers that are the sacred prerogatives of bodies that in time will evolve into Bahá’í National Houses of Justice.”¹²

The Guardian spoke of his need for an International Bahá’í Secretariat with both advisory and executive capacities to assist him in his manifold duties.¹³ He also alerted us to the limits of delegation by Local Assemblies:

“The Local Spiritual Assembly cannot delegate to any one of the local committees the authority to exercise any control or supervision over any other committee which it has itself appointed. All local committees are directly and solely responsible to the Local Assembly which alone can exercise the power of supervision over them.”¹⁴

The Universal House of Justice has clarified the role of administrative committees of Spiritual Assemblies:

“...The Local Spiritual Assembly could be authorized to appoint an administrative committee in each of a number of sub-units of the city; and these committees could deal with the urgent needs of the friends in these areas on behalf of the Assembly... In such a decentralized system, the

11 Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá’í Administration*. P. 41.

12 Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá’í Administration*. P. 142.

13 Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá’í Administration*. P. 115.

14 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. 1993 edition. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 February 1939. P. 3.17.

Local Spiritual Assembly would have to provide for the overall coordination of the efforts of the friends in all sub-units of the city.”¹⁵

Delegation to local Bahá'í committees often fails. Typical reasons for a committee to fail include:

- Members not sufficiently united; unable to agree on meeting dates, formats, roles of committee members.
- Lack of effective leadership on the committee: leader cannot get members working together.
- Insufficient commitment to tasks and objectives: committee members lack the initiative to sustain their work.
- Poor consultation skills: one member dominates the committee or several members argue.

The Assembly, as manager of its committees, must take ultimate responsibility for their success or failure. Often Assemblies merely re-appoint new members onto the same committee, hoping that this will solve the difficulties. Unfortunately the same problems re-emerge despite the new membership.

If local Bahá'í committees are functioning well, the need for a proper secretariat will be reduced because much activity will be planned and implemented outside of the Assembly.

III. Role of the Assembly in Developing the Human Resources to Advance the Cause

The Guardian made it clear that Assemblies had to enlist the support of their communities to advance the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh:

“...if genuine and sustained cooperation and mutual confidence cease to exist between individual friends and their local and national communities, the all-beneficent work of the Cause must cease and nothing else can enable it to function harmoniously and effectively in future.”¹⁶

Shoghi Effendi emphasized that close fellowship and consultation with individual believers is mandatory for Assemblies:

¹⁵ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* Letter from the Universal House of Justice. P. 3.18.

¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration.* P. 28.

“...the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation... Their function is not to dictate but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent... They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel.”¹⁷

The Guardian specified that Assemblies “have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect and guide the believers...”¹⁸

IV. Role of the Assembly Secretary

Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand lists a number of duties of the Assembly secretary.¹⁹ Let us examine these one-by-one with respect to the estimated time commitment from each duty, the potential for delegation and possible methods for facilitating performance. Unless a quotation from the Writings is cited, the views expressed represent the opinions of the author.

This section applies to and is written for a large or rapidly-growing local Bahá’í community in which the duties for the secretary are expanding beyond the capacity of the current secretary. It may not be applicable to a small and static Bahá’í community.

Duty 1: “Prepares agenda for the Assembly meetings usually in consultation with the Chairman.”²⁰

Preparing an agenda for meeting is relatively easy when the work of the Assembly is highly systematic; when action plans related to goals are accurate and executed on time and to the requisite quality.

Given the confidential nature of some Assembly business, the scope for delegation to non-Assembly members is limited.

Duty 2: “Records all minutes of the Assembly meetings and the Annual Meeting (this may be done by a recording secretary).”²¹

For a fluent typist the time commitment to produce minutes for a single meeting is not great. If the secretary is not a fluent typist, a single set of minutes might take hours to produce. Dictation is more rapid than typing but it takes some practice to acquire dictation skills and any non-assembly members typing the minutes must be trustworthy to maintain confidentiality. Some

17 Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá’í Administration*. P. 63-64.

18 *The Local Spiritual Assembly*. Quote from Shoghi Effendi. P. 16.

19 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

20 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

21 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

Bahá'í secretaries type minutes on portable computers during the meeting instead of taking notes with pen and paper; this represents a very efficient way to record the minutes. Not everyone, however, can type minutes while attempting to participate in the consultation. Likewise portable computers are more expensive than non-portable computers. The Assembly can meet in places equipped with computers to avert the need to access a portable computer. Minutes can then be taken on computer and recorded on a floppy diskette, which can later be edited by the secretary in his or her own computer.

In general many of the duties of the Assembly secretary lie in written communication. Hence a person elected secretary could justify investing time to improve her or his typing and word-processing skills, which could be used to advantage in many areas of life outside of service to the Faith. Computer-based typing training is an enjoyable and easy way to learn or improve typing skills.

The Guidelines clearly state that the Assembly can appoint a recording secretary to take minutes. This is a simple way to reduce the workload on the secretary.

The Guidelines state that Assembly minutes must be reviewed, if necessary corrected, and then approved by the entire Assembly.²² The secretary should send a copy of every set of minutes to the National Spiritual Assembly.²³

Duty 3: "Receives mail for the Assembly and presents communications of all kinds to the Assembly at the next meeting."²⁴

Bahá'í Assemblies are encouraged to use post boxes rather than private addresses of Bahá'ís. The chore of clearing a post box does not need to fall on the secretary. Anyone can clear the post box provided they deliver the correspondence promptly to the secretary without opening letters, some of which may be confidential. The task of clearing a letter box should be delegated if possible. It is also possible to delegate the filing of incoming correspondence to a non-Assembly member who observes confidentiality.

The ability to understand and action correspondence is an integral part of the role of a Bahá'í secretary; this cannot be delegated to non-assembly members. Other Assembly members, however, could assist the secretary.

Duty 4: "Conveys all decisions of the Assembly, by correspondence or other prescribed means, under the direction of the Local Spiritual Assembly."²⁵

Although outward correspondence should go through the secretary, other

22 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.24.

23 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.24.

24 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.6-3.8.

25 *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.6-3.8.

Assembly members can be delegated to compose letters which are then edited, approved and signed by the secretary. Delegation can be according to portfolios; the member whose portfolio is new believer deepening could write letters to or about new believers.

People lacking practice in composing letters often find the task of writing letters for the Assembly to be time-consuming and difficult. Writing letters is an important skill which can be utilised both for Bahá'í activities and in one's occupation. Thus most Bahá'ís could easily justify investing their time in training in composition of letters.

Bahá'ís lacking access to word-processing on computer are disadvantaged with respect to writing letters. On a conventional typewriter editing is impossible, making it necessary to write or type a draft of the letter prior to typing the final version. With word-processing, the draft is easily transformed into the final copy without need for re-typing the text - only the changes are entered. Therefore, Bahá'ís writing letters for the Assembly require training and access to computer word-processing.

The Guidelines state that most correspondence from the Assembly should be written; this provides a permanent record of what has been said.²⁶

“The Assembly should strive for accuracy, clarity and overall excellence in its communications. If the secretary does not fully understand the Assembly’s intent, a draft of the letter should be brought to the Assembly for approval.”²⁷

Shoghi Effendi has warned secretaries to ensure their correspondence conveys the decision of the full Assembly:

“Generally speaking the Secretary of an Assembly must be careful to convey exactly what the majority decision or advice of the body was. There can surely be no objection to his putting it in proper terms and clarifying the matter according to the decisions or instructions of the Assembly. But he should of course not introduce his own personal views unless endorsed by the Assembly.”²⁸

In electing members to the Assembly, one of the desired qualities mentioned by the Guardian is a “well-trained mind.”²⁹ The secretary of an Assembly requires a well-trained mind in order to write letters expressing the view of the Assembly using courtesy, wisdom and tact.

Irrespective of who composes outgoing letters, Guidelines state that “All

²⁶ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.24.

²⁷ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.25.

²⁸ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* Quote from Shoghi Effendi. P. 3.25.

²⁹ *The Local Spiritual Assembly.* Quote from Shoghi Effendi. P. 9.

correspondence from the Local Spiritual Assembly should be signed by the Secretary or, if approved by the Assembly, on behalf of the Secretary."³⁰

Duty 5: "Maintains a filing system for all correspondence, community bulletins and so on."³¹

On receiving inward correspondence the secretary reads each document and either records it in a log of inward correspondence or delegates this recording and filing to an assistant. Using the time-management principal of "handle each piece of paper only once if possible," it is important for the secretary to take immediate action on many items of inward correspondence. To do this requires access to a photocopy machine. Thus when the secretary receives a letter that pertains to the child education committee, she or he can immediately photocopy the letter and dispatch this copy to the appropriate people with a request ranging from "for your information" to "please read this letter and report back to the Assembly." The secretary can also enter information required by the wider Bahá'í community into a computer-based monthly report from the Assembly in the local Bahá'í newsletter. This fulfils the Assembly's responsibility to inform the community of important information and can reduce the amount of time spent at Feast making simple announcements.

By making an immediate decision on incoming correspondence and actioning that decision, the secretary can dramatically reduce the amount of time that the full Assembly needs to spend informing believers and committees of relevant information.

Duty 6: "Advises members of the community where and when the Nineteen Day Feasts will be held (this job may be done by a Feast Committee, if the Assembly so decides)."³²

The secretary, in conjunction with Feast committee and newsletter, sets and announces dates and venues for Feasts. This is an easy task requiring very little time.

Duty 7: "Prepares agenda and materials to be shared with or distributed to the community at Feasts."³³

This task is tied in with the basic communication function of the secretary. It can be shared with other members, particularly the chairman. The time expenditure on this task is minimal. An assistant can photocopy materials for distribution to the believers attending Feast.

³⁰ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.26.

³¹ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

³² *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

³³ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

Duty 8: “Makes notes of recommendations made at the Nineteen Day Feast and presents them to the Assembly at the next meeting. The community should be advised of any action taken or consideration given to such recommendations.”³⁴

Since the secretary would ordinarily attend Feasts, no additional time is spent recording Feast recommendations. Likewise presenting Feast recommendations to the Assembly requires no additional time or effort. Either task could be delegated to another Assembly member. Perhaps the most challenging component of duty 8 is reporting back to the community when the Assembly has not approved a Feast recommendation - explaining the reasoning is often difficult and some of the friends may become upset that their ideas have been rejected. It is also difficult to explain why the Assembly has not reached a decision about a Feast recommendation; the Assembly can state that it is investigating the recommendation but in many cases the final result of this investigation is not reported back to the Assembly. A formal system of recording Feast recommendations and the dates on which the community is notified of the final Assembly decision may be helpful to keep track of the outcome of Feast recommendations.

Duty 9: “Maintains an up-to-date list of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all members of the community.”³⁵

Duty 10: “Advises the Bahá’í National Office of all enrolments, transfers, changes of address and changes in personal status of believers (marriages, divorces, deaths, etc).”³⁶

There is nothing confidential about a community address list, provided the list is not distributed to people for purposes outside of official Bahá’í use. Hence, the keeping of a community address list can be delegated to a person outside the Assembly; this could include a non-Bahá’í working for the secretary. The key feature is that information about changes in address and phone numbers are sent to the person maintaining the list, who then forwards information to the National Bahá’í Office and other Bahá’í communities receiving transferred members. Address changes should also appear in the local Bahá’í newsletter.

If an address list is computerised, it can be updated and reprinted easily. In addition computer-printed mailing labels can be created quickly, reducing the workload for the local newsletter editors.

³⁴ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.6-3.8.

³⁵ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.6-3.8.

³⁶ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 3.6-3.8.

Duty 11: "Sends out written notices of the Annual Meeting so that they are received at least fifteen days prior to the date of the meeting on 21 April. Ballots and a list of believers eligible to vote must be enclosed."³⁷

This is a simple task which can be delegated. The person who maintains the address list is ideally placed to create a ballot listing eligible voters.

Duty 12: "Keeps a permanent file of National newsletter and other Bahá'í periodicals to which the Assembly subscribes (this job may be done by the librarian if the Assembly so directs)."³⁸

This job is best delegated to a Bahá'í librarian - an Assembly member does not need to be involved.

Duty 13: "Maintains a file or book of press clippings of all publicity on the Faith (this job may be done by the publicity committee, public information officer, archives officer or other assigned person, if the Assembly so directs)."³⁹

This task is best delegated to a non-assembly member such as the archives officer or office of external affairs.

Duty 14: "Receives periodic reports from committees as well as expected responses to the Assembly's communications."⁴⁰

As the port of call for incoming correspondence, the secretary would naturally receive reports of this nature and reports these back to the full Assembly, making recommendations if further action is needed (e.g. to further train the committee).

Duty 15: "Brings to the meeting files, correspondence, the *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies*, and any other relevant Writings. A useful source of reference is *Lights of Guidance, 1988 edition*."⁴¹

Given that the secretary generally keeps the files and correspondence in her or his home for easy access, it is no extra work to bring such information to Assembly meetings. If the Guidelines are available for a computer file then simply bringing a computer to the Assembly meetings will supply the Guidelines.

³⁷ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

³⁸ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

³⁹ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

⁴⁰ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

⁴¹ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

Duty 16: “If possible, so that members can be well prepared to consult at the Assembly meetings, it is helpful for the secretary to prepare a report consisting of a list of items to be considered at the forthcoming meeting, with brief background information pertaining to each item, and a resume of correspondence handled by the secretary between meetings. This will be helpful both for the information of the Assembly members and for saving time at each meeting.”⁴²

This function cannot easily be delegated to other Assembly members. The ability to prepare a concise summary of each agenda item is developed through experience both inside and outside the Faith. Secretaries lacking such experience will spend much more time and effort in preparing for a meeting than those with greater experience.

V. From Assembly Secretary to Secretariat

Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand offers two options for assisting the secretary whose workload has grown and may be struggling:

*“The Assembly may choose to divide the duties of the Secretary among more than one person. For example, the Assembly may elect a Recording Secretary to record the minutes and do the filing; to be responsible for recording births, deaths and marriages; and for communicating with the National Spiritual Assembly about address changes, enrolments and transfers of membership. Another option is to have a three-member Secretariat including the Chair, the Secretary and the Recording Secretary, which would assume many secretarial duties for the Assembly. Some duties may be delegated to a committee or individual, e.g. publicity. Each Assembly is free to determine the details of handling this work, the number of officers and the responsibilities of its officers.”*⁴³

Many local Assemblies have taken the first option of appointing recording secretaries; relatively few have taken the second option of appointing a secretariat. References to the term secretariat in the Writings of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice are largely confined to the National Secretariats serving National Spiritual Assemblies. I was unable to find references to local Bahá’í secretariats in the Mars for Windows CD compilation of fifty Bahá’í books published by Crimson Publication in San Juan Capistrano, California.

⁴² *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

⁴³ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand*. P. 3.6-3.8.

VI. Experience of the Hamilton, New Zealand Assembly Secretariat in 1993

The Hamilton Spiritual Assembly, like many others, faced the challenge of finding a member willing and able to serve as secretary. After the annual meeting at Ridvan 1993 the new Assembly developed a secretariat. Information about how this occurred and preliminary evaluation of the effects of the secretariat is beyond the scope of this paper but a summary of main points is now provided.

Our initial secretariat consisted of the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. Time pressure on the chairman forced him to leave the secretariat; he was replaced by another member.

The secretariat aimed to meet at least once a fortnight, depending on its duties. It would time its meetings to ensure that full assembly meetings did not need to address matters related to implementing assembly decisions and policies.

The first draft of terms of reference for the secretariat were:

- Ensure the timely implementation of assembly decisions and policies.
- Meet regularly with believers, particularly those holding key positions (e.g. deepening coordinator, children's class coordinator) to harness their energies and skills for service to the Bahá'í community.
- Train and supervise non-assembly members serving on committees or as officers of the assembly.
- Committee actions would be limited to carrying out local and national assembly decisions and policies, dealing with urgent situations that do not require consultation by the full assembly, encouraging, supervising and training believers.

Expected outcomes of the secretariat:

- Assembly decisions implemented fully and rapidly provided no unforeseen obstacles arose (e.g. insufficient funds to carry out assembly decisions).
- Bahá'í events and projects carried out to a high spiritual and professional standard.
- Full assembly meetings focused on management and leadership rather than petty administrative matters.

- Non-assembly members develop their administrative capabilities, enabling them to achieve higher levels of service to the Faith. This may enhance the employment potential for Bahá'ís seeking paid employment.
- Major improvements in child education, deepening and teaching due to better planning and administration.

The secretariat soon developed modified terms of reference:

- Foster and monitor implementation of Assembly decisions
- Evaluate the effects of Assembly decisions
- Find the facts about situations so that relevant information is available to the full Assembly
- Cull the agenda
- Support the secretary

In July, 1993 the Assembly directed the Secretariat to bring together into one document the Hamilton Three Year Plan. As the secretariat met it became more capable of resolving issues over the telephone, thereby reducing the need for further meetings. The secretary felt empowered to take action to implement Assembly policies, which led to more expeditious handling of administrative matters. Other Assembly members not on the secretariat also were empowered to take on tasks to assist the Assembly.

VI. Final Comments

Bahá'í administration remains in an embryonic phase. The Guardian's secretary explained that:

"...the existing imperfections in the administrative machinery of the Cause ... should be attributed not to the administrative system itself, but to the administrators of the Faith, who by reason of their human limitations and imperfections can never hope to entirely fulfil those ideal conditions set forth in the Teachings. Much of the existing defects in the present-day activities of the believers, however, will as the Community develops and gains in experience be gradually removed, and healthier and more progressive conditions prevail".⁴⁴

We must all heed the Guardian's warning that:

“...administrative activities, however harmoniously and efficiently conducted, are but means to an end, and should be regarded as direct instruments for the propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. Let us take heed in our great concern for the perfection of the administrative machinery of the Cause, we lose sight of the Divine Purpose for which it has been created. Let us be on our guard lest the growing demand for specialization in the administrative functions of the Cause detain us from joining the ranks of those who in the forefront of battle are gloriously engaged in summoning the multitude to this New Day of God.”⁴⁵

Shoghi Effendi told us that:

“...prior to every conceivable measure destined to raise the efficiency of our administrative activities, more vital than any scheme which the most resourceful amongst us can devise, far above the most elaborate structure which the concerted efforts of organized Assemblies can hope to raise, is the realization down in the innermost heart of every true believers of the regenerating power, the supreme necessity, the unfailing efficacy of the Message he bears... naught else can provide the driving force and sustaining power that are both so essential to the success of vast and enduring achievements.”⁴⁶

Local Bahá'í communities in New Zealand are ready to enter a new phase in the process of their maturation. To achieve this the Assemblies must reach greater heights of leadership, management and administration. The challenge is to implement a system which fosters the maturation of the Assembly and community. Developing the role of the secretary, which may be assisted by a secretariat, is an important step in this process.

⁴⁴ *Guidelines for the Local Spiritual Assembly in New Zealand.* P. 1.5.

⁴⁵ Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration.* P. 103.

⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration.* P. 111-112.