

**GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLIES ON
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

A Supplement to
DEVELOPING DISTINCTIVE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES

Compiled and edited
by the
**National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá'ís of the United States**

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O SON OF SPIRIT!

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

~ Bahá'u'lláh

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PREFACE

(with Notes on Terminology)

This manual, *Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies on Domestic Violence: A Supplement to Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities*,¹ has been developed by the National Spiritual Assembly² for the purpose of providing informed, consistent, and explicit guidance to Local Spiritual Assemblies³ concerning domestic violence. It is designed as a tool to familiarize Local Spiritual Assemblies with the many forms of domestic violence, to eliminate misconceptions about it, and to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies in their functioning, through:

- Establishing the spiritual basis for addressing domestic violence in the context of Bahá'í beliefs;
- Making available a common set of definitions, consistent with field research, for what constitutes domestic violence;
- Providing insight into the relationship between gender inequality and domestic violence;
- Clarifying the general role of laws, punishment and education as they relate to dealing with situations of domestic violence;
- Identifying Bahá'í laws, principles, and exhortations that apply directly to situations of domestic violence;
- Contrasting and clarifying the roles of individuals and of Local Spiritual Assemblies in relation to domestic violence;
- Identifying the responsibilities of Local Spiritual Assemblies under both civil⁴ and Bahá'í law to protect those who are abused, to discipline those who commit abuse, and to foster and support the spiritual transformation and character development of every soul; and
- Providing a basis for educating the Bahá'í community about domestic violence.

Although the scope of this supplement is intended primarily to provide advice about a broad range of behaviors that may occur between family members or within the home, much of its guidance applies also to situations of abuse or violence that occur between unrelated individuals. Issues of Bahá'í marriage and divorce may

¹ *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities: Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies* is a manual designed to aid Local Spiritual Assemblies in applying the principles of Bahá'í administration with wisdom and love to the various issues which may come before them.

² A National Spiritual Assembly is the nine-member governing council of a national Bahá'í community, elected annually by the national membership. There is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith. Further information on the Bahá'í Faith or its administrative system is available at <<http://www.us.bahai.org>> and from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (refer to the Bahá'í Resources and References on Related Topics section).

³ A Local Spiritual Assembly is the locally elected nine-member governing council of a local Bahá'í community that forms a part of the Bahá'í administrative system.

⁴ The term “civil law” is used throughout the supplement to include federal, state, and local laws, except in instances where the text distinguishes civil from criminal law.

also be involved in situations of domestic violence, but they are not addressed in this supplement, as *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities* and other Bahá'í publications offer guidance on those matters.

Although this supplement is intended primarily as a reference tool for use when a Local Spiritual Assembly is confronted with a situation of domestic violence, it is recommended that all Assemblies thoroughly familiarize themselves with its contents prior to the necessity of handling such situations. To deal wisely with the complex and sensitive issues of domestic violence requires intimate familiarity with its various aspects, as outlined above. Given that the supplement is written in such a way that each section builds upon previous sections, familiarity is best gained by reading the document sequentially and in its entirety. Further assistance in studying this document and learning to apply the guidance contained within can be found in the Assembly Development Module Workshop *Advanced Practice in Administering Justice: Focus on Domestic Violence*, which can be obtained from the Bahá'í Distribution Service.⁵

Together with the rest of society, the Bahá'í community is engaged in an on-going learning process regarding the subject of domestic violence and this supplement should be regarded as a “work in progress.” As our understanding increases and we receive input from the community, additional guidance from the Universal House of Justice,⁶ and further research from the field, we will continue to make revisions and look forward to receiving comments and suggestions.

Moreover, as domestic violence is a global pandemic, affecting people of every culture, religion, race, ethnicity, economic strata and educational background, Local Spiritual Assemblies and Bahá'í communities are encouraged to form partnerships and to cooperate with other organizations to eradicate domestic violence from the life of the community and the nation.

In addition to the wealth of guidance in the Bahá'í teachings applying to situations of domestic violence, we wish to acknowledge that such a thorough treatment of the subject would not have been possible without the contributions and sacrifices of the multitude of individuals and organizations who are carrying forward programs of research, prevention, intervention, legislation, and remediation, often impelled by courageous individuals who have spoken out about abuse, by stories of those who have suffered the consequences and by aware individuals seeking to change society for the benefit of present and future generations. In particular, we wish to acknowledge our appreciation for the extensive cumulative body of materials made available by many such organizations and individuals as contributions to society's collective understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, which were invaluable in preparing some sections of this document. Finally, we would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the dozens of individuals from a broad range of

⁵ Refer to the Bahá'í Resources and References on Related Topics section.

⁶ The Universal House of Justice is the nine-member governing council of the Bahá'ís of the world, elected once every five years by all members of all National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the world.

backgrounds whose generous contributions of expertise, experience, insight, advice, review and feedback were essential to our work.

It is with humility and gratitude that we offer *Guidelines for Spiritual Assemblies on Domestic Violence: A Supplement to Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities* for the use of the Bahá'í community and welcome its examination by others who are also seeking to free humanity from this pernicious and age-old social disorder.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE GUIDANCE IN THIS SUPPLEMENT DOES NOT CONSTITUTE LEGAL
ADVICE, WHICH SHOULD BE SOUGHT FROM A QUALIFIED ATTORNEY IF NEEDED**

