



The **Nine-pointed Star** is a common symbol in the Bahá'í religion. The number 9 is significant in the holy texts of the religion.

BAHÁ'Í

The Bahá'í movement is the youngest of the world's independent religions. It is based on the teachings of its Founder, Bahá'u'lláh, who emerged in the mid-19th century in what was then Persia, now Iran.

Bahá'ís believe in the existence of one God, the fundamental equality of all people, and that Divine revelation continues to be renewed by new Messengers who preach the same fundamental messages updated to the current needs of humanity. The Bahá'ís see Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad and Bahá'u'lláh as Messengers of God.

Today there are an estimated 7 million members in over two hundred and thirty countries. There are no clergy in the Bahá'í religion; it is administered locally by democratically elected councils, called Spiritual Assemblies. There is also a National Spiritual Assembly, responsible for all the affairs of the Bahá'í community in Ireland. The Universal House of Justice, in Haifa, Israel, oversees the international Bahá'í community.

Summary of Essential Practice Points:

Please refer to the full text of the highlighted points related to the following summary points.

1 *Profile of the Bahá'í in Ireland:*

The majority of Bahá'ís in Ireland are ethnic Irish people. There is also an Iranian community who has settled in Ireland.

2 *Religious contacts and religious practices:*

There are no clergy in the Bahá'í religion. A local community contact can be sourced through the Irish National Secretary, whose details are at the end of the section. This contact can be called on for guidance for the healthcare settings and personal support for ill and dying Bahá'í.

3 *Death-related religious rituals:*

In the case of imminent death and where no family are immediately available the community member designated by the person should be called to support the person. There is no formal religious ritual for dying Bahá'í.

4 *Cleaning and touching the body:*

Healthcare staff may conduct the normal cleaning and washing practice on a deceased Bahá'í. It is customary for Bahá'ís to place a ring on the finger after death and in no circumstances should it be removed.

5 *Initiation ritual:*

There is no formal initiation into the religion for infants even in the case of imminent threat to life.

Profile of the Bahá'í in Ireland

Census 2006 indicated that the number of Bahá'í in Ireland increased by almost 3% between 2002 and 2006. 504 people indicated Bahá'í as their religious affiliation in the Census.

Essential Practice Point

1

The majority of Bahá'ís in Ireland are ethnic Irish people, including those who have converted to the religion and whose children are being raised Bahá'í. There is also an Iranian community that has settled in Ireland who are Irish citizens. There may also be Bahá'í visitors to Ireland who need healthcare during their stay.

- Bahá'ís generally are open to contact with hospital chaplains and people of other religions.
- Ill members may request a visit from a community member.
- The Bahá'í religion is mostly free of ritual, ceremony and symbols. Followers tend to pray and read from the teachings of the religion's founder.

Food and the content of medicine

Bahá'í avoid mind altering substances, including narcotics and alcohol. Medicines containing these ingredients are normally permitted.

Blood Transfusion and Organ Transplantation

There is no religious objection to these procedures.

Care of the ill

Beliefs about the treatment of illness

The Bahá'í religion encourages members to seek the guidance of a qualified doctor if necessary to maintain good health.

Religious contacts and religious practices

Essential Practice Point

2

- There are no clergy in the Bahá'í religion. Community members are available to visit the ill and dying in healthcare settings. A local contact can be sourced through the Irish National Coordinator whose details are at the end of the section. This contact can be called on for guidance for the healthcare settings and personal support for ill and dying Bahá'í.

Care of the Dying

Death-related religious rituals

Essential Practice Point

3

- There is no formal religious ritual for Bahá'í. In the case of imminent death and where no family are immediately available the community member designated by the person should be called to support the person.
- It is customary for Bahá'ís to place a ring on the finger after death and in no circumstances should it be removed.

Cleaning and touching the body

Essential Practice Point

4

Healthcare staff may conduct the normal cleaning and washing practice on a deceased Bahá'í. Do not remove the ring placed on the finger after death.

Postmortem requirements

There is no objection to a postmortem conducted on compelling medical or legal grounds.

Interment ritual

Cremation is not permitted and burial should take place as near as reasonably possible to the place of death, certainly within the distance of an hour's transport.

Religious Icons and Symbols

Personal and religious items

- There are no particular items of religious significance worn by members.
- Some may carry holy books from the religion.

Use of religious symbols

It is not appropriate to display a crucifix, cross, candles or other Christian images in a mortuary area where a deceased Bahá'í is laid out.

Additional Notes on Maternity and Paediatric Care

Initiation ritual

Essential Practice Point

5

There is no formal initiation into the religion, even in the case of imminent threat to life. Rituals such as the practice of baptism in some Christian traditions are not appropriate for Bahá'ís.

Foetal, infant and child death

- There are no formal practices / rituals required for stillbirth and miscarriage. The community may hold their own ceremony.
- Adult practices apply for deceased infants and children.

Memento of a deceased child

Check with family if they require a memento of a child who has died as there is no formal requirement in this area.

Developing a Local Bahá'í Contact

The names of local Bahá'í members can be sourced from Mrs. Alison Wortley, National Secretary of the Irish Bahá'í Community (01 6683150). The number should be used solely for the purposes of sourcing religious support for Bahá'ís and seeking guidance in delivering healthcare to community members.

Contributors

Ms Caroline Smith, former National Secretary of the Irish Bahá'í Community, provided information for the first draft of this section. Mrs Alison Wortley, current National Secretary, reviewed and approved the finalised material.