

Bahá'í Profile

PLEASE NOTE: This religious profile provides an overview of the range of beliefs and practices that may apply to individuals who practice this religion. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients.

Introduction:

The Bahá'í Faith, which originated in Persia over 170 years ago, is the youngest of the world's independent monotheistic religions. Founded by Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), its central theme is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in a peaceful global society. It reveres the founders of all the great religions. Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah is the most recent of these Messengers of God, with teachings for the modern era.

The word Bahá'í derives from Bahá meaning glory or splendour and signifies a follower of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í community today numbers more than five million members, resident in over 200 countries. It is the second most widespread religion (National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Australia Inc, 2010b).

Migration:

- The Bahá'í faith was brought to Australia in 1920 by Clara and Hyde Dunne who were from the United States. They travelled extensively around the country giving talks and presentations on the Baha'i faith and its teachings.
- The first Victorian Baha'i was Effie Baker, a photographer and model-maker, who joined the Baha'i Faith in Melbourne in 1922. The following year, 17 Baha'is gathered in South Yarra to form Australia's first Baha'i institution, the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Melbourne. Later in 1924, the Baha'i faith spread to Ballarat, Geelong and other regional centres. (Australian Bahá'is Community, 2010, *Bahá'ís in my State*).
- By 1934, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand was established.
- In 1957, plans were announced to build a Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney. It was officially dedicated in 1961 and is one of only seven Bahá'í Houses of Worship in the world with an eighth currently being built in Chile.
- The gradual growth of the Bahá'í community in Australia was accelerated by Iranian Bahá'í refugees fleeing the resurgence of persecution following the 1979 Iranian revolution.
- In 1981 Australia developed a special Humanitarian assistance program for Baha'i fleeing persecution in Iran. (Museum Victoria, *History of immigration from Iran*).
- Based on the 2016 Census data, it is estimated that of 13,988 Baha'is living in Australia, around 2,828 reside in Victoria. This represents 0.05% of the total Victorian population.

Local Demographics: Bahá'í residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Number of Bahá'í Residents
City of Boroondara	113
City of Knox	224
City of Manningham	379
City of Maroondah	146
City of Monash	224
City of Whitehorse	177
City of Yarra Ranges	39
Total population of EMR	1,308

(ABS Census 2016)

Language:

- Bahá'ís come from all over the world and they speak many languages.
- Bahá'ís from Iran may speak Persian / Farsi.

Religious Practices:

Beliefs:

- Bahá'ís believe that there is only one God who is the source of all creation.
- Bahá'ís believe in the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of humanity.
- God has sent, and will continue to send, great prophets to humanity, through which the Holy Spirit has revealed the word of God.
- Bahá'ís follow the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), who is regarded as the most recent in a line of messengers from God that stretches back beyond recorded time and includes Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad.
- Other Central Figures in the Bahá'í Faith are The Báb, forerunner to Bahá'u'lláh (similar to John the Baptist); 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh's son and successor as well as Interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings; and Shoghi Effendi, grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957.
- Bahá'ís believe every person has an immortal soul. At death, the soul is freed to travel through the spiritual world.
- The Bahá'ís support gender and race equality; world government; world peace; and freedom of expression and assembly.

Worship:

- The Bahá'í faith has no clergy or sacraments and virtually no rituals. Private prayer, meditation upon the Holy Writings, and collective worship, discussion and action are all ways in Baha'is observe their religion.
- Rather than a weekly worship service, most Bahá'í communities hold a monthly program called "feast" that includes worship, community consultation and social activities. Bahá'ís also hold special worship events on holy days and festivals.

- When Bahá'ís come together in communal worship, there are no congregational prayers. One or more person will recite prayers on behalf of everyone present. There will be spiritual readings from Bahá'í sources but readings may also include spiritual texts from other religions.
- Bahá'ís perform daily obligatory prayers. They may select between short, medium and long obligatory prayers, each of which is to be read at a designated time or times of the day. Some require certain movements to be performed. The times for prayer are quite broadly interpreted and do not usually require special consideration.
- Aside from the Obligatory Prayers, Bahá'ís use prayer regularly in their daily lives. There are prayers, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for almost any situation. For example, to express gratitude and praise, to overcome test and difficulties and to develop spiritual qualities.
- Bahá'ís regard work performed in a spirit of service as a form of worship.

Places of Worship:

- National Spiritual Assemblies (NSA) supervise affairs in each country. The National Spiritual Assembly has its offices in the grounds of the Bahá'ís House of Worship in Sydney.
- In most capital cities of Australia a Bahá'í centre can be found, offering information and local news and knowledge.
- Plans are currently underway for the development of a new Baha'i Centre of Learning for Victoria, however there is currently a centre called the Baha'I Community of Port Phillip in Elwood.
- In Australia, most groups meet together in community halls and homes of members.

Religious / Community Leaders:

- There is no priesthood and no individual leadership.
- In any locality where there are more than nine adult believers, Local Spiritual Assemblies administer affairs. Their functions have been defined by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in Bahá'í scripture. Each Spiritual Assembly has nine elected members.
- In Australia, Regional Councils exist on a state level and National Spiritual Assemblies govern affairs on a national level. The Australian National Spiritual Assembly has its offices in the grounds of the Baha'i House of Worship in Sydney.
- The Universal House of Justice is the world governing body of the Baha'is and its seat is located in Haifa, Israel.

Icons / Statues / Symbols:

- A nine-pointed star is often used as a symbol of Bahá'í faith.
- The calligraphy piece known as “The Greatest Name” – “O Glory of Glories” is used as a wall hanging or framed table ornament.
- The “Ringstone” symbol, a design of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which represents God, His Manifestations, Mankind and the Spirit which unites the three, is often found in Bahá'í homes or brought by a Bahá'í to hospital. It is may also be used for rings and as a framed table ornament or wall hanging.

Scriptures:

- Bahá'í scripture is made up of the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
- Among the better-known writings of Bahá'u'lláh are – 'The Most Holy Book', 'The Book of Certitude', and 'Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh'. There are many other books of Bahá'í scripture.

Other Laws and Customs:

- Gambling is discouraged and use of alcohol and narcotics is prohibited. (Langness, D, 2015; Richards, R, 2016)
- Bahá'í are forbidden to join political parties and are expected to respect the authority of established governments and its laws except when there is a direct conflict with Bahá'í law.
- Bahá'ís cannot accept political appointments or run for elected office.

Clothing:

- There are no specific conventions or beliefs around clothing in the Bahá'í Faith.

Food:

- Fasting is observed for 19 days every autumn (spring in the northern hemisphere) from the 2nd to the 20th March for reasons of spiritual regeneration. Bahá'ís over the age of 15 do not eat or drink during this period from sunrise to sunset.
- Alcohol and drugs, for other than medical reasons, are prohibited.
- Some Bahá'ís may be vegetarian, or eat limited meat but this is not obligatory. Generally speaking there are no prohibitions to foods eaten by Bahá'ís.

Holy days:

See Key Bahá'í Festivals.

Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- Adult children respect and care for parents but the institutions of the Faith also have duty of care.
- Elderly people have a role to play in the education of the community, family and grandchildren.
- Wherever possible the elderly should be integrated into community life.

Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- The soul is understood to be independent from infirmities in the body and mind, therefore disability is not linked to a weakness or sinfulness of spirit.
- It is everybody's responsibility to take part in caring for the disabled, the individual as well as the institutions of the Faith and the country.
- Everybody should be treated equally and have access to equal opportunities.

Communication Styles:

- Handshaking is well accepted when greeting.

Naming Conventions:

- There are no specific naming conventions for Bahá'í followers. This is usually more dependent on culture.

Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Bahá'ís believe that religion and science are complementary.
- Bahá'í teachings require Bahá'ís to consult a competent physician when ill. Prayer both complements and supports the healing process.
- Both physical and spiritual health is considered important to the well being of a person.
- Bahá'í dead must be buried within an hour's travel distance from the place of death. Bahá'ís do not embalm or cremate their dead. The only ceremonial requirement of a funeral is the recitation of the Prayer for the Dead. (Beliefnet, 2001, *Transition Rituals – Bahá'í*)
- Additional burial laws that apply to Baha'is of Middle Eastern origin are:
 - The dead body is washed and wrapped in a shroud of white silk or cotton;
 - A Bahá'í burial ring is placed on the finger (for those aged 15 years or more);
 - The body is to be placed in a coffin of stone or a fine hard wood.(Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, Section 13.3)

The Role of the Family / Women:

- The family is viewed as the fundamental building block of society.
- The Bahá'í faith states that women and men are equal.
- Women participate fully in decision making, both within the family and within the Bahá'í community.

Courtship, Marriage and Child-rearing:

- Marriage is strongly encouraged and Baha'is may marry people of other faiths or no faith.
- Family unity is considered very important and the rights of all family members must be respected. Divorce is strongly discouraged but is permitted if reconciliation cannot be achieved following a 'Year of Patience'.
- While men and women are equal, their roles are not identical. For example, mothers are considered to have a special role as the first educators of their children.
- After the couple decides to get married, permission from all four parents is required.
- It is considered a fundamental purpose of marriage to produce children, it is frowned upon for married couples to decide against having children, although it is acceptable if couples are unable to conceive.

Key Bahá'í Festivals / Significant Dates:

The Bahá'í calendar is a solar calendar, meaning that the dates of the festivals and holy days do not change from year to year.

- Intercalary Days (*A period of charity, gift-giving and festivities*) 26th Feb – 1st Mar
- Bahá'í fasting month (for over 15 years old) 2nd Mar – 20th Mar
- Bahá'í New Year (*Feast of Naw Ruz*) 21st March
- The Declaration of *Bahá'u'lláh* (*Festival of Ridvan – 12 Day period*) 21st Apr – 2nd May
- Holy Days during the Festival of *Ridvan* 21st & 29th Apr, 2nd May
- Declaration of the *Báb* 23rd May
- Ascension of *Bahá'u'lláh* 29th May
- Martyrdom of the *Báb* 9th July
- Birth of the *Báb* 20th October
- Birth of the *Bahá'u'lláh* 12th November
- Day of the Covenant 26th November
- Ascension of *Abdu'l-Bahá* 28th November

Local Services Useful for Baha'is Residents in the Eastern Region

Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128 and 18 Bond Street, Ringwood 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)
New Hope Foundation	Grattan Gardens Community Centre 40 Grattan Street, Prahran 3181	Ph: 9510 5877

Aged Care & Disability Support Services

Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) (MIC)

Aged & Disability Services

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill 3128

Ph: (03) 9275 6901

Email: wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can continue living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care.

Other Supports

The Australian Bahá'í Community

The Australian Bahá'í Community seeks to be a learning community, reflecting on how to better foster spiritual life and contribute to the progress of Australian society.

Ph: (02) 9998 9222

Address: 173 Monda Vale Road, Ingleside NSW 2101

Email: secretariat@bahai.org.au

Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Boroondara

PO Box 32, East Kew VIC 3102

Ph: 0418 320 138

Email: boroondara@vic.bahai.org.au

Bahá'í Community of Monash

Ph: 0412 775 290

Website: <https://www.bahai.org/>

Media

Media	Program	Details
Radio	SBS Radio 2 – 93.1 FM Persian Show Saturdays 3-4pm	http://www.sbs.com.au/guide/channel/SBSRadio2/location/VIC#/
Internet	SBS (Persian) Podcast	http://www.sbs.com.au/podcasts/yourlanguage/persian/
Newspaper/ Journal / Articles	Bahá'í Library Online	http://bahai-library.com/
	Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) provides the largest range of Bahá'í books and resources in Australia.	PO Box 300, Bundoora 3083 Ph: 9357 1880 or 1800 251 022 Email: bds@bahai.org.au https://bahaibooks.com.au/pages/about-bds-australia
	Australian Bahá'í Report The Australian Bahá'í Report is a newsletter about the activities of the Australian Bahá'í Community. It is published in February, June and October each year.	Email: opi@bahai.org.au https://bahai.works/Australian_Baha%E2%80%99i_Report/Volume_13/Issue_1/Text

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