

Heads Mixed Baha'i Group In Florida

By ROMONA LOWE
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MIAMI, Fla.—A Negro woman is chairman of the predominantly white local spiritual assembly of the Miami Bahai. She is Olive Alexander, a slender graying social worker who came here from the Bahamas 16 years ago and found as much to be done here for the poor as in her less privileged homeland.

As spiritual leader of the religious group she is proof positive that the Bahai attempt to live up to the principles they profess. Briefly they believe in the oneness of mankind, their first and basic principle; in universal peace; universal education; harmony between science and religion, and the equality of the sexes.

Hard To Find Hall

Because of their refusal to separate the races they have had difficulty finding a meeting hall and so are forced to meet from home to home. Neighbors were so hostile that they had to withdraw from the last hall they rented. The vacillating landlord who had shaken Miss Alexander's hand in his own dining room when the rental contract was signed pretended that he did not know Negroes were going to attend the meetings.

"You see we fight in our way," Miss Alexander explained. "In this case it was to withdraw as a group.

"We are non-political. In our own community, as we call our religious body, we do all our voting for the nine members of our spiritual assembly, which is the governing body, by secret ballot. There is no campaigning and no two persons are to discuss individuals for election."

No Paid Clergy

There are no paid clergy in the Bahai faith, she said. Members are urged to be self-sufficient and the belief is that one must be willing to make the sacrifice, have the desire to be a leader and in this way they attempt to remove the profiteering so detrimental to contemporary organized religion.

In Miss Alexander's case she has been for 12 years executive director of the James E. Scott Community Association, formerly called the Negro Welfare Federation. Under Miss Alexander's direction, the Association carries on an educational program that includes mothers' clubs, reading clubs, library service, sewing and home nursing classes, cooperative canning and work in foods and crafts. Some 368 adults, 509 teen-agers and 1,040 younger

children participated in the Association's program last year.

Heads Business Meetings

As a leader in the Bahai, Miss Alexander who radiates a kind of inner calm, is called upon to preside at the business meetings, often to lead the discussion in the study groups, and to make decisions affecting the local group.

"Our family relationships are good," Miss Alexander remarked, referring to the cooperativeness of the group. "Outside problems are not allowed to disturb us."

Since the Bahai accept the fundamental principles of all religions, members do not have to give up the basic tenets of the faith in which they were born. There are Chinese and Jewish members as well as Negro in the national membership.

The religion which originated in Persia was introduced in America in the 1890's and has its American headquarters in Wilmette, Ill. Baha' u' llah the founder said, "Now is the time for the brotherhood of man," and it is the determination of each Bahai member to make this a reality.