

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

September 6, 2020

To the American Bahá'í community
for the Feast of 'Izzat

Dearly loved Friends,

Every report we receive of your creative and energetic responses to restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic brings us fresh delight. Likewise are we heartened by news reaching us of your wholehearted support of the movement now sweeping America for greater attention to the issue of racial justice. Taken together, these reports tell the story of the determined efforts of all three of its chief protagonists in this country—individuals, institutions, and community—to achieve the unifying aims of the Five Year Plan.

One such report came to us recently from an individual who, together with her husband and children, resides in a neighborhood in Texas. She began by describing their efforts, together with those of another Bahá'í family, to further the work of community building in the months before the onset of the pandemic:

We began a monthly “PJs & Prayers” children’s devotional on Saturday mornings. The five children between our two families—as well as three other Bahá'í children that live within a few miles of us—began this amazing children’s devotional activity. Each month, the eight children planned the program, picked a theme, pulled Writings on the theme, and picked a few YouTube videos. Parents were only in charge of breakfast and printing flyers to advertise. The kids passed out flyers, invited neighbors, and made posters for the front door. The first month, we had over 20 children attend, including children from five houses in the neighborhood! Our monthly activity became such an attraction . . . a highlight for the community. Kids and parents loved it. Who can say no to an invite from sweet children? It helped start conversations with new neighbors and [got] all of our children more involved in the process of community building. Our kids became as invested in our neighborhood as us.

We saw the importance not only of cultivating friendships and bonds with neighbors, but [of offering] social times and fun activities [that] bring people together at various comfort levels to open doors. . . .

Plans began for starting a junior youth group and children’s class. . . . We held a parent meeting in the middle of February 2020 and invited every neighbor to attend. We only had three parents show up, but all were ready to enroll their kids in the junior youth program. The first week of March, we held our first two classes at the same time in our home. We had four junior youth and five children attend. . . . Then, COVID happened.

At first, the restrictions had a demoralizing effect, but the families soon rallied:

Starting the first week of May, we resumed our junior youth group (on Zoom) and turned the children’s devotional into a children’s class. My 11-year-old son and I went on seven home visits to drop off “Breezes of Confirmation” and explain the purpose of the group to parents. It was very well received and now—because of COVID—some of the kids we spoke with in February that couldn’t attend because of scheduling conflicts were all of a sudden free because of “shelter in place.” Over the last month, since we passed out books, we have exploded to nine regular kids in our junior youth group and an average of 15–20 kids in our children’s class on Zoom.

In the last few months, COVID has brought our neighbors closer than ever. It's helped us truly get our junior youth and children's classes off the ground—all thanks to Zoom. It's helped open conversations and doors to over 10 new households in our community who are actively participating in core activities and asking how else they can get involved. From neighborhood movement that was once a "slow drip," our neighborhood now feels like the dam has been broken, and, literally daily, we are [being] flooded with more confirmations. We have families or members of a family that attend one core activity, love it, and ask what else they can do. They come to a devotional and then want their kids in a children's class. They have one in the junior youth program and then ask what we have for their younger siblings. The coherence is amazing. . . . We are seeing the fruits of our labors and the effects of building true friendship and bonds with neighbors. We are so thankful, so happy to serve, and so happy to share!

In the wake of the recent wave of racial unrest in the country, these friends also found a way to launch the neighborhood into a meaningful conversation on race unity:

I was chatting with my husband about ways to get involved to promote race unity. We came up with a Unity Walk in our neighborhood and I immediately called two other Moms that are new collaborators for us. Their kids are in our junior youth group and children's classes, respectively. They were all-in and very excited. We made flyers and passed them out to all [the] homes in our neighborhood. We invited the kids in our children's classes and junior youth group to [gather] in our driveway two evenings in a row to help make signs with paint and butcher paper. Our junior youth also painted T-shirts to wear to the Walk. A few days later, we met at the main entrance of our neighborhood and all of a sudden had 55 neighbors show up to walk the streets of our community! Fifty-five! It was incredible! Several neighbors that we had never met or seen before showed up that morning to rally around our call for unity and walk with us. . . . At the end of our Walk, several parents—all on their own—started chanting "U - N - I - T - Y, U - N - I - T - Y" over and over. Makes me tear up just remembering it! This 1.75-mile Walk further galvanized the unity and strength that is growing in our neighborhood. We can't wait to see what comes next!

Dear friends, such are the wondrous confirmations that reward the sincere, systematic efforts of believers to share the divine teachings with their friends and neighbors! Such examples abound wherever souls are engaged in the promotion of the Cause of God. As you gather together to celebrate this Feast, we hope that you take inspiration from this story, that you share your own victories in the arena of action, and that you lovingly encourage each other to scale new heights of service.

Our abiding love, gratitude, and prayers are with each and every one of you.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF
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Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary