



The Highway of Guidance

A Message from the Regional Bahá'í Council

Dear Friends,

This is the first issue of a new communication tool for our region. A while back we had announced a contest for giving a name to a regional newsletter. Many of the friends offered interesting and wonderful suggestions. What we discovered, however, is that MANY of them offered the same name- The Highway of Guidance- so it was decided to use that as it looked to be an overwhelming feeling in the region that this SHOULD be the name, so here it is...the first edition of *The Highway of Guidance* which we hope will become something that you find informative and inspiring, that you look forward to receiving each cycle.

This particular issue focuses largely on the devotional gatherings taking place in many places in the region because it was during this time period that the friends were dedicated to multiplying the number of devotionals and enhancing their devotional spirit. Space does not permit us to show you the entire panorama of how much the devotional culture of the Northeast has been affected by the efforts of the friends, but these stories will give you a taste of what has been happening in so many localities in the region.

If you have a story to share or news of what is going on in your area, please share it with the Regional Council at secretary@rbcne.usbnc.org so that your news can help us keep the region informed. A special thank you is extended to all those who sent stories and news for this edition! It was a joy to read each account and learn about what you are doing.

With loving regards,

Regional Baha'í Council of the Northeastern States

Stories about efforts in the Northeast: Please Note

Please note that names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved. Also, some of the pictures reflect events taking place before the pandemic, so you will see groups gathering without social distancing and masks. Please note that none of those events took place during the times of COVID restrictions.

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A Simple Act of Love

One of the Baha'is wrote the following message to the members of his cluster when the Regional Baha'i Council first announced the goal of establishing 999 new devotional gatherings in the region.

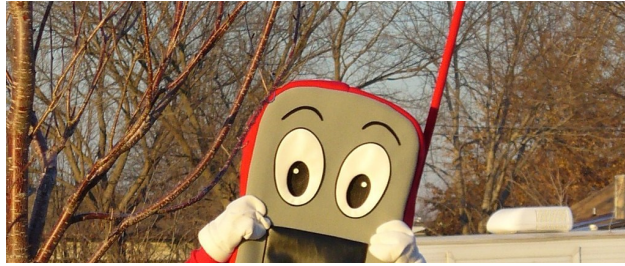


Image "Cell Phone" by KB35 is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

“Dear Friends, you have likely read the recent Feast message from the Regional Baha'i Council of the Northeastern States regarding devotionals and the goal for 999 new devotionals throughout the region. While many of us already host or participate in devotionals, with a prayer book, phone, and 10-15 minutes per month, we can start more devotionals!

Its message has inspired me to make a goal to start 5 new devotionals by December 31st that will be held once a month until at least the Day of the Covenant, 2021. If you would be willing to pray with me by phone once a month for 10-15 minutes, please let me know. I encourage you to reach out to others as well. Please join me in praying that the devotional goal of the Regional Baha'i Council of the Northeastern States is reached, surpassed as soon as possible.”

This believer kept in touch, reporting in on the progress of his plan. For example, on December 21, 2020, he reported having 11 telephone devotionals and working

on a few more. He commented that, “This is a good way to develop and strengthen spiritual bonds.” By January 4, 2021, he was up to 15 devotionals and said that he was “hoping to have a few more.” On January 7, he reported 17, with 5 of them being with friends of the Faith. Then, on March 24, he was at 22 with 8 friends of the Faith and still “working on a few more.”

Of tremendous significance was this message that accompanied his March 24 report:

“When I started this effort, I did not realize what a beneficial effect it would have on me as well as helping to win the goals of the Plans. I considered calling it "Got Phone?", a take off on the "Got milk" campaign, but I held my tongue, not wanting to turn others off. This phone campaign has led me, someone who is

reluctant to talk on the phone and initiate conversations on the Faith or prayer, to contact friends and relatives, and I am amazed at the positive, with no negative, responses. I have prayed since at least last fall to have a way to connect with members of the community of interest for possible new Reflections on the Life of the Spirit (Book 1) study circles, carefully chose those called, and have had various levels of discussion with those called as to why I am calling, from telling them I am fulfilling a goal to mostly asking to pray before we end the call. All from my home during a nationwide Corona-19 pandemic and with no extra cost!

“I am amazed at the positive, with no negative, responses.”

The other good news is that in addition to building bonds of friendship, I am confirmed and inspired to do more. Ya-Baha'u'l Abha!!!

I know my humble actions have inspired at least one other Baha'i and hope more will be inspired to replicate this simple act of love.”

Reflecting on Roxbury as a Spiritual Oasis- A Devotional Meeting

The following message was sent out by the host of a devotional meeting to those who participated. They included those who formerly served the Faith in Roxbury and those who are currently serving in the focus neighborhood there.

“Thank you, one and all, for joining me in Reflecting on Roxbury as a Spiritual Oasis at the devotional meeting last evening. How wonderful it was to see so many Roxbury veterans and enthusiasts alongside fresh recruits to the Roxbury experience.

To raise our voices beseeching the Almighty, calling on those precious souls in our families and friend circles, on the believers who embraced the Blessed Beauty, as well as those people who learned about the Cause, all of whom are seated in the Abha Paradise, to come to the aid of the community building efforts now underway thrilled my soul. Tears flow as I contemplate the potency of each moment of that memorable and tender experience. The jubilant stories of old, the voices reclaiming recollections of people and places that form a legacy of struggle, resilience, and faith, and the

promise of a future which continues that tradition were commendable.

The special effort in preparing the story of Sadie Oglesby by Patti Tomarelli added so much to the occasion, allowing us to focus on the spiritual legacy of Roxbury. And each prayer offered with humble conviction consecrated our hearts.

So, I truly thank you!

Attached below you will find the photo taken by Linda Meccouri. It was taken late, and many of you had already excused yourselves, but, nevertheless, it will be a keepsake from the evening.”



Photo courtesy of Linda Meccouri

Social Media to the Rescue in Central Jersey

When the pandemic forced everyone to shut down in March, two wonderful things came of our local children's class. We moved our children's class onto Zoom and opened it up to other friends around the country. Because half of the children were ready to start Grade 2, the "big kids" (2nd and 3rd graders) started having their Zoom calls on Sunday afternoons. The "little kids" (pre-school/ kindergarten) continued to have classes on Sunday mornings. With the digital format, friends from three different states (NJ, TX and AZ) have been able to participate together. The bigger kids have formed a deep bond to one another, and hopefully once travel resumes, they'll be able to meet someday in person.

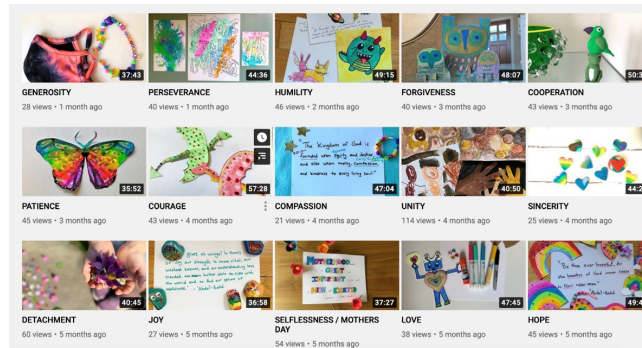
At the same time, I also moved our virtues-based pre-school children's class onto Instagram for a couple of months. I started holding Instagram LIVE classes on Sunday afternoons. It was wonderful to be able to interact

with children all over the world and to share ideas with others who may not have access to ongoing classes. The LIVE classes were wonderful, but because of time restrictions, I started to record the lessons and upload them to YouTube. In a couple of months, without reaching out or advertising, the Instagram followers have risen to over 900 and the YouTube

channel has 77 subscribers. I currently have 23 lessons recorded and posted to YouTube for parents to watch with their kids if they are looking for a virtues-based art class to do in their free time. We sing songs and prayers, read picture books based on the virtue of the week, have a discussion, and do a project. You can find the class on Instagram @BahaiVirtuesClass and on YouTube by searching "Bahai Virtues Class".

Lastly, we held our first social distanced and masked outdoor children's class this past Sunday. Each family brought a blanket to sit on, and we had individually-packaged snacks. The kids did a great job keeping their masks on, and it was wonderful to be with our friends in the chilly, but beautiful weather. We learned prayers, read stories, and painted

paper pumpkins which will be used for a community Halloween display.



@BahaiVirtuesClass on Instagram.

Collaborating with others always helps!

In reading the reality of our neighborhood in the Boston area, our core group of tutors realized that the neighborhood park serves as a central community space where young and old come together to play, exercise, and hang out. We started having our children's classes and junior youth groups in the park.

At first, by accident, all the groups happened on the same day. To see so many of the community engaged in similar activities was an encouragement to the teachers, animators, and participants alike. Those who were not facilitating an activity used that space to strengthen bonds of friendship and engage in meaningful conversations with the parents, children, and junior youth. As those participating in the various groups naturally came to the park daily after "zoom school," these daily park visits enabled the tutors and facilitators to socialize with their groups and build friendships with new individuals. This naturally led to new youth and children learning about the community building process. Adults in the park noticed the interactions and, after regular interactions of "hi, how are you," they were comfortable enough to

ask what was going on and to learn more about the institute activities.

These daily interactions and conversations in the park have led to stronger bonds of friendship, increased numbers in the children's classes and junior youth groups, a greater community awareness of the community building processes, and a group of parents and older siblings wanting to start a Book 1. A recent fruit from these daily park interactions was a Sunday picnic organized by a parent and a community member in conjunction with the institute activities. The day was warm and through several morning texts, they decided to contact all the teachers and animators to ask them to have their groups and then have a picnic. All the groups quickly mobilized, came to the park, had their groups and classes, and then all came together to enjoy a long session of kickball. It was such a beautiful sight to see youth, junior youth, and children playing together and seeing how the older kids took care of the younger kids. And, of course, everyone then

"These daily interactions and conversations in the park have led to stronger bonds of friendship"

enjoyed some delicious rice, beans, and cake.

Through concerted daily efforts to connect with the community, the circle of

friends who are involved in and know about the community building process is steadily growing.



Photo "Boston Park" by cho_kettie is licensed under CC BY 2.0

The Long Healing Prayer Can Travel

A Baha'i in the Rochester, NY cluster was at a meeting where a Baha'i from Maine told about having a devotional to say the Long Healing Prayer. At Feast, that person shared the information, and the community rallied around it. It wasn't the Assembly this time proposing a new idea. This came from consultation at Feast. The Assembly said it would take on the responsibility. Every morning at 9 am friends came together on Zoom to say the Long Healing Prayer. Friends who were not Baha'is were invited to attend, and then they, in turn, started to invite their friends.

In one person's family there was a health crisis for a member of the family. The family gathered together to say the Long Healing Prayer. A member of the family, not a Baha'i, liked it so much that she now regularly attends and also has started inviting her friends. Praying together every day has fostered fellowship and love to the point where they now check on each other to make sure they are fine. People are talking about this outside of the devotional with friends, presenting an opportunity for conversations outside the meeting. A friend of the Faith who attends regularly couldn't be present one day, so she said it herself. Recently, the Baha'i who suggested this started to ask questions about the meanings of some of the words used as attributes to add a new dimension to the devotional. The study of the prayer was a

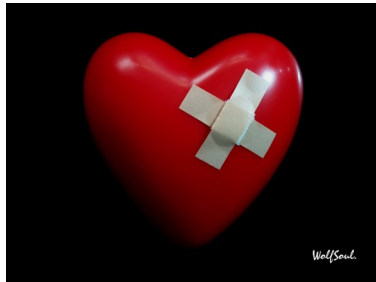


Photo "Healing." by WolfSoul is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

natural progression.

When others who work and couldn't attend the 9 am meeting heard of this, they started a new devotional as momentum built. These individuals felt left out and decided to have one of their own once a week in the evening.

Eastern Sector

In our eastern sector, our Auxiliary Board member helped start a devotional to say the Long Healing Prayer, but at one point had to step out. A member of the Area Teaching Committee who lives in the eastern sector now fills in for the technical assistance so it can continue. A person arose, and, with accompaniment, is now hosting her own devotional on Zoom.

Beyond our Community and Cluster

Finally, this is a case of the eastern part of the region having an impact far reaching to the western part of the region. I don't know if the friend from Maine is aware of how one comment, one momentary time of sharing, impacted a cluster so far away from his.

The Saga Continues

When asked, a woman agreed to read a prayer as a part of the devotions used to start the Cluster Reflection Meeting. However, when it came time to read, she was not on the call. Another person was asked to step in and say the prayer.

The original person asked to read called afterwards to explain. She had stopped by to check on a good friend who was not feeling well. There was plenty of time to be with her friend before the Zoom call. As she listened to her friend speaking so sadly, she had a decision to make. Should she excuse herself from a friend in need to say a prayer in a meeting or stay to help her friend feel better? The woman stayed and shared the Long Healing Prayer with her friend who liked it very much. Seeing her enthusiasm, the woman asked if her friend would like to join the daily 9 am Zoom call. The friend indicated she may indeed join. Whether the friend joins or not, here is another example of the power of the Long Healing Prayer.

A Heart Sings in New Hampshire

We had some good news in our community yesterday. We heard by email from a seeker whom we have not been able to reach since the pandemic started and our children's classes were suspended in May. Several of us had emailed and texted, but with no response. We wondered if she had relocated or moved on.

She and another mother had been in a Book 1 which I tutored while her young (and rambunctious) son participated in children's classes. We first met her through the Bicentenary events. Her email said that she is as enthusiastic to learn as ever, and that she and her son will be rejoining the classes in the spring.

You can imagine how my heart sang with this news!

"Ruhi Book 1 on life and death" by Baha'i Views / Flitzy Phoebe is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



Affecting Culture in a Nepali Family

A friend in Rochester, NY wrote that she had received picture from an eleven-year-old girl in the Nepali neighborhood where the friends have been building relationships with the local population. picture that she sent was from her family's devotional gathering. Her family has done children's class as a family for two years. As part of the cluster's expansion phase, the neighborhood team wanted to encourage families to hold family devotionals. The team knew that the girl's family likes to be creative, so they created a bag with flowers, different placemats, quotations from the Ruhi Grade 1 Book, colored card stock, different candles, and the framed quote 'If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illuminated and spiritual'. The team suggested to the families that all would share pictures of their devotionals with each other to encourage our

them to do prayers as a family once a week.

Next, this same young girl did a video of their devotions to share with the writer who said that it was so precious. In it, the girl was the leader. She had her dad read



"Children in Nepal" by World Bank Photo Collection is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

the quotation in the frame. Then she said that because so many people were sick with COVID or just sick, they should do the healing prayer. She got her notebook from children's class and led her family in an echo or call and repeat version of the prayer. Then she suggested that her family pick a virtue to work on for the month. She offered a few virtues and then suggested that they choose 'giving'. She asked them to share examples of giving that they had done.

What a wonderful example of how the children from the wider community are internalizing what they are learning in the children's classes that we are offering in neighborhoods throughout the region and how the devotional spirit, combined with service, is affecting the culture of family life!

On the Front Lines of COVID, Race, and Devotionals

As we share stories of devotionals in the region, I wanted to share a devotional that takes place several times a week at a hospital in Westchester by this group in the picture below. The doctor is a Baha'i, and the others are nurses and friends of the Faith. They get together and pray every morning. It is a beautiful and maybe rare story of how devotionals are helping those on the front lines of both the issues of race but also COVID at the same time as all the nurses are African American working in a hospital setting.



Book Club Calls Upon Souls of Departed

The Rochester, NY cluster reported that fires in many hearts - 12 to be exact - were enkindled during Monday night's first gathering of our cluster's Fires in Many Hearts Devotional Book Club. Ten or 11 communities were represented. We began with prayers for our efforts, including thoughts of souls who had contributed to the progress of the Faith in our area. The spirit of the early days of the Faith came to life during shared readings of the preface of the book. Next week, following the Celebration of the Expansion Phase, we will open with devotions and proceed with Chapter 1: "The Burning Log".



"burning log" by jo.dainty is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The Story of Simon

Simon's name and contact information arrived in the Seeker Response System on 13 July 2020. I sent him an email and called him by telephone, leaving a message when he didn't answer. Two weeks later, Simon returned my call. He expressed an eagerness to learn more about the Baha'i Faith and asked if we could meet at a local park. I said of course.

On August 3, we met at the park, and spent a couple of hours just getting to know each other. Simon has recently retired and wants to make good use of his time. He said that he has investigated various religions and feels that he needs to learn more about Baha'u'llah. After listening attentively to him, I felt that I could suggest that we study Book 1, Reflections on the Life of the Spirit, together. I showed him the book, mentioning that this was the first in a sequence of courses that aim at helping us to understand our spiritual reality and live a life of service to our fellow man. We agreed we would meet weekly at the park, because he does not use a computer and he was not yet proficient using his new smart phone. In other words, he wanted to engage in face-to-face conversations.

The following week, and every week thereafter, we have met at the park observing social distancing and wearing masks. As we began studying Book 1 Unit 1, I asked Simon if he would like to invite a family member or close friend to study with him. He said no, so I suggested that he might want to share one or two quotes from Unit 1 with a friend.

When we started Unit 2 about prayer, Simon said he did not wish to continue studying this book because there were too many "thees and thous". The language in the quotes reminded him of being forced to go to Bible school, which was a painful memory, and, because of that, he has rejected all forms of the Christian Faith. We decided to keep meeting weekly, but instead of using Book 1 as a basis of our conversations, we talk about subjects that he is interested in. We have talked about many different topics, including but not limited to: life after death, the power of prayer, Baha'u'llah's life and mission, the oneness of humankind, the power of good deeds, and living a life of service.

A few weeks went by, and Simon said he had met someone on an online dating system and that they were getting to know each other. He said that he had been telling her about the Baha'i Faith and would it be all right if she could join us at the park. Last week, I met his new girlfriend. We had a wonderful conversation--getting to know you kind of conversation--in which I learned that she is Christian and has served as a children's Bible class teacher. She expressed an interest in joining our conversations about the Baha'i Faith. We are looking forward to our next meeting, which will take place in a public library because the weather is turning cold and wet.

Are We Ever Too Old?

Our newest believer came into the Seeker Response System on October 27. Her first question was, "Is there an age restriction for being Baha'i? I'm really old." She is 95.

From the start, she had deep and thoughtful questions and comments. She has known of the Baha'i Faith for many years but recently heard of it again on a TED radio hour on the local public radio interviewing the architect of the Baha'i House of Worship in Chile. She grew up Jewish but in a secular household. Because of a natural interest in God, she then pursued a career as an investigative reporter of faith and religion for most of her life. She had given up on finding anything religious that was "all-inclusive" until she learned more about the Baha'i Faith.

While she has been pondering this step for some weeks, she realized on a devotional call last week that many of the people attending are not registered Baha'is. This impelled her to make this serious commitment: "If others see that I am committed to this religion, it may give them pause to evaluate their own commitments. I feel I have to express my truth before I pass on."



"Grandma The Clown works out 01 - Royal Hanneford Circus - Westchester NY - 2013-02-16" by Tim Evanson is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Finding Her Way Home

Here is a success story about a seeker that came through the Seeker Response line this year. When I first contacted her by phone, she told me that she was raised in a rural area of Wisconsin “in the middle of nowhere,” and the first time she ever heard about the Baha’i Faith was when she was in junior high school. She remembered a girl who was well-liked giving a presentation about her Faith.

Years later, when she graduated from college, while she was working as a nanny for a family in Illinois, she bumped into a neighbor who invited her to an event at her house. The description of the meeting sounded like a fireside.

She told me that although she was not raised in a religious family, she ended up attending different churches with her friends. She was never quite satisfied about her experience because she did not like the division.

Her husband asked her one day when she was sharing her disappointment, “What do you expect?” She said that she wanted unity and a

sense of coming together, to which he responded, “It doesn’t exist.”

One night, as they sat down to search for a movie to watch, she noticed the title “The Gate.” Out of curiosity, they decided to watch it, and at the end of it, her husband said, “You need to call and find out about this.”

Two weeks after that initial conversation that we had, she decided to enroll. Sever-

al times so far, she has announced that this was exactly what she was looking for. She has already, with the help of a great believer who has been accompanying her, completed Ruhi Book 1 and has just started Book 2. She attends regular devotional meetings and is taking a course through the Wilmette Institute.

I can’t help but think that every effort that one makes to teach the Faith, no matter how small it may be, contributes to the journey of a seeking soul. A person’s journey that eventually arrives at the shores of Baha’u’llah’s Revelation depends on many signposts along the way and sometimes along a life span. A junior youth talking to his classmates about Baha’i Faith, a neighbor holding a fireside and with warm hospitality inviting people in the neighborhood, the movies or books that are made available, the technology that Seeker Response is utilizing, and participation in the Institute process are all a part of a sacred plan to help sincere souls find their way home.



Photo "The House sits in the middle of nowhere, Wisconsin" by drewsaunders is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Finding Youth to Train in a Public High School

An older married couple made the decision to offer themselves as home-front pioneers to help win the goals of the current Plan, so they consulted with a Continental Counselor, their Regional Baha’i Council, and two Auxiliary Board members in their sub-region. After researching various goal clusters in their area, they moved to an economically declining city in a milestone 1 cluster about 3 hours away, which they had discovered through their research held a large percentage of minorities, refugees, and recent immigrants.

They enlisted the help of a resident Baha’i college student, and the three of them set out to befriend and attract local neighborhood youth in an area of public housing in a certain section of the city. They proceeded systematically – praying together, studying guidance together, memorizing conversation materials from the 2013 Youth Conferences (still good!) and other sources – praying, studying, consulting, acting, and reflecting together each day.

A resident Baha’i mother sometimes joined them on their daily outings as they cheerfully walked the selected area, talked to people on the street and in their front yards, knocked on doors, met youth, parents and children, engaged them in conversations about the needs of the neighborhood, and shared information about the various Baha’i-inspired training programs that were just now becoming available.

The team learned that most of the neighborhood youth attended the same large public high school, and their social relationships centered around their high school friends, so they began to consider how to approach the administrators of the school to see if they could more systematically offer their training programs to all 2,500 students. Two members of the team went to the school one afternoon and knocked on the door. By some sort of divine arrangement, a school counselor, Mr. K., was the only person there to greet them.

Mr. K. said he was interested in their program, so they showed the four-minute Toronto junior youth video, provided color brochures on the junior youth and children’s class programs, shared printed flyers about the next training camp, talked about the Baha’i-inspired but non-religious aspects of the programs, and discussed the benefits for socially struggling youth to learn to become “mentors” and community service volunteers. After a few more visits, he agreed to support their proposal to offer the training programs to students in his high school.

(continued on Page 8)

Finding Youth to Train in a Public High School

(continued from Page 7)

The team learned they would need to obtain official approval of the principal, so they called the principal to set up a meeting. The principal did not want to meet with them, but his office staff kindly asked for information and brochures to be sent to him. After repeated polite inquiries, the answer finally came back that the team would need to get permission from the district superintendent. The team then wrote an email to the superintendent requesting a meeting and conveying the same brochures, flyers, and related information.

After a few weeks and repeated polite inquiries to the superintendent's office, the principal was told that he did not need the superintendent's permission, so he asked for a face-to-face meeting where the team assured him that they did not need any school resources -- no reserved rooms, no staff, no funds, no materials, etc. After hearing this, he immediately approved the plan.

The team then worked with Counselor K, who had access to the school's internal reservation calendar, to set up its schedule of visits to the school which were planned around the four daily lunch periods. They discovered, to their comfort and reassurance, that other organizations, such as the US Army, regularly sent recruiters to promote their programs during lunch time, so their request was not that unusual.

The team visited the school about 10 times, for about 4 hours each time, in the middle of the day, timed to coincide with student lunch periods, and with an extra two to four volunteers each time. They learned that school staff were always concerned about security, so they designed their own lanyard ID cards (see photo) to hang around their necks to avoid being constantly challenged as relative strangers walking the hallways.

During each visit, one group set up a display table in one room of the cafeteria, with a large wall banner that said, "Youth Can Move the World", a table of brochures, flyers and sign-up sheets, a tri-fold cardboard-backed visual display, a TV monitor playing short video clips about the Toronto junior youth program, and bowls of candy (see photos). One friend in that group sat at the display table and 1-2 friends circulated among the tables to start conversations.

Discussions in the noisy cafeteria were often brief, but over 300 students eventually provided their contact information on written sign-up forms and expressed further interest. The cafeteria team then directed them to attend info sessions in the library during the next day's lunch period.

Another small group set up in an empty space in the back of the library with video playback monitor, flyers, brochures, flip charts with bullet points, a full hot lunch, cold soft drinks, chips and snacks, all provided to anyone who wanted to learn more. Two presenters took turns conveying more detailed information about the two paths of service training available – becoming a community service "mentor" (animator) for a group of middle school age kids or becoming a moral education teacher of primary

school kids. Here again, memorizing portions of the 2013 Youth Conference materials, praying and preparing together, and working as a united team proved indispensable.

The library sessions allowed students to ask in-depth questions and for the team to assess interest and compatibility with the community-service training programs. They had previous experience with some youth hearing rumors that they could go away to a fun-sounding "camp" without sufficient understanding of the necessary effort to complete the study and service components, so they were happy to have more time to fully explain the required commitment.

About 80 students attended these longer library presentations, and many provided more detailed contact information such as home address, parent's phone numbers, social media IDs, available times, etc. The team followed up, mostly through social media, and attracted some of the interested students to participate in its training programs.

They met an unexpected challenge though, because the high school served the entire city, so a significant portion of those interested lived outside the focused neighborhood and did not have adequate transportation. After further consultation, the team eventually decided to limit those entering the program to students who lived in and around the public housing area where the program was most active.



Forming habits of prayer and study of the Writings in Book 1, Roxbury, MA



"Ferdinand's Blue Store; Roxbury, Mass., HDR" by chuckthewriter is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Galvanized by the July 22nd message of the Universal House of Justice to the Baha'is of the United States, and the recent wave of seminars diving deeply into the newly updated text of Reflections on the Life of the Spirit (Book 1), a team of two tutors in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts set out to have conversations with neighbors. The goal of these conversations was two-fold, to learn more about the aspirations and challenges facing the local population and to introduce the community building activities--with a specific goal of beginning a new Book 1 study circle. These conversations took place over the course of a month during the pandemic period and consisted of the team of tutors walking in the neighborhood, speaking to neighbors sitting out on the stoop, meeting friends in the park or on individual home visits, all done with the appropriate safety measures. These conversations led to numerous confirmations, the Creative Word being shared, a greater understanding of the neighborhood, and a new Book 1 study circle beginning. The study circle meets weekly outdoors in person, with each participant spaced out and wearing masks.

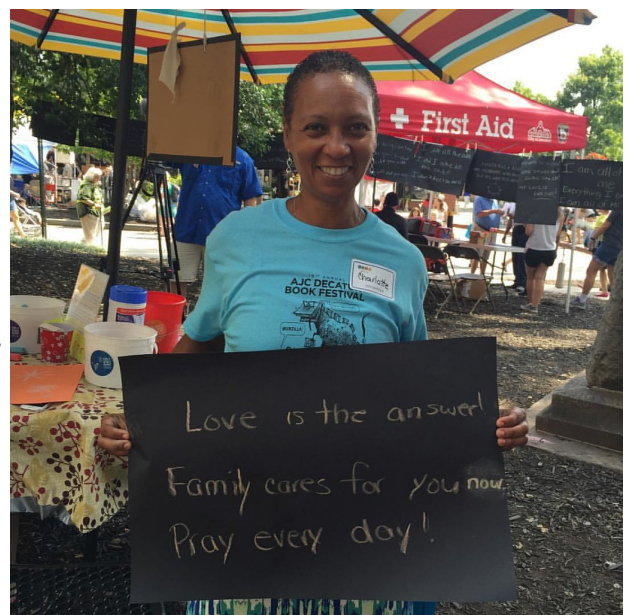
This study circle is still in progress and currently in the second unit on prayer. Throughout the study, the tutors have leaned upon insights from the Book 1 seminar, with a special emphasis on establishing a deep connection among the participants with the Creative Word, and credit much of their success to the thoughtful preparation they had as tutors in the weeks before the study circle began. The tutors noted that this emphasis of giving appropriate time to understanding the explicit meaning of the Creative Word allowed participants to see how concepts built on one another and enabled them to draw on previous concepts and quotations as they were striving to understand new sections of the material.

One particular question that arose was how the participants are formalizing the habit of studying the Writings in the morning and evening and what the tutors can do to encourage this habit. The group consulted together on this question and decided to coordinate devotional gatherings for the study circle participants on weekday mornings before the workday began and to text each other Writings from Book 1 that they were reflecting on in the mornings. Another insight was to begin each study circle with a reflection on the Writings that the participants were particularly moved by during the week, whether from Book 1 or other passages, and all were freely encouraged to share the thoughts on their minds and hearts. On the occasions when some study circle participants could not meet, the tutors quickly pivoted to creating a devotional space for those who could still meet. These sessions outside of the study of Book 1 were often based on current issues, and the tutors have reflected on how one-on-one attention and study of prayers and Writings had a marked effect on the participants and their spirit. It was during one of these sessions where prayers were shared in relation to the topic of racial justice that

one of the participants exclaimed, "Can you imagine what the world would be like if we all prayed every day?"

The participants have come to love the Creative Word over the course of the study and are naturally incorporating the habit of not only praying but sharing prayers and Writings with other friends and family members. The tutors attribute this not to something they said, but to the methodology of study, and, in particular, the one-on-one attention given to the participants. At one point in the study circle another participant was moved to tears as she read the Creative Word, and, unprompted, exclaimed "I can tell these Words are different from other words in the world. They make me feel content, happy, and uplift my soul." The tutors are thrilled at the possibilities moving forward: that this study circle could form during the pandemic period, that the deep preparation for the study as a result of the Book 1 seminar was highly effective, and that more and more friends in our region will be joining this movement of new Book 1's, infusing our region with new learning and experiences.

"Love is the answer-family cares for you now-pray every day #dbf2015 #HaikuDBF @outofhandATL @ghm575 @DecaturBookFestival #READdifferent #Atlanta #haiku" by ghm575 is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 .



Storytime Tonight and Beyond!

Friends in the Upper Valley VT/NH cluster reported participating in a wonderfully inspiring and enkindling series of gatherings described below. Although this program is no longer taking place as its duration was only from August through October, perhaps this idea will be useful to others who might replicate it or use it as a springboard to a similar but new approach.



"Kindness is the greatest of all balms.... Rumi" by Nick Kenrick.. is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

The following gives background information on why the gatherings were initiated:

I grew to know, love, admire, and be inspired by Razi Milani as my father-in-law, my children's grandfather. He was a gentle, knowledgeable, wise soul, an eagerly obedient lover of Shoghi Effendi, a tested and steadfast servant of Baha'u'llah, a fearless Baha'i pioneer to many lands from Persia to Yemen to Brazil with his mother Djamileh Khanum, and later home front pioneering with his young family in Brazil. Razi loved studying and sharing our Baha'i history as well as mystical poetry including Rumi's Masnavi. He was a gifted story-teller who wove inspiring, meaningful stories during his daily interactions and was an enthusiastic tutor of The Twin Manifestations (Ruhi Book 4). Razi inspired generations and stirred my soul with his love of the Cause by recounting, recording, and sharing stories from the lives of the maidservants and servants of Baha'u'llah, our spiritual ancestors, who strove during their earthly days through selfless, consecrated, heroic choices and acts to contrib-

ute to a radical, unparalleled in the annals of humankind, spiritual enterprise: humanity's passage to maturity, the transformation of its character, flourishing into its intrinsic Oneness. On October 9th, 2010, Razi's soul took flight to the Abha Kingdom. This October 9th, 2020, marks 10 years since Razi's passing to the next world.

The following describes the gatherings:

Dear co-journeers on the path towards the full expression and manifestation of our Oneness!

You are warmly welcome to join, in Razi's honor and memory, a 15-minute story-telling program. The program will start tonight, Sunday, August 9th, 2020 through Friday, October 9, 2020, every evening from 9:00 pm EDT to 9:15 pm EDT.

The Zoom link for "Razi's Time" will be used to create a daily virtual space. All are invited and welcome to PHONE IN or ZOOM IN to listen to a narrated story for no more than 15 minutes. The purpose of creating "Razi's Time" is to foster an open space to come together, listen, and

cultivate sharing heart-stirring, inspiring stories that nourish our souls and move us to deeper understanding and desire to connect with the Spirit of this Matchless Day, propelling us to bestir ourselves towards infinitesimal acts as well as ever-greater exertion towards Herculean and sustaining efforts, on the path of reflecting in our individual and collective lives, the splendors of Baha'u'llah's Revelation!

PROGRAM: The proposed up to 15-minute daily evening story-telling series will be as follows:

1. OPENING: Brief music/silence interlude
2. A narration of a story
3. Brief music/silence interlude
4. CLOSING: A short prayer, mystical quote, or poem

5. NOTE: The way this story-telling program was originally and intentionally designed is so that anyone can PHONE IN/ ZOOM, relax, and let one's soul enjoy the 15-minute program with no need to be with one's personal video on (a screen-share slide will be up available for view). This way you can be sitting on your sofa, quietly laying in a hammock, looking up at the stars, enjoying an evening stroll, or tucked in bed. Simply enjoy the time, let the story touch and inspire your heart, preparing you for a new day after a restorative, reenergizing evening sleep while your soul soars to spiritual worlds and conferences with other souls, perhaps one of the souls whose story you just heard about!

With Perseverance, We Can Accomplish Great Things

I just wanted to share with you the story of an African American Baha'i in Buffalo and his desire and perseverance to start a devotional gathering during our expansion phase.

He overcame several challenges such as not having internet or a smartphone, not having much knowledge of technology (he is in his 80's), and health issues.

He decided to invest and buy a phone that will allow him to download the Zoom app and open a free account for himself. He received basic training from one of the Baha'is in the community about how to use the technology.

He started his first Zoom devotional last Wednesday. A few friends, including his two daughters who were raised Baha'is and live in another state, joined the devotional that he organized. It was such an inspiring and spiritually uplifting gathering!



Study Circle for Dudes

A virtual study circle for men-only was launched in mid-December by a tutor who had attended the second wave of training seminars on the revised version of Book 1. The racially diverse group comprises ten men, mostly from Eliot, ME and Portsmouth, NH and ranging in age from 15 to 75. Eight are Bahá'is and two are friends of the Faith. The group took three weeks and scores of email communications to form, with 18 potential participants declining due to scheduling issues or because they were too busy or just not interested. The idea of a single-gender group was suggested by some women engaged in Bahá'í activities, who were concerned that their husbands and "significant others" were not showing the same interest in the Teachings. At its opening session, the group decided to hold some physically-distanced outdoor activities to get to know each other better.



"Saturday study circle & junior youth group 060" by Baha'i Views / Flitzzy Phoebe is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The Art of Expanding a Nucleus

The Rochester, NY cluster, like many others, is learning about how effective the work of a nucleus can be in bringing about growth in the cluster. One of the friends there reported the following:

"The nucleus around a certain arts devotional continues its practice of holding a Zoom meeting each morning to pray for the participants, to consult on strategies for expansion, and to reflect on each week's gathering. As the members gained experience, insights into the nature of an expanding nucleus surfaced. They have come to envision the nucleus as a social dynamic that pivots on fellowship, love, and the Word of God. One expression of this is that personal visits were made to a number of participants during the expansion phase. An invitation was extended, outside of the devotional gathering, to one of the more receptive souls to other Baha'í activities, and he attended all of them. The nucleus is ever mindful of selecting the appropriate time to invite the participants to a Book 1 study circle.

Invitations are made easy due to the format and the theme of the arts devotional (renamed the Arts and Spirit Forum to remove any potential barriers). The devotional has two parts. It begins with the group sharing inspirational

writings from any source. Since there are Baha'is in attendance, Baha'u'llah's Words are usually shared. The second part of the gathering addresses the theme, which is the exploration of the spiritual mysteries of art.

This theme attracts both artists and lovers of art. It was discovered that Zoom meetings introduced a dynamic that gathering at the Baha'í Center did not. By connecting online, travel was no longer a deterrent. More important, online communication presented an opportunity for a deeper interaction among the participants by enabling the sharing of their own work or the work of other artists that was close to their hearts. This dynamic of sharing and discussing forged an unexpected intimacy between participants. After a while, the invitation process came naturally to everyone by simply sharing their experience. Soon, friends of the Faith began inviting their friends and participants began visiting each other. The nucleus was expanding!"

Moved to Tears

Rita is a friend of the Faith. One of the believers in her cluster reported this story which she found to be particularly sweet.

"If there was ever a day when we needed to hear a child praying, that would be it!!"

Rita grew up without any spiritual background but learned of the Faith ten years ago and is in a Book 1 study circle. She and her husband now live in our cluster (where she grew up), and they are expecting their third child soon. The oldest, a daughter, is about 3-1/2!! We sent Rita a small children's prayer book in late December and told her how parents often read bedtime prayers with their children. Nothing more was said, but she began immediately!

In fact, at last week's study circle ... that terrible Wednesday in DC! Rita said that she had been reading the prayers to her daughter who loves them all. We always start the study circle with devotions. At the end, Rita took out the book and began to read, "O God, guide me..." And then we heard her daughter's little voice, "O God, guide me..." They went through the whole prayer. We were all in tears. If there was ever a day when we needed to hear a child praying, that would be it!!



"a child's prayer" by Nancy Big Crow is licensed under CC BY 2.0



Was she calling the wrong number?

– Irene has been in touch with the seeker in this story and was asked if this story could be shared with you all. Just imagine Irene with her joyful and radiant spirit telling this story:

Irene was calling the doctor office 4 times in one day and each time left a voice message. After the fourth message, someone named Julio called and said, “You know I have been receiving your voice messages and your messages sound serious. I wanted to tell you that you are not calling the doctor’s office but calling my home.”

Irene replied and laughed, and Julio said that he was glad that she was laughing because it sounded serious! He asked Irene where she was from and Irene told him that she was from Kenya and will be going back. “Oh” Julio replied. “What takes you back to Kenya?”

Irene replied, “I am a Bahai and I am going back to serve my community.”

“Oh, what is Baha’i?” Julio asked. So Irene shared with him about the Bahai Faith and Julio was interested and wanted to know more and asked, “Can you give me one on one info?”

Irene told him that she will send him something when she gets back home. She got home and fell asleep.

She woke up in the middle of the night and remembered that she had to reply to Julio, so she tried to find inspiration in her tired state and went online and sent a quote and the link for bahai.org.

Julio went onto bahai.org, came into the Seeker Response System, and requested to learn more and to receive material that the National Office sends to seekers. He was so happy to receive the materials and called Irene and asked deeper questions about Baha’u’llah. They have developed a friendship just through the phone and never met. Irene explained how she would be happy to accompany him in the same way she was lovingly accompanied when she heard about the Baha’i Faith and would like to offer that to him.



“Wrong Number by TOER” by wiredforlego is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

The Long and Thorny Road

Baha’is in sub-region 2 (western NY and western PA) reported that Eric Dozier met with white and Persian Bahá’is in their sub-region in August. He spoke of their spiritual destiny to promote the cause of racial justice and unity as clearly described in the Writings and shared stories of how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá unequivocally demonstrated how our actions should be.

An email had been sent earlier to the Rochester cluster, inviting the Bahá’is who represent the Pupil of the Eye (Black and Brown Bahá’is) to meet with Eric at a special gathering. This invitation was later extended in September to the rest of the sub-region - 11 clusters from Plattsburgh to Pittsburgh.

The series of talks was part of the Great American Race Unity Road Trip, which Eric and his wife Genevieve created late last year. Engaging in honest and heartfelt conversations about rac-

Realization of Nobility

I have developed an interest in working with youth from challenging backgrounds within the city of Rochester, NY. In many cases, there are youth who might be characterized as being on the school to prison pipeline or disadvantaged from a conventional social-economic perspective. Perhaps this is because I can relate to their feeling of being discounted by society and not expected to amount to much – marginalized and sidelined. Our society is one that seems to tell youth that only the top fraction of a percent will get into ‘good’ schools or become professional athletes and attain a level of material success. Others may seek economic security through high risk activities because they see no pragmatic path forward. There is a vast under realization of human potential in our society.

One of my most rewarding experiences has been in working with disadvantaged youth in training them to become animators in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. I have had sessions with youth who have come with ankle bracelets and under supervision who could readily be perceived as not being “receptive” or of a temperament that required “too much effort.” There are unique challenges with urban American youth but also extremely rich potential. However, I have been amazed at the nobility of youth from these backgrounds which becomes manifested when they are given two things – the realization that it is within their grasp to become agents of social change in their communities - along with the training to do so. Fortunately, both are provided through the study of Books 1 and 5. Helping youth to get in touch with their true spiritual nature and to tap into the power of prayer and reading and reflecting on the Writings is the first step in their realization of their true humanity. When challenged to become a mentor for younger youth, they light up over the opportunity to be of service. The hardest kids find themselves in this process and get in touch with their deep reservoirs of noble intention which has been waiting to be called upon. Youth from many backgrounds share this in common – the desire to play a leading role in bettering the world. I can’t help but to feel that the opportunity that the program offers them to get in touch with their true noble nature helps them to set up a pattern of living where their positive affirmations of their value and worth are found through inner reflection and outer service with their junior youth.

There is no doubt of the potentialities of the program to transform the fortunes of our society by tapping into the deep reservoirs of noble intention that lies within the souls of our youth.

ism, its effects, and effective ways we can combat it in our lives, Eric relies on guidance from our Writings and his deep love of this Faith and throws in a splash of his unique and wonderful music.

The friends added that they were so grateful to Eric and Genevieve for their tireless, devoted, and loving service in helping them continue to strive to catalyze the transformation of ourselves, our Bahá’i communities, and our neighborhoods, walking that “long and thorny road” together.



Resources can be Anywhere

Last May, several Baha'is from the Southeast Massachusetts cluster started meeting on Friday evenings to deepen on racial justice. When the National Spiritual Assembly published the statement "Forging a Path to Racial Justice," we reviewed this momentous document at one of these meetings and began consulting about how to disseminate this powerful message to the public, recognizing that the statement was not addressed to the Baha'is but was intended for a much wider audience. In consultation with the nearby Local Spiritual Assembly, we were advised to work within our respective local communities as opposed to working together in a regional effort.

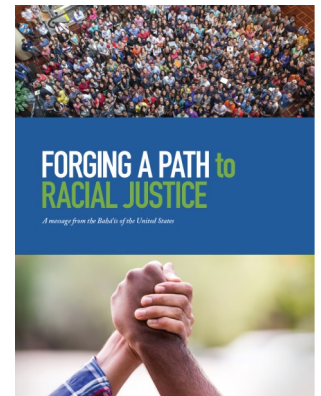
Some communities were successful in getting the statement published in its entirety in the local newspapers, but in Mashpee we were not successful in that effort. However, the three of us in the Mashpee group consulted on what our next steps would be and realized that we had an established resource that we had

been working with for the last three years. In advance of the Bicentenary of Baha'u'llah, we had joined the local access TV station, Mashpee TV, for a nominal fee of \$50 annually. Our membership allowed us to borrow the sound and audio equipment and gave us a few free lessons as well! In the last few years, we had hosted Baha'i activities at the station and had developed a good working relationship with Bill Nay, the Director.

When we approached Bill with the idea of taping a public reading of the National Assembly's statement, he was immediately receptive. Reading the statement was easy – the three of us each read 3-4 paragraphs from the teleprompter, but it was Bill's creativity that brought the statement to life. The images and music he selected to accompany the reading captured the spirit of the statement perfectly. The video has had 113 views so far, including the person who commented, "I didn't even know there was a Baha'i community here! I'm a Christian,

and I've been meaning to look into it."

Some Bahai's in the nearby town of Bourne were discussing a similar effort with their local TV station, and they have agreed that they can air the Mashpee recording which has been uploaded to YouTube (with contact info edited). In addition to the statement, we have developed some 15-minute devotional programs, three of which have already aired and three are still in production. These can be shared with anyone.



Some People Declare Online



One of the Seeker Response coordinators in the Northeast reported the following:

"Roberto called me back shortly after I left him a message. He had submitted an online application for enrollment in the Faith, and I had called him to be able to ascertain that he understood what it means to enroll in the Faith, following the same guidelines given to us by Shoghi Effendi for enrolling new believers no matter how they declare.

Roberto has been attracted to and studying the Baha'i Faith for many years, beginning when he was a doctoral student in California where his mentor was a Baha'i. Roberto helped his mentor prepare classes and do research for conferences. He has also been reading Baha'i prayers and

"studying the text" for all those years. Roberto is currently a professor of theology in New York City and is an ordained minister of the "Disciples of Christ." However, he told me that he plans to relinquish that position due to his desire to enroll as a Baha'i. We discussed this step, which he understands well, and has been contemplating for some time. His professorship position will not be affected by leaving his ministry. He understands this is a "big step" but wants to make the stand for humanity in this im-

"He understands this is a 'big step' but wants to make the stand for humanity"

portant time when the needs of humanity are so great. During our call, we discussed the three Central Figures, Baha'u'llah's Covenant, and obedience to the laws and institutions of the Faith, all of which he understands. Based on this conversation, I am verifying Roberto's enrollment. I will also connect him with the Baha'is near him, whom he has not yet met."

Talking About Talking

Some Thoughts and Strategies for Elevating Conversations

Notes gleaned from Cluster Discussion in Rhode Island

Always listen to the other person carefully. We should do twice as much listening as we do talking (two ears, one mouth).

Try to identify something the other person cares about from what they are saying, even if most of their conversation is about trivial topics.

Ask questions that cannot be answered with yes or no. For example, "How do you think peace can be established?" instead of, "Do you think peace can be established?" "Why do you think people should wear masks?" instead of, "Do you think people should wear masks?" Your goal is to get people thinking more deeply, and short answer questions rarely accomplish that. Ask how or why questions vs yes or no questions.

Pick up on fears expressed and ask, "What do you think could be done about that?"

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Talking About Talking

(continued from Page 13)

Be on the lookout for expressed uncertainties, doubts, or even certainties. Ask, "Why do you feel that way?"

Express interest in what people seem passionate about. Ask them to expand on what they have said. It will give you insight into what aspects of the Faith might attract them. People will be more interested in talking with you if they perceive you are interested in them.

Constantly be looking for places where a Baha'i idea can be introduced naturally as part of the conversation.

Be attentive to any questions asked. Before just giving an answer, consider asking, "What made you ask that question?" Look for the underlying, unstated questions, concerns, or fears.

Always give yourself some time, even just a few seconds, to carefully consider what might be appropriate to say in any given situation before speaking.

Look on every human being as a potential seeker, whether they appear that way to you or not.

Assume that everyone has deep concerns about something, and try to find out what those concerns are. Even a direct question like, "What do you really care about?" can lead to elevated conversations.

Listen, listen, listen!!!!

Importance of prayer and preparing ourselves

Inviting others to arise to serve

Friendship must come first

Bringing topics to the level of principle, the need for moral authority

Learn to listen - how full is the glass before you put anything in it?

Sharing about the Baha'i Faith needs to come from a natural place.

Kindness! People are desperate for a different kind of world

Necessity of following-up, consistency

How to be inclusive? We should strive to embrace all.

Strategies for elevating above the mundane and the trivial

Emulate 'Abdu'l-Baha in the question-asking piece.

Many are experiencing a traumatic response to the situation. We can strive to change the tone.

For different people it takes different periods of time.

How to have conversations when we have differing viewpoints?

Really understanding where they are coming from

'Abdu'l-Baha wrote lots of letters. He corresponded with all with love.

Find the common ground.

We have many more opportunities to elevate conversations than we think there are.



Many actions are coming out of fear.

Have something to give to others.

Special Ideas (bahairesources.com) website has many types of "teaching cards" that can be purchased.

Not everything needs to turn into an activity.

Trust that everyone has deep concerns.

People just need to unload; we can help them to do that.

All, subconsciously or consciously, are searching for God.

Seekers vs explorers

Question: How to awaken to spirituality?

We can accompany people to be true seekers.

We must keep the door open and encourage search, but also speak directly to the Baha'i Faith being a framework for addressing the injustice of the world today.

It is better to not overwhelm people and just open the door.

From Book 9: concept of social discourse

Rochester Area Cluster: Reflections on the Expansion Phase

Any recounting of the activities of the Rochester (NY) Area cluster's expansion phase must begin with the Cluster Reflection Meeting. It was there that goals were set for new hosts of devotionals, for participation of new friends of the Faith to attend devotional meetings, and the multiplication of elevated conversations. Spaces (breakouts) were made for nuclei and communities to consult on their plans for the expansion phase. As a result, many nuclei adopted common strategies: to gather each day for prayers, to increase their personal connections with those attending their activities, and to make lists of new people to invite.

The expansion phase began with a first of its kind kick-off Zoom gathering where plans and strategies were shared. The cluster decided to dedicate the expansion phase to Doris and Willard McKay, early Baha'i teachers from the area. That led to the formation of a weekly book club featuring the book *Fire in Many Hearts* written by Doris McKay describing teaching efforts meaningful to many families in the Rochester cluster. The book club begins with an inspiring devotional.

The intensity produced by the daily pattern of prayer, consultation, action, and reflection forged stronger bonds between the members of the nuclei. New insights into the dynamics of an expanding nucleus were gained. For example, the creation a regular space for consultation generates myriad lines of action.

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Rochester Area Cluster

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One of the neighborhood nuclei formed two new junior youth groups from the older members of children's classes.

A total of six new devotionals were started during the expansion phase.

Then came another first. At the conclusion of the expansion phase a celebration was held. It was a time of sharing victories and presenting an opportunity for the friends throughout the cluster to see each other's faces one more time and to hear personal accounts of their efforts.

Planning by the cluster agencies began for the consolidation phase stimulated by the study of Book 10.3, Section 6.



Littleton, NH



Everyone Has a Part to Play

Littleton, NH

We are delighted to hear that there are blossoming Baha'i activities in Littleton, NH!

After many years of saying the teaching prayer for the Northeastern States, receptive souls are coming forth to learn about the Revelation of Baha'u'llah! This summer, the friends there made a concentrated effort to say the Tablet of Ahmad daily as well.

In September, one of the believers invited several people whom she had told about the Faith years ago at a Baha'i fireside. Three seekers came and sat out on the deck. An introduction about the principles of the Baha'i Faith was presented, followed by a showing of "Light to the World." The message resonated in their hearts, and they all looked forward to coming to learn more.

In October, a second fireside took place, and two more people came, for a total of five seekers. A speaker from Twin Mountain gave a unique and interesting presentation about unity from a world history perspective with a theme of progressive revelation. Following the talk, we answered questions and had discussions about various aspects of the Faith.

Two of the seekers have little children, and they asked if we had any education classes for children. We told them that in the Baha'i Faith the education of children was a priority, and we would love to start children's classes! We had a planning meeting for children's classes on Oct 13th. We started with a prayer and music and several Baha'i quotes about children's education. We also presented the Baha'i process of consultation, and we asked the seekers if we could conduct the meeting according to the Baha'i consultation process and all agreed.

Undoubtedly, the "hosts of heaven" were our assistants and helpers! The consultative process for planning children's classes flowed like water. One of the seekers had experience as a pre-school teacher and eagerly volunteered to help, and everyone was invested to assist in some way with these classes. One of the mothers has a farm business in Littleton and has adequate inside and outside space; she offered to host the classes.

We are overjoyed to report that we had our first children's class with four pre-school children on Oct. 19th! The class agenda included: A welcome song and prayer; lesson/discussion about the virtue of patience; an activity using a Christmas cactus plant, (the children rooted cuttings from the mother plants and will practice patience watching the roots grow, and then they will be planted), an art activity, and learning songs with guitar and marching playing little noise makers, and an ending prayer. There were 4 students, a teenage helper, two parents, and 3 teachers (two were Baha'is). In addition, the two mothers have spoken to other mothers and more are interested in participating with the children's classes.

A Magnetic Home

I hope this story is helpful to others who read it and feel inspired. My wife and I have been blessed by the spirit we hope to engender in our home.

This story is about my cousin, Ella, who lives two houses from us. Ella has always been interested in matters that touch deep in the heart. She has had her struggles in this sometimes challenging world. When we moved here from another state and started our devotions, she attended them on a regular basis and continued to visit other religious services, sometimes in the same day or weekend. As time passed, she felt the soul stirring, nourishing power of the prayers we all said. She not only brought her own prayers from other faiths, as she knew they were all welcome at our devotionals but wanted to comment on the prayers of the Bab, Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. She would often say, "Can you please make a copy of that prayer or quote?" We, of course, gave her a prayer book and some other books of the Writings so she could study on her own. These devotionals became a portal to the beginning of the series of Ruhi books. She studied Books 1, 2 and is into Book 4 on the Twin Manifestations. Ella is open with just about anyone she speaks to about looking into the Baha'i Faith if they have not heard of it. She writes a weekly article for a newspaper in our area. She has shared with her readers the effect of the devotionals on her and the benefit they can have in the face of the tests we are now encountering. She has often come to our home for evening prayers as she says, "I cannot face all the negative news without some spiritual grounding and safety I find in these words we read and meditate upon." She has said our home feels like a magnet for others who have attended with whom she has become friends. It has been a place which encourages her to act in the spirit of the words Baha'u'llah has revealed to us.

Providing community and spaces to talk

A person in the Rochester cluster shared some stories:


“One woman has come to every session and eagerly participates. She has shared that this space means so much to her because it provides her with a community where she can talk about spiritual matters. Her son took his life, and we spent the last session discussing the topic of life after death. She said it was a hard topic to discuss, but she feels it is these difficulties that have made her stronger. She is such a positive force and loves to share things she is reading about that are related.”

“I visited two different friends last week, both African-American women, as the weather was great, and it was perfect to deepen our friendship. One is my neighbor in this complex and one lives a few miles away. Ahead of time, I suggested we offer prayers for our neighborhood and our country. I read the prayer for humanity in both settings. One friend sang a song and offered a personal prayer. The other wasn't sure what I meant, but when we talked about it, she thought we could continue.”

*O Thou kind
Lord! Thou hast
created all
humanity from
the same
stock. Thou hast
decreed that all
shall belong to
the same
household. In
Thy Holy Presence
they are all Thy
servants, and all
mankind are
sheltered
beneath Thy
Tabernacle; all
have gathered
together at Thy
Table of Bounty;
all are illumined
through the light
of Thy
Providence.*



If We Take a Step, Opportunities Result

The photo here is of an advertisement that appeared in Albany, NY in the *Sunday Times Union* on July 26th in Albany, NY. The ad was a reprint of the letter sent by the National Spiritual Assembly on forging a path to racial justice. The Albany Spiritual Assembly had shared that the cost of the ad would be \$1,800 and let friends know how they could contribute to the cost if they wished to do so. As of this writing, the Albany Assembly had received contributions totaling \$1,846.19 toward the cost of the ad. 

In November, the Assembly wrote to report that The Faith and Values Section of the *Times Union* featured a story about the Baha'i Faith, this time a reprint from one that appeared in a newspaper from Austin, TX. Perhaps significantly, the newspaper staff took it upon themselves to include this story. The friends in Albany are hopeful that awareness of Baha'u'llah's teachings is spreading throughout their community and beyond.



O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home.

~ 'Abdu'l-Bahá



**Regional Bahá'í Council
of the Northeastern States**

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Members of the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northeastern States, 2020

Top to bottom; left to right:

Top row: Marie McNair, Vickie Nizin, Joel Nizin, Carey Corea

Middle row: Tabassom Anvari, Nader Anvari, Nina Dini

Bottom row: Frank Robinson, Michael Penn



Stories about efforts in the Northeast: Please Note

Please note that names have been changed to protect the identity of those involved.

Also, some of the pictures reflect events taking place before the pandemic, so you will see groups gathering without social distancing and masks. Please note that none of those events took place during the times of COVID restrictions.



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