

BUILDING ON THE BICENTENARY



A review of the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb and a preview of endeavours to come.



A joyous performance during a national celebration of the Birth of the Báb at Parliament Buildings on 22 October.

Reaching out

The bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was observed in Aotearoa and throughout the world on 29 October 2019, along with activities before and afterwards as part of the celebrations.

The period we are in is dedicated to community-building through meaningful conversations, through activities that weave together worship and service, and through learning to better work together in building a peaceful global society. In essence, it is an occasion for honouring the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh by acting on Their Vision.

The special report on these pages gives a glimpse of bicentenary activities throughout New Zealand in many different forms, and looks forward to even greater momentum developing as a result. The Bahá'í community and friends of the Faith are learning from the experience gained during this bicentenary year and preparing to apply their learning with increasing commitment and creativity in the years ahead.

*What else will
rescue the world
but the efforts of
countless souls who
each make the
welfare of humanity
their principal, their
dominating concern?*

— Universal House of
Justice, 'To all who have
come to honour the
Herald of a new Dawn',
October 2019

Hope blooms

“We urge everyone who worked to bring about this success to hasten now and gather again to reflect and to consult, and to determine how best to apply, in each unique setting, all that your experience has taught you: how an expanding nucleus of friends can cultivate a growing pattern of activity; how children can advance to the next grade and junior youth to the succeeding text, further developing their moral and spiritual qualities; how institute courses can develop much-needed skills and capacities; how the path of service can widen to accommodate large numbers; how real hope for the betterment of society can be demonstrated in action; and how all of God’s peoples can be enabled to take inspiration from His new Revelation, and how souls who are receptive can be invited to identify with the Cause of the Abhá Beauty.”

— Universal House of Justice, 8 November 2019

Communities “patterned on Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings ... affirm the need for a global consciousness, arising from a shared concern for the well-being of humankind, and they count all the peoples of the earth as spiritual brothers and sisters.”

— Universal House of Justice, October 2019



Photo: Children and junior youth in Naenae take the lead in a tree-planting event to mark the bicentenary.

Power of initiative

Seeds of future initiatives are seen in the wide variety of efforts made by Bahá’í communities and individuals to prepare for the bicentenary. Their efforts demonstrate themes of building capacity, becoming more systematic, and reaching out more widely to others. Reports received give examples of what can be done:

- Initiating or expanding participation in community-building activities. Participants are then able to take part in inviting others to Holy Day celebrations and the like.
- Helping the children in a children’s class to be able to speak about the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.
- Visiting homes of friends and neighbours.
- Holding gatherings for local youth and junior youth.
- Bringing friends together to collaborate on creating arts.
- Holding weekly devotions with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours.
- Studying Ruhi Book 4 to learn stories about the lives of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.
- Engaging in study of the courses of the training institute.

Brilliant diversity

Local and neighbourhood celebrations for the bicentenary have been both large and small, including a wonderfully diverse array of activities such as film screenings, presentations about the Faith and its Founders, visual and performing arts, sharing treats with workmates, special meals and morning teas, a donation of books to a library, group study, devotional meetings, and many others. A sample showcases the sheer variety of things that can be done.

Neighbourhood. A Bahá'í family collaborated with a neighbourhood family who are friends of the Faith to hire a hall for a celebration. Participants joined a series of creative activity stations on themes from the life of the Báb. Youth played a key role in this event.

Home. One home gathering of family and friends included a 7-8 minute presentation on the Báb, a 30 minute devotional programme and 2 hours of social time. All participants have attended Bahá'í events before and are likely to do so again.

Youth. A youth barbecue had the aim of building a space of conversation. Aid from the host family's parents made it possible. The initiative was a big help for youth who need peer relationships or are investigating the Faith.

Presentation. A believer gave a talk about the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh to the Mt Herbert Friendship Society. The presentation concluded with images of the Shrine of the Báb. The society's secretary afterwards circulated a summary of the talk to members.

Multicultural. Large multicultural events with participation from the wider community happened in Waitaki, Timaru, and Canterbury University.

Marae. Kororipo Pa welcomed 18 people who walked up in the dark on 29 October to celebrate the Birth of the Báb at dawn. Roma Marae in Ahipara hosted a day-long hui of learning and celebration.

Workplace. A year ago, looking ahead to the bicentenary, an individual obtained space at work for monthly sessions of meaningful conversations based on the Bahá'í Writings.

University. Members of a University Bahá'í Club invited fellow students to a seminar on "The State of the World".

School. A family held a morning tea for all staff at their children's school, speaking about the role of teachers, and the Bahá'í view of education. Bahá'í children's classes at the school are to continue.

Radio. Two 24-minute radio programmes about the bicentenary were broadcast on an access radio station, the first was mainly about the story of the Báb, and the second about the Immerse art exhibition. Both programmes were broadcast twice.

Service. A junior youth group gave cookies to the nurses of a hospital children's ward and sang songs and prayers about unity.



Hui at Roma Marae in Ahipara.



Meal shared by Samoan study circle participants.



Bicentenary celebration in Dunedin.



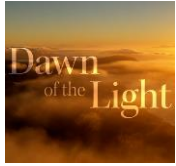
Waitaki junior youth after a planning session.



Neighbourhood celebration in Waitakere.

‘Dawn of the Light’

The celebrations served as an opportunity to reflect on the current state of world affairs, as well as the impact that the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith are having on diverse populations.



The film *Dawn of the Light* (bahai.org/dawn-of-the-light/), demonstrates the implications of some of the core Bahá’í teachings in addressing contemporary forms of oppression in diverse settings around the world.

Profound changes in the structures of society are, of course, essential to lasting peace, e.g. the role of women, of young people, of education, and our economic models—all require re-examination. But individuals need not wait for structural change before contributing to peace. Each person has the potential to become an active agent of social change and to contribute to building a peaceful society.

The message of love depicted in the film is really what gives meaning to all of our lives, and is applicable to all of us, no matter our background.

Expressions in art

The Universal House of Justice, in its letter to the Bahá’ís of the World on 8 November 2019, wrote: “The bicentenary elicited artistic works of beauty and feeling, creative expressions of devotion too numerous and diverse to describe.” No less so than in other parts of the world, this was true in New Zealand.

Visual arts, music, drama, and poetry all sprang forth from the minds of adults, youth, junior youth and children inspired by the bicentenary, illustrating stories from the history of the Faith and reflecting on the Bahá’í Teachings. These expressions took a number of cultural and linguistic forms, reflecting the diversity of the community.

Online sharing

New Zealand friends made creative use of the internet to share their bicentenary messages and plans, by way of social media postings, Youtube videos, and so forth. Some links:

- Video report on event at Parliament: <https://bit.ly/350HCwH>
- Bicentenary Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/34THLSI>
- Bahá’í Waiata Project: <https://bit.ly/32Kv8b8>
- Immerse art exhibition: <http://immerse.nz/>
- Song by Waipa friends: <https://bit.ly/34XkFKZ>
- Song by G Hindin-Miller, S Taefi & others: <https://bit.ly/2NF7VCV>



Artist Dame Robin White speaking at the national bicentenary event in Parliament Buildings.



Napier art exhibition poster.



Bahá’í Waiata Project online video.



Christchurch art and craft exhibition, initiated by a neighbourhood group.



Artistic collaboration in South Waikato.