

Waitaki

Feedback from participants

Participants offered the following comments.

- I walked through the door and straightaway it felt so different. I could feel the love and atmosphere was just so different from what I'm used to. We felt so welcomed and throughout the day our children were happy, enjoyed being around our children, and not being told off when they touch the food. They could have something to eat when they wanted to and it didn't matter how much.
- Through all the programmes of the day I got to know everyone, and I felt like I had known everyone for years. I was invited by one of the Bahá'í friends from Dunedin to come and stay with them if I need a place when I am in Dunedin. That's totally something new for someone offering his home to me as a person we just met at the conference.
- Watching the videos opened my eyes. I thought that looking after my family was enough. But watching the video made me realise I am so wrong. I need to help my family and reach out and help the community too.
- Knowing you are Bahá'ís and looking from outside we said to ourselves, poor you, you guys follow blindly. But as of today, I know this is what's needed for this world. Not what we assumed from the outside.
- Everything was just beautiful from food to programmes. I Love it.
- When is the next Conference, please invite me again.
- I enjoyed the conference and can you let me know of the next one.
- I enjoyed talking to each person and asking them questions regarding the conferences. I want to follow up and catch up about what is the next plan.
- My father back then gave his business the name UNITY. We as children were very unhappy about it. Why not choose a name related to the family or us but he chooses unity? As of today, I know his vision and what he thinks. He is not a Bahá'í. Now I get the meaning and more.

Other observations

- A lot of meaningful conversations are going around the community because of the conference being advertised in the newspaper and the story published in the local newspaper and on social media afterwards.
- Those who did not make it to the conference got back to the Bahá'í friends with an apology for not attending due to Covid and mentioned they read about the conference either in the newspaper or saw it on social media.
- They were so focused
- Aware that what they are doing now needs to upgrade.
- The Assembly utilised resources used that were successful in other conferences such as videos edited by the Queenstown community. This was after attending their conference and identifying there are areas that are similar and we can use their resources for our Conference.

Successful aspects of the programme

- Small groups and all the discussions on all themes. The friends took lots of notes and asked to take the material home to go over again with their partners.
- Learning new songs related to the themes and doing it together with everyone lights up the atmosphere.
- Small group activities, creating similes, poems, or rap songs were enjoyed by everyone. One participant shared that it's new to him and he just realised he has a voice, and he can easily share his ideas and what he thinks and can contribute to the conversation.

- Watching short video clips from around the world opened more areas for the participants to think about what is happening around the world and how they can help the community.
- The Facilitators. The Assembly invited facilitators from Queenstown, Dunedin, and Christchurch. The enthusiasm and the way these facilitators led, brought happiness, love, and joy to everyone. No one got bored. The materials were not so long as to make the participants bored and tired easily

Diversity of participants

- Ethnicity: There were Tongan, Tuvaluan, and Pākeha.
- Age Group: From Children 3 years old up to adults aged 60 and over
- The Mayor of the Waitaki District opened the conference for us. He was at the Conference from 9.00 am until morning tea at 10:30 am, when he had to leave due to other commitments.
- A representative from the Oamaru Pacific Island Group attended.
- A Church deacon attended.

Venue, logistics and catering

At our conference, we decorated it with love and happiness. The setup of the Pembroke School Hall was carried out with a lot of help from our Bahá'í children, junior youth, and youth with the theme "we are one" by using different coloured balloons on the walls and on every table. The centrepieces were lights and artificial flower displays to symbolise the oneness of mankind. It was a tremendous effort by the young people who rose to the occasion, staying up until 1.00 a.m. to support elders who had just recovered from Covid.

The junior youth and some of the adults created two 9-pointed stars at the front of the hall to symbolise the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh with lights. Tapa and mats were also used for decoration to highlight the different ethnicities of the community.

The school hall is very convenient for everyone as it's in town, safe as well for young children and it has a high fence, not only that but there is a playground available for all the children. The children's class teachers utilised them when children wanted play time during breaks. This school was a bonus for us because of the relationship the Bahá'í community has been building with the school for almost 20 years. The school allows us to use the hall during the weekend and on occasions. Decorating two special spaces for the children was admired by parents with young children. One was inside the hall but at the back for when the children want to relax and or when feeling cold. Their other space was a marquee tent outside for outdoor activities where the children could be loud, creative and have fun with their children's class teachers.

The Local Spiritual Assembly's taking care of the logistics of the conference made everything smooth sailing throughout the day. As for food, the Assembly together with the community made a huge change to the way they usually host such gatherings. They usually prepare the food themselves. As the Local Assembly prepared for the conference they identified that they spend a lot of time on the preparation of food and not enough time taking part in the programme and mingling with the friends that are invited to such gatherings. Therefore, the Assembly decided to bring in catered food and allow the friends to fully participate in the conference. It was a success. Everyone agreed it worked and was a wonderful idea.

It was amazing to see how this plan set the beginning of the conference for Waitaki. Everyone loved the morning tea — lots of choices and it was so delicious! After the morning tea, the food was covered and left at the table for anyone who came late to help themselves before they joined the programme. Not only that but it was available for the children to come and help themselves anytime as it was a cold day.

For morning tea, the extended family of one Bahá'í family kindly prepared the morning tea, which was beautiful and set the atmosphere of the day.

Lunch: Subway was our caterer for lunch. It was yummy and plenty for everyone.

Light Supper: The Assembly bought easy stuff to add to all the leftover food. Plenty. Everyone enjoyed themselves and took a plate home too for their families.

Details

Date: 11 June 2022

The Waitaki Community's official date for its conference was the 4 June 2022. Unfortunately, due to some of the local Bahá'í families coming down with Covid, it had to be delayed until 11 June, with special permission from the National Assembly.

Venue: Pembroke School Hall.

The principal of the school has a long-term relationship with the Local Spiritual Assembly of Waitaki

The school hall is used by the community for its devotions every Sunday and other activities when needed, and for this service the Local Assembly contributes regular donations to the school. A relationship of mutual appreciation and trust has built up between the school and the Bahá'í community.

Note: Reports received from the various conferences have been edited for clarity and conciseness.