



How Religious Communities Locally Responded to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Name of Religious Tradition: Baha'i Faith

Location: Leamington.

Place of Worship: People's houses, or now online

During the Pandemic, the main changes to our ways of worshipping were:

1. Everything has moved onto Zoom meetings.
2. We meet much more frequently.
3. We meet for a lot more informal and unscripted prayer meetings, which we call "devotionals"
4. Whereas before we often had members of the community singing or playing at our services, while this still happens, it is augmented by recorded songs and music by Baha'i sourced from the Internet such as [Bahai Blogs](#)
5. We have started to meet with people from all over the world, and conversely attend services elsewhere ourselves such as in the Baha'i Houses of Worship such as in [Delhi, India](#)
6. We have also begun to participate more frequently jointly with other Faiths in interfaith devotionals purely for the pandemic.
7. Our main service, the 19-Day Feast, is now just to a prayer meeting, followed by discussion with the social part truncated.
8. We try to invite a much wider range of people to everything, not necessarily just from the local area
9. A lot of older and infirm people whom we had to coax out, now that we have trained them in Zoom, are able to attend, in some cases more so than when they had to travel
10. We have a list of people whom we phone constantly to see that they are OK.
11. Many of our community are involved with local initiatives such as working with refugees and The Samaritans.

Coventry SACRE & Warwickshire SACRE
February 2021

Written by Rocky Grove, Baha'i SACRE Member 7 Co-Chair for Warwickshire, on behalf of the Baha'i community in Leamington Spa

During the Pandemic, the ways in which our religious community reached out to the local community were:

- Zoom
- Telephone
- WhatsApp
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Common activities
- Email

This article appeared in a local bulletin:

By **MARTIN BECKETT**

With its emphasis on the oneness of God, religion and mankind, the Baha'i world has always been outward looking and seeking to build a future society based upon our principles such as the equality of men and women, the need for global co-operation and the harmony of religion and science.

We now share our Holy Days and community meetings with our adjoining communities and help to prepare programmes. Instead of having an open house event in which to invite our friends, we offer programmes of inspirational readings, music, stories and prayers to lift the spirit and allow our friends to invite us into their homes through Zoom.

We linked in with the O Z Whitehead fireside Sunday discussions. These were named after a famous American actor - he played the young lad in the original film of The Grapes of Wrath - who lived in Dublin for many years until his death had discussion evenings around his fireside.

Range of speakers

Co-ordinated from Oxfordshire by Dr. Stephen Vickers, a former Solihull resident, it has slowly increased its range and we regularly engage with well over 200 participants from countries as far apart as Greenland in the north to South Africa, Brazil and Australia in the Southern hemisphere.

Our range of speakers have been equally far-flung and diverse from a world-renown environmentalist, a former member of the International Criminal Court to Dr. Semira Manaseki-Holland, a medical lecturer and specialist paediatrician from Solihull attached to Birmingham University.

Ironically, it is the unifying effect of Covid 19 that has brought us together.

In Balsall Common we are fortunate in having good quality broadband so our

There was a time when the small Baha'i community in Balsall Common used to meet in each other's houses for prayers and study sessions. MARTIN BECKETT says they used to invite friends to their meetings but then along came Covid19. They had to re-think their future direction sandwiched between larger Baha'i communities in Solihull town, Coventry and Mid-Warwickshire. They found that they were all computer literate which meant that Zoom came into play and they invited their friends again to join them on their spiritual journey.

It's virtually zooming in on meetings

There are many platforms available for virtual communication on the internet but Zoom has proved most adaptable. For smaller groups for up to an hour it is free to download and use. For groups of over 100 and for longer time spans it is possible to open an account.

Alternatively there is still Skype, WhatsApp works with smartphones, FaceTime is good for devices that run on Apple and I have free regular video meets with friends in the USA on it. There is also Teams for Microsoft users and Google Duo for smartphones and tablets.

Wishing to join

Eventually the virus will be under control but it is likely that our relationship with the natural world will have changed permanently. We will become more cautious in our dealings with animals and their habitats and more conscious of how our activities affect the planet's ecosystems and its climate.

For those wishing to join our Sunday talks and discussions we meet from 7.45 pm using the Zoom ID 847 1712 0511 and password OZWZF.

To join in with and hopefully contribute to our local Zoom activities please e-mail us for details - bahaisofbalsallcommon@martinjane9.plus.com

Baha'i area children's classes are now on line and our five national summer schools moved from being residential to virtual, enabling participants to join in from the comfort of their own homes.

Many platforms

We have missed the usual pattern of our year but we have adapted. For those who have passed away, there have been memorial meetings held virtually. We do not have a priesthood so our elected institutions and individuals need to work together in a spirit of co-operation using the consultative process to arrive at decisions.



Before Covid-19 struck, the Balsall Common Baha'i group with invited guests and friends plant a commemorative tree

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