

# Income Disparity In a Time of Global Crisis

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As we watch the world around us slowly coming to a halt, we see many employers asking their workforce to stay home and telecommute. At Stanford, where my husband works, all non-essential staff are to stay home until further notice. At the university, classes have moved from in-person to online.

This all may seem wonderful and proactive, and I see many people online relishing working in their pajamas. However, once again, in time of calamity, the disparity of rich versus poor seems magnified. In these times, I think of what Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith wrote in His book *The Hidden Words*:

**O SON OF BEING! Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants.**

This passage has always struck a chord with me. It is so simple, so pure, and yet so powerfully worded. We see humanity being tested by the material world and we see how we have lost sight of our humility — and sometimes even our humanity. In this time of global crisis, people around the world are in a state of panic and anxiety. In Italy, the entire country has entered a self-quarantine until April 3. In the United States, the president himself was exposed to COVID-19 at the CPAC conference, in a show that no one, regardless of wealth or stature, is safe.

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These are trying times for all the citizens of the world. However, the ones we should be most worried about are those of us with less financial and job security. Those of us that do not have the choice to telecommute to work at grocery stores and gas stations. Those of us that cannot

afford to have our employers shut down for two weeks. My local Bay Area school district canceled all field trips and gatherings. While some students and parents are lamenting the cancellation of school play performances and even prom, I'm thinking of the parents who scraped and saved to allow their children to experience these events — and the ones who must be nervous that school closures may occur. They are probably worried about how they will stay home and earn a paycheck at the same time.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 American Community Survey, 13.1% of Americans live in poverty. That's approximately 44 million men, women, and children in this country. Once again, the most vulnerable in our global society will suffer the most from this pandemic. The Baha'i writings tell us:

**They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honor destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My Life! There is no honor, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honor. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*)**

If this global crisis has taught us anything is that we are all connected. This is a testing time for all of humanity, and we can no longer deny that when something happens to our brethren across the globe, we must all react in a spirit of unity and togetherness to succeed. We are forced now to realize that our singular actions can impact the global community. From this crisis we have seen humanity tap into its lower nature and fight amongst each other for bare essentials. We have seen governments blaming each other and some even choosing denial and non-action, believing that somehow our man-made borders will protect us.

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In this trying time, we have, however, seen victories as well. We have seen neighbors checking in on each other, going out shopping for those in high-risk categories. We have seen some employers showing compassion by allowing flexibility, even for essential employees. We are seeing governments making decisions for the well-being of all its citizens. As of this writing Italy has closed its borders until April 3, and Israel will quarantine all visitors into the country for 14 days.

If this pandemic has yet to hit its peak, as some experts predict, then, to save those that may be affected, we may be forced as one human family to make decisions that will impact the entire globe. As Baha'u'llah wrote more than a century ago, **“It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”**