



## The Fifth Bi-Annual Meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, Oxford (UK), March 2012

On the final day of the meeting, leaders were asked to reflect on what had been accomplished. They were asked to consider three questions:

- 1. What does Interreligious Friendship mean to you?***
- 2. How do you practise Interreligious Friendship?***
- 3. What messages and practices of Interreligious Friendship can you take back from this meeting to your community?***

Some chose to respond independently to each question while others integrated their answers.

### Alessandra Gerolin

---



**1)** Interreligious friendship for me means to share the basic needs of the human hearth (the desire for beauty, truth, good) with people coming from different faiths. Sharing the deepest aspects of our humanity allows us to do a part of our path towards the destiny together (this means also that any good aspect of another tradition becomes part of my path without losing my identity). This is very different from sharing opinions and it doesn't mean only to share common values (also if it's very important). It means to share our lives in a companionship which involves all the aspects of our humanity and not just a "religious concern" if the latter is intended in an abstract way. I don't believe that the interfaith dialogue can happen through a mere "dialogue", if it wants to be really transformative personal relationships and engagement are crucial.

**2)** This dialogue can happen on a personal level and at the level of communities: I think we have to cultivate personal encounters and through these encounters going to the depth of our faith. Interfaith dialogue can help us to deepen our identity, to notice its originality, and to rediscover it. From my personal point of view I have friends coming from different faith traditions, and I always tell them why Christianity has struck me so much, because I've tested in my life that the contemporaneity of Christ within the Church is the answer to the profound needs of my hearth. In doing so people feel free to share their own experience, they feel free to be "religious" as well (whereas contemporary society often tend to "privatize" their beliefs) and a profound friendship with some of them has started. As member of the movement Communion and Liberation every year the Rimini Meeting represents one the most important occasion in Italy to come in touch with people from different faiths, with whom we establish a relationship which goes on throughout the year. More practices need to be developed on a local level, in particular with muslim immigrants through works of charity, which can be able to overcome fears and stereotypes.



## **The Fifth Bi-Annual Meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, Oxford (UK), March 2012**

**3)** To my community I bring back the importance of establishing an interfaith discussion: till few years ago in Italy it was almost impossible to come across somebody who was not a Roman Catholic. During the last decade the situation has changed a lot because of the massive migrations. I think we have to start to create interreligious dialogue with other religious communities inviting some of them to share matters of common concern. The Church is doing a lot in this direction, but also lay people have to involve themselves in groups of dialogue etc., also creating places of dialogue where people can share a common spaces, have meals together etc. I think that in order to develop the interreligious dialogue in Italy people have to know more about their own faith and about other faiths: to listen to people who talk about their own faith is not enough for developing an authentic “critical” view, which is necessary for not reducing the other to an “alter ego”. I think we should create interreligious working groups who work for the common good starting from matters of primary concern such as social justice, human rights etc.

During these days I’ve also realized how my view of the other faiths has become wider: a lot of stereotypes have been overcome in meeting real people who tell their experiences from a practical perspective rather than from a purely doctrinal perspective (even if the knowledge of the “doctrine” is also crucial). I think that the knowledge of the differences is crucial in order to start to work together on matters of primary concern, probably starting from a local level (in Italy for example we have the problem of immigrants, who migrate to Italy and as they cannot find a job some of them start being associated with criminal groups etc. so one topic could be related to the way in which local religious communities can help the immigrants in order to prevent them from being involved with crime, for example helping them to find a job etc) up to big social and civic issues.