



## 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.

### Bishop Frank Griswold

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Interreligious friendship exposes me to an expansive and ever-expanding encounter with the Divine, mediated by my friend who has been shaped and formed by a different symbol system and perhaps sacred texts and rituals. This exposure, however, is above all an exposure to a person who renders concrete and specific the faith tradition he or she possesses. It is the person with whom I sense a relationship who makes me eager to explore the realm of mystery within which he or she lives and moves and from which they draw their sense of being.

Here I must say that I believe that all of humanity is bonded together by the force and power of love, a love which is united with the force and power of creation. Deep spiritual friendship occurs when all that occludes this binding force of love is removed. This means removing barriers of fear and suspicion and ego investment in one's own tradition as the superior or only way. Love can have its own way and surprise us by unleashing elements of affections which break down barriers and leave us undefended and receptive in the face of another whose way of naming and responding to the transcendent is very different from our own.

Occasions such as this gathering create the possibility to encounter one another in this deep and personal. It is the conversations around the edges – meals, walks, tea – fuelled by the formal sessions that allow us to open ourselves trustfully to particular 'others' to whom we are drawn. In that way, we can ask and be asked questions and share perspectives that deepen our encounter with the force that unites us which some will name as 'God'.

All this is a process whereby the mind descends into the heart and it is at this level – understood as the core and centre of personhood – that true insight, revelation and transformation occur. For this to happen, spiritual practice prepares the way. It attunes the ear of the heart to hear the voice of the Divine in the tradition and embodied reality of the other.

Since much of my life is given over to teaching ways of spirituality and giving retreats, I plan, with new enthusiasm and urgency to share what I have learnt and set out above.