



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 Lennart Koskinen



1. Interreligious friendship is for me a deep source of understanding more about myself as a person, my own faith and tradition – but also about the Other I meet. ‘Meeting’ is the key word, not only socializing and having a good time together.

Meeting always takes place on an individual level, even if it happens within a social framework. Meeting is being present, not only physically but with all your senses, (even the sixth), your intuition, empathy and curiosity. It is listening but also sharing. It goes beyond all dogmatic, theoretic and practical implications. It is very rare but it has occurred during this meeting, as well during the previous I have attended.

2. It is easy (relatively) in this gathering, but much harder in your own environment. I try to exercise the skills I have learned, to listen beyond words when I read an article in media, a book from an unknown author or when seeing an interview on the TV. There is always more than what is shown.

Practically, I intend to attend and support the numerous groups of interfaith dialogue locally in my country, trying to share my experiences where I can, as well as writing some articles to promote a fruitful debate.

The most important area where a wide interfaith effort can make a change is about environmental global warming. No force is as strong as a common spiritual understanding and willingness to take our responsibility for the survival of our common world. Religious leaders, scholars and lay people who are united can together make a difference!



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3. Action starts in the mind. That my Buddhist friends have taught me. I will carry back the vision of one fundamental Force, Power, Deity beyond the multitude of gods and theological systems. The common name beyond all names is Love. It/ he/ she perpetrates everything existing and is interpreted in numerous ways. Love has taken, and is taking, shape through holy men and women, holy places, symbols, rituals and words. But we can never grasp all of them. That's why our own tradition is the best guide for us to find the path of our own lives. I am Christian, and for me Jesus Christ is the utmost authority and role-model, but more and more I realize and respect other revelations. No tradition contains the whole truth; that's why we should learn more from each other. That's why interreligious meetings are needed on all levels to promote human and spiritual growth, foster peace and understanding between nations, peoples and religions.

That is the vision I will carry with me and work for.