

## **The work of the Elijah Interfaith Institute**

*The Revd Heather Smith writes:*

Undeterred by the restrictions of coronavirus, Jerusalem-based Elijah Interfaith Institute Director Alon Goshen-Gottstein decided to hold this year's meeting of its Board of World Religious Leaders on Zoom. I was privileged to be invited to facilitate one of the small groups that formed the core of the 3-day meeting.

Just over 50 leaders attended to discuss the effects of coronavirus on their leadership, faith communities and their own spirituality. Each leader also gave a theological justification for the practice of interfaith dialogue. These teachings will be used to re-launch the Elijah Friendship Declaration.

My small group included:

- Swami Rameshwarananda Giri, President of the Ramakrishna Mission in Europe
- Imam Plemon el Amin, Imam of the Atlanta Masjid Al-Islam
- Bishop Lennart Koskinen, former Bishop of Visby, Sweden
- Venerable Jinwol Lee, Buddhist Monk and Zen Master from Korea
- Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp from the Netherlands
- Bishop Domenico Sorrentino, Bishop of Assisi
- Shri Shirvatsa Goswami, Vaishnava scholar from India
- Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland

The small village of Bromham, where I live, seemed suddenly part of the world stage!

All the leaders found justification for interfaith dialogue in our common humanity and in the unity of God in the different ways these ideas are expressed in their own doctrines.

Leading during a pandemic brought many stories, but leadership in these times has proved a challenge for all. The limitations it imposed, making it impossible to be physically among the people, were a common cause of pain.

Both Rabbi Soetendorp and Bishop Domenico found comfort and strength in song. As if to underline the benefit, at the very end of the final plenary, Bishop Domenico sang for us in Italian – The Canticle of the Sun. It made a beautiful and profound ending.

<https://elijah-interfaith.org/about-elijah/the-elijah-board-of-world-religious-leaders>

<https://elijah-interfaith.org/addressing-the-world/coronaspection>