

VISIT OF CARDINAL TO SIKH COMMUNITY, EDINBURGH

On Sunday Cardinal O'Brien paid a visit to the Sikh Community in Edinburgh in their Gurdwara in Leith.

He was welcomed by both the President, Mr Sukhdev Singh and the Vice-President, Mr Ragbir Singh and initially brought into the prayer hall where he had the opportunity of addressing the large congregation.

Speaking to all those assembled, the Cardinal said:

“Speaking to you here I realise that many of you and your families have been longer in Scotland than myself – I came here as a young boy from Ireland shortly after the Second World War.

My relationship with members of the Sikh Community has been the most friendly – realising even that when you needed a temple for a place of worship, you purchased this present building when it had been a church of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

On my journeys throughout the world, as well as for meetings here in Scotland, I have encountered a great desire of members of the world's great faiths to live in unity and harmony. I think of my meetings with leaders of the Muslim Community in Darfur, described as one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. And I think of my very recent visit to Myanmar/Burma where the population of 50 million is 90% Buddhist, with Catholic Christians being just a small percentage of the population.

Everywhere, whether here at home in Scotland, or in places where there is great suffering in different parts of the world, there is that desire to live and act at peace and unity with one another.

Consequently, it is all the more surprising then when a member of one faith community speaks against another faith community. That happened just very recently when a certain Bishop Williamson spoke with regard to the Jewish Community and the Holocaust, denying or reducing the significance of the Holocaust. This upset very many members of our Catholic Christian Community – both lay members as well as priest, bishops, cardinals and even the Pope.

In a recent declaration from the Vatican on 4 February 2009, just a few days ago, it is stated: “The positions of Bishop Williamson on the Holocaust are absolutely unacceptable and firmly rejected by the Pope. The Pope himself stated this on 28 January 2009 when referring to this terrible genocide, re-stated his full and undoubted solidarity with the Jewish peoples, receivers of the First Covenant, and he affirmed that the memory of such terrible genocide must move humanity to reflect on the unpredictable power of evil when it conquers the human heart”. He also indicated that Bishop Williamson, in order to be able to function as a bishop in the Catholic Church, must in an absolute, unequivocal and public way, distance himself from his present position on the Holocaust, which was unknown to the Pope when the excommunication on him was lifted. Consequently, I emphasise to you all that our journey together in peace and harmony must never be hindered by the actions or words of one man not speaking in any representative way at all of the faith to which he says he subscribes.

Following on his address, the Cardinal met very many members of the Sikh Community leaving the prayer hall and joined the community in the Gurdwara Langar Hall for shared food and a community gathering.