

**Greetings at the
Greek- Iranian Interfaith Webinar
“Religion and Health”**

His Eminence Metropolitan Ignatius of Demetrias (Volos, Greece)

Dear President of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue and Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Dear Cultural Advisor of the Cultural Center of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Dear Professors,

Dear all,

We are living in a world increasingly marked by the spread of violence and the phenomenon of religious radicalism of any kind. We become everyday witnesses of crimes committed in the name of God or religion, while the internet and media coverage of such crimes increases the horror, spreading in parallel within contemporary societies the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty, as well as the hostility against the other, the different. Wherever you turn your sight, you see either wars religious in nature or crimes and massacres committed in the name of religion.

Undoubtedly, what we urgently need, is to reconsider new models of peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation, new ways of communication, mutual acquaintance and acceptance between the various religious communities. Methods of overcoming the fanaticism, the intolerance and the engaging in vicious cycles of violence and retaliation. The wider geographical area, to which we belong, constitutes a true school of such a kind of overcoming.

It was the crisis of COVID-19 that provided us a good opportunity for expressing our deep commitment to go beyond such phenomena of religious fanaticism so as to closely work together for the relief of our people. As far as Eastern Orthodoxy is concerned it has to be reminded that we are true Christians only to the extent to which we remain faithful to the evangelical commandment of unconditionally love and solidarity to all the people,

regardless their race, gender, religion, social status and origin, a love which includes even our enemies.

The need for a further, broader and deeper ecumenical dialogue among religious traditions is absolutely critical, since it has been proven by history, in the past and more recently, that religions as an important spiritual and cultural factor can contribute through various means to the cooperation between the people against common threats, like the coronavirus pandemic and the like that put at risk the very existence of humanity. Unless the religious leaders realize their responsibility to fight for their people's life and health, our world as we know it today will disappear as a result of our incapacity to offer a true meaning to the fragmented world.

This pre - conference webinar is a meeting taking place within the framework of the dialogue between the two religious traditions, a timely event indeed with the aim to address the critical topic of the relation between "Religion and Health". All these years, the Volos Academy for Theological Studies of which I have the privilege to preside, has facilitated this dialogue by organizing various inter-faith meetings, in a spirit of respect for each other's differences, with particular focus on the inter-Christian and interreligious dialogue, successfully served by the Department of Interreligious Studies of the Academy.

With these thoughts, I would like to greet this on-line Greek-Iranian interfaith meeting, by wishing you every success and by deeply thanking both the participants and those who worked for its organization, the Cultural Center of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the General Secretary of the Religious Affairs of the Greek Ministry of Education, Mr. George Kalantzis for facilitating on the part of Greece by any means the progress of this dialogue and the staff of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies.