

My name is Masaharu Matsuda, a resident associate minister at Tenrikyo Church Headquarters, located in Tenri, Nara, Japan. Tenrikyo has participated in this International Meeting numerous times and also introduced our teachings and activities to you before. As this session is entitled “The Ages of Human Life,” in which we are assigned to discuss “a spiritual reflection on the relationship between generations in the longevity age,” I would like to take this opportunity as a representative from Tenrikyo to share with you my thoughts on the role of religion regarding the subject.

Let me use my personal experience first. I grew up in a big family. My grandparents and parents were also resident ministers of Tenrikyo so that I used to think that I would become a minister like them some day. Before I go on, I have to make it clear that gender has no bearing on qualifying as a minister of Tenrikyo, as we are taught that there is no discrimination between “female pine and male pine.” Additionally, we Tenrikyo ministers are not only able but also encouraged to get married. In this respect, Tenrikyo may be fundamentally different from some other religious groups. I got married when I was 31 and my wife was 25. We are blessed with three children. When our youngest daughter was born, there were eight people in my family—the oldest being 97 years of age and the youngest being a new-born infant—and four generations in it. At one point, my wife, our children, and I were away from home for about eight years because of my service in Singapore. Letters and phone calls from our children would always bring joy to my grandfather as well as my parents.

My grandfather passed away when he was 100. He was mostly bed-ridden for the last 15 years of his life so that he needed care and support. My second son was born with lazy eyes. In fact, there were some difficult times for us in many ways, but I never thought, “What if there were no aged care needs and physical disorders in my family?” It is nonsense for anyone to try to avoid aging and illness, and living with people who need some kind of care is inevitable wherever you are. There is

always a reason for what is happening to us. There is always God's intention in it; therefore, acceptance is of prime importance. Although we are not a wealthy family, we are very happy because we always try to accept things joyously and overcome difficulties with faith. We are united in a simple belief—the belief that God will take care of us so long as we do our best to be good. This is the way each one of our family members is trying to make spiritual growth, that is to say, trying to be a better person each day.

When my grandfather passed away, deep and inexpressible sorrow fell upon us, and yet we all felt joyful. It is not because we did not have to think of caring for him any more. It is because he had such a long life, and because of him we were one in unity and grew ourselves. Is longevity always a blessing? It depends on whether there is love in the place you live.

In an aging society, we are all facing many social challenges. Many elderly people live alone because they are excluded from where they ought to belong. Poverty prevails not only in developing countries but also in economically advanced regions. Illness never disappears. Therefore, the number of socially vulnerable people is increasing. Population growth is directly related to environmental issues. We do not want to hear the news of child abuse and sexual abuse any more. An age of longevity is often paraphrased as an “age of complexity.” There are no easy answers and solutions to modern problems, and that kind of confusion makes us feel lost and wander around.

The task entrusted to those of us who are fully dedicated to religious life, such as priests, monks, pastors, reverends, ministers, clergymen, and etc., is to take action. Being vocal in your opinions and decisions on social issues can influence others. And yet, what is more important and convincing is, to do whatever is close at hand, for example. Go home early and spend more time with your family. Express gratitude to your parents and treat them with filial affection. Educate your children well at home, and never leave it to school only. Show your love and care equally to the elderly, the

young, and the disabled. Tell and convince your fellow followers to do all these things because I strongly believe that those who cannot love their family cannot love others.

We always aim at our ideal, but at the same time we ought to reflect upon ourselves asking ourselves whether we are doing the actual work for it. In Tenrikyo, we are taught:

Even between parent and child, husband and wife, and
brothers and sisters: their minds all differ from one another.

Ofudesaki V:8

Only when your joy brings joy to others, can it be called true joy. If you enjoy yourselves while causing others to suffer, this cannot be called true joy.

Osashizu, December 11, 1897

Every one of us is different and unique, and yet we have one thing in common—none of us is perfect. The goal of Tenrikyo is the Joyous Life, where all people in the world help one another, live joyously, and thereby bring joy to God. I, as a minister of Tenrikyo, must try to ensure that there is mutual help in my family first before I preach others to do so. Tenrikyo also teaches:

What do you think this path is to be?

It is solely mutual help among all people in all matters.

Ofudesaki XIII: 37

Every religion has its teachings to achieve its goal, but what is most important is to implement the teachings inside your family.

Sometimes your ideal is so big that you tend to draw a spectacular blueprint. We may think that establishing and building institutions will solve the problems mentioned earlier. Sometimes it involves many types of funding, charities, and political negotiations. Yes, it is going to be wonderful if all our dreams come true. Nevertheless, it is still more important to start with something close at hand than constructing something big in a single bound. Having more institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, orphanages, schools is good, of course, and Tenrikyo, too, just like other faith-based organizations, provides the public with such facilities. However, let us ask ourselves first if each of us is looking after those who are ill, taking care of older people, and teaching young children to develop faith in our daily lives and within our own families. Even if you don't live with your family, you can always reach out to your neighbors, friends, and colleagues. Start with something simple and spread it in wider circles. I believe that is a proper way to work toward a goal.

Before I conclude, I would like to add one more thing. While the world population as a whole is still growing, the population in many countries is getting smaller. That means the number of followers in some religions is decreasing. In the age of longevity, nurturing young followers is an urgent matter, too.

Those of us who devote ourselves to faith need to be a model not only for our fellow followers but also for everyone in the world at large. The Second Shinbashira, the leader of Tenrikyo between the early and middle twentieth century, said that if you are asked what Tenrikyo is, your best answer will be to say, "Look at me." I would like to conclude my remarks by humbly asking all of you to ask yourself whether you are really endeavoring to be a model in today's world of longevity and complexity.

When I return to Japan after this International Meeting, I will resume doing very simple things—helping my wife prepare breakfast, making tea and coffee for our parents, and sending our kids to Church Headquarters before they go to school.