

The Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery  
Sam Rahberg, Director

## Taizé: Towards a New Solidarity

- a. Delighted to have the privilege to speak of my experience in Taizé and what it can teach us. My pilgrimage came during the third phase of a research project in 2011-2012. With funding from the Louisville Institute, the Benedictine Center explored the future of its ministry. During the first phase, we prepared for the thirtieth anniversary by completing both a study of the archives and research around the needs of modern day guests. During the second phase, we gathered Benedictine Center staff and advisors to consider the implications of that research and set a course for the next three years. I have written articles summarizing each of those phases and have copies available for those of you who might be interested. The third phase provided me with the opportunity to travel to France and Belgium to visit religious communities and sites which welcomed pilgrims. You might ask, as did Abbot Leo, why I would choose a French speaking context when so many Benedictines speak English. There are three reasons:
  - i. First, I wanted to be stretched outside of my comfort zone. In a book called *Leaders Make the Future*, Bob Johansen describes the skills leaders need to face the volatility and uncertainty of the next ten years. He argues that “Immersive Learning Ability”—learning in unfamiliar environments—is one of the most important skills.
  - ii. Second, the Benedictine Center has key links to sites in France which I wanted to experience first-hand—a labyrinth modeled after the one in Chartes Cathedral, and monthly prayer in the style of Taizé. Br. John of Taizé had visited in Spring 2012.
  - iii. Lastly, this was an important time of personal renewal for me. My wife was able to travel with me as we celebrated our eleventh anniversary, we were able to visit a friend from Brussels, and we were able to practice our French so that we could continue hosting French student teachers and keep up with our children in their French immersion school.

# Opening Prayer

- Song
- Silence
- Prayer close to Scripture of the day

- a. Today, we are exploring specifically the insights I bring back from Taizé, and I want us to hold to two interpretive lenses in creative tension so that we stay close to our conference theme, “Extending Hospitality to Those on the Margins”
  - i. Lens of “Les Jeunes”, young people 18-35 who are people on the margins of the Church
  - ii. Lens of Benedictine Retreat Centers, a ministry which itself is on the margins and which serves those who find themselves on the margins
- b. I cannot pretend to recreate for you a powerful week-long experience as part of the community of Taizé, but I’d love to give you just a bit of a taste and see how it helps inspire some of our thinking together about Benedictine retreat ministry. I’ll share about the place, the practice, and the sending of Taizé and then we’ll spend some time in dialogue about what we’ve heard.

# 2012 European Meeting, Berlin



## Br. Alois' 2012 Letter to the Young People of the World



Perhaps due to issues of translation, it feels a bit like the book of Proverbs...bite size bits of wisdom that don't necessarily read well continuously. Even so, I love this letter like I love Proverbs—you can sense there is a wisdom that we will live into over time. Before we open the letter, let's look at some key vocabulary:

**Solidarity:** as Taizé models it, solidarity is about being together in the midst of struggle. Being present, listening, and cultivating reconciliation. Brothers from Taizé go to live in small numbers to offer a ministry of presence, Hell's Kitchen, Africa, Asia.

**Trust:** They talk much about trust because it is the starting point. Regardless of religion, race, or nationality, true relationship begins with trust. It is simple, realistic, and essential.

**Hope:** is recognized to be in short supply in our world today. It is not cheap or fleeting, but tested and rooted in what God has and continues to accomplish in Christ. It is a desire for and an confidence in a better, more peaceful world.

**Reconciliation:** seems a daunting word in English to me, but is front and center in the Taizé community's understanding of the Gospel. If we have been reconciled to God in Christ, then the grace of God shines forth in us to reconcile the world—the healing of relationships and communities.

**Parable of Community:** Draw these themes together and imagine them practiced, exercised, and demonstrated with 5,000 young people from all over the world. Seven days of prayer, work, and conversation. You have the parable of community that is Taizé. And this community is on pilgrimage, fostering trust in places all over the world with up to 100,000 young people at a time. That was Berlin in December of 2012, Chicago in May 2012, and will be Rome in December 2013.

(5 min) Pause: invitation to sit with these words and just begin writing. What do they stir in you? You'll not be require to share.

## Towards a New Solidarity (intro)

- In which situations am I being asked simply to be present? In which situations to choose trust and hope?
- When have I experienced solidarity being built in times of distress?
- What can I do so that my church community is a sign of the new family in Christ?

Bear in mind the context! East and West Berlin, once divided now reunited, a symbol reclaimed for a time in our world with global upheaval and challenge.  
Small Group discussion

In which situations am I being asked simply to be present? In which situations to choose trust and hope?

When have I experienced solidarity being built in times of distress?

What can I do so that my church community is a sign of the new family in Christ?

## Towards a New Solidarity (outline)

- Trust Among Human Beings: Walls
- Trust in God: Foundation, Questions
- The Christ of Communion: Bonhoeffer
- Trying to Be the Salt of the Earth: Cannot remain divided

*Questions for home: What might God be trying to say to me through this text? How does it lead me to pray?*

Accueil  
Welcome  
欢迎  
Empfang  
Przyjęcie  
접수처  
Приём  
Acogida

### Trust Among Human Beings: Walls

Society remain compartmentalized and fragmented

Walls between people, but closer to us...even in our hearts

“World peace begins in our hearts. To initiate solidarity, we need to go towards others, sometimes with empty hands, listening, trying to understand the man or woman who does not think like us...and already a deadlocked situation can be transformed.” (2)

### Trust in God: Foundation, Questions

Trust in God is the foundation for solidarity

That trust is often questioned

“Faith does not mean first and foremost adhering to truths; it is a relationship with God. It call us to turn towards the light of God...What is distinctive about the Christian faith? The person of Jesus, and a living relationship with him.”

### The Christ of Communion: Bonhoeffer

Br. Roger; Bonhoeffer (from Berlin) “Christ existing as community”

The center of our faith is Christ...On the cross, Christ refused fatalism and passivity; the Resurrection speaks to Christ’s presence

“Prayer leads us at one and the same time towards God and towards people.” (3)

The vocation of the Church is to gather all people together—importance of listening and reconciliation

### Trying to Be the Salt of the Earth: Cannot remain divided

“Reconciliation with God entails

“The Christ of Communion did not come to set Christians apart...he sends them out to serve humankind as a leaven of trust and peace.” (4)  
there will be trials...and with them “the call to love still more”

Questions to take home: What might God be trying to say to me through this text? How does it lead me to pray?

# The Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth



- **2012** Opening ways of trust among human beings
- **2013** Uncovering the wellsprings of trust in God
- **2014** Seeking visible communion among all who love Christ
- **2015** Becoming “salt of the earth”

**Young people, join this pilgrimage**  
**Adults, encourage and empower them**

(5 min video about Taize)

(5 min) Looking Forward...

2012 Opening ways of trust among human beings.

2013 Uncovering the wellsprings of trust in God.

2014 Seeking visible communion among all who love Christ.

2015 Becoming “salt of the earth.”

Read final section (4): search for ways to practice these themes, bring pilgrims together, allow young people to mobilize their energies, meetings on every continent to listen to young people.

Charge: Young people, I invite you to join this “pilgrimage of trust on earth”. Adults, I invite you to encourage and empower these young people to do so.

## Closing Prayer

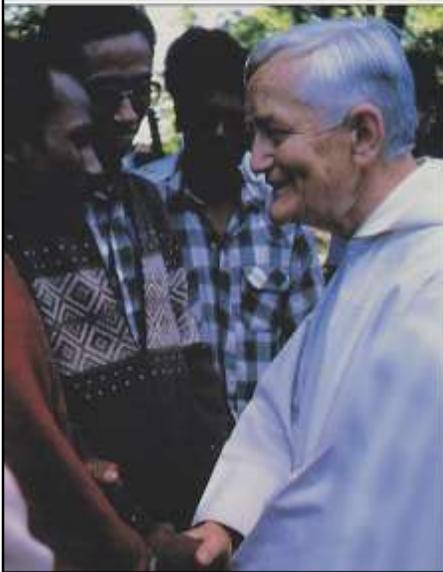


Christ Jesus, even if we had faith enough to move mountains, without living charity, what would we be? You love us. Without your Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts, what would we be? You love us. Taking everything upon yourself, you open for us a way towards trust in God, who wants neither suffering nor human distress. Spirit of the Risen Christ, Spirit of compassion, Spirit of praise, your love for each one of us will never disappear.

Prayer of Br. Roger  
*The Sources of Taizé*

- a. Encourage and empower young people to be part of the ministry
- b. “In Taizé we see the future of the Church.” Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, former Methodist bishop of NJ who led many pilgrimages of young people to Taizé...hope others would say something similar about our Benedictine retreat centers

# The History of Taizé



- **1940** Br. Roger left Switzerland for France, settled in village of Taizé and ministered to WWII refugees
- **1949** first seven brothers committed themselves
- **1952-1953** Br. Roger writes *Rule of Taizé*
- **Late 1950s** young people started coming and it continues today
- **1966** first international meeting of young people
- **1986** Pope John Paul II visits
- **Aug. 6, 2005** Br. Roger killed by deranged person
- **2015** International gathering "Toward a New Solidarity" celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the community and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Br. Roger's birth

Taizé: We are a parable of community

- It is interesting that the Taizé community should be established within 20 minutes drive of Cluny, perhaps drawing from and contributing to the spiritual energy of the region.
- You may well know Taizé for its music, but the rest of the world knows Taizé for its work with young people.
- What pleases me most is that the clarity of vision born by the founder is still visible after his death. There is a love for simplicity, listening, praying, and journeying together toward reconciliation. Between 500 and 5,000 pilgrims come to Taizé each week—each week—and I did not meet one person who looked worn and wearied.
  - “I want Taizé to be an icon, a parable of community.” Br. Kristoph
- The moment to hold in your mind is the most diverse setting you can imagine, fill the room with the roar of countless languages which become one with “Ubi caritas...”
  - It’s about living and praying together...not as guests and hosts, but as community. “Planning only takes you so far, trust the rest of the way.” Br. John
  - “Faith is not adhering to truths, it is a relationship with God...All pilgrims, all who seek after the truth, are called to let Christ take hold of us.” Br. Alois’ letter
  - “The Church is born at the foot of the cross...out of suffering, not some great triumph or victory.” Br. Matthew
  - “Encounters are not solutions.” Br. Aelred
  - “In Taizé we see the future of the Church.” Former Methodist bishop of NJ
  - “Bless us, Christ Jesus. You draw us away from solitude into the mystery of being together as Christ.” Br. Alois after Br. Roger
  - “What can you do? Build up your church and communities in small groups, making them more beautiful and welcoming. That is our vocation in Christ. Transform your church to be a place of silence, a place to listen to those who come, a place of peace amidst the busyness. Don’t look too much for numbers of people, only the experience of discovery. Pray for everyone who is thirsty for reconciliation, pray for peace for all people, especially those in Syria and Africa. Pray also for the young people...” Br. Alois
- Images of community life with Taizé music.
- Calling, permission, prohibition: task is to hold these three elements together—together they lead to life...three angles of fraternity. Encourage and support our young people. Consider a joining the pilgrimage Toward a New Solidarity. Clarity of vision makes for good decisions.

## Resources

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[www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)

Br. Roger of Taizé. *The Sources of Taizé* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000)

Santos, Jason Brian. *A Community Called Taizé* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008)

Clément, Olivier. *Taizé: A Meaning to Life* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1997)

Fidanzio, Marcello ed. *Brother Roger of Taizé: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011)

