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Four Proposals for 2017

***Together,
Opening Paths of Hope***

At the beginning of September 2016, a stage in the pilgrimage of trust brought together 7500 young Africans in Cotonou, Benin.¹ The theme of this gathering will continue to inspire us throughout the year 2017: *together*—not alone, but supported by one another—*we can open paths of hope*—in ourselves, around us and for the human family.

One of the questions asked at Cotonou was this: “To nourish our hope, how can we leave behind a passive attitude where we are content to wait for change from the outside? What forms of commitment are within everyone’s reach?”

It is urgent for those from other continents to listen to the many Africans who aspire to greater justice in political and economic relations: that is one of the conditions for them to realistically envisage building a future in their own countries.

In order to prepare their future, more and more young people in Africa want to make use of the great creative potential that is in them. They will then be able to awaken the courage of young people in other parts of the world who are experiencing similar situations.

In order to continue, at Taizé and elsewhere, the reflection begun in Cotonou, here are four proposals that will lead us to open paths of hope.

We will try to find ways of discovering how to put these proposals into practice with *simplicity*, one of the three realities—together with joy and mercy—that Brother Roger wanted to set at the heart of the life of the Taizé Community.

f. Alois

¹ After Johannesburg (1995), Nairobi (2008) and Kigali (2012), this fourth African stage of the pilgrimage of trust on earth was organized in Cotonou, Benin, from August 31 to September 4, at the invitation of the Catholic and Methodist Churches of the country. In addition to those from Benin itself, the 7500 participants came mainly from Togo (800), Nigeria (550), Ghana (100), Burkina Faso (160) and Ivory Coast (50). Twenty African countries were represented in all, and there were also sixty Europeans present from fifteen different countries. The French, English and Fon languages were used in the workshops and forums, and the liturgy also included songs in Yoruba and Mina.

Stand firm in hope: it is creativity

Hoping against all hope, Abraham believed and so became the father of many nations. (Romans 4:18)

This hope is an anchor for our soul. It is firm and secure. (Hebrews 6:19)

Anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Luke 18:17)

In the instability of today's world, we are disconcerted by violence, suffering and injustices. All creation is groaning, as if it were undergoing the pain of childbirth. The Holy Spirit is also groaning, yet this same Spirit is the support of our hope (see Romans 8:22,26). So what can we do?

Faith is a simple trust in God. It does not offer ready-made answers, but makes it possible for us not to be paralyzed by fear or discouragement. It leads us to get involved, and sets us on the road. Through it we realize that the Gospel opens a vast horizon of hope beyond all our hopes.

This hope is not a facile optimism that shuts its eyes to reality, but an anchor cast into God. It is creativity. Signs of it are already found in the most unhopedor places on earth.

- Will we dare to believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in the world? Can we rely on this presence, even if it is invisible?
- May our faith remain simple, like the trust of children! This does not mean watering down the content of the faith, but holding fast to what is at its centre—God's love for humanity and for all creation. The Bible tells the story of this, from the freshness of its beginnings through all obstacles, and even human unfaithfulness. God never tires of loving: may this message keep hope alive in us!
- To allow ourselves and those close to us to be permeated by this message, we need to come together more often to pray. The simple beauty of prayer reflects something of the mystery of God and can lead to a personal encounter with God.

Simplify our lives in order to share

Jesus said: I am gentle and humble in heart. (Matthew 11:29)

You have received freely; give freely. (Matthew 10:8)

*Jesus said to a rich young man: Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor....
Then come, follow me. (Matthew 19:21)*

Acquisitiveness—the race for money and success—leads to injustice and frustrations. A spirit of sharing, which the Gospel invites us to develop, is one of the paths of hope that we need to open today.

Choosing a simple life is a source of freedom and joy. Then life becomes less burdensome.

Simplicity implies transparency of heart. Although it is not gullible, it refuses to mistrust. It is the opposite of duplicity. It enables us to enter into dialogue, without fear, with everyone we meet. Jesus' life is an example of this.

- As far as material things are concerned, let us strive continually to lead a simpler life. This will inspire in us acts of sharing in the face of human suffering, humiliating poverty, the trials of migrants, or conflicts across the world.
- Let us find ways to support one another in realizing courageous signs of hope in our neighbourhoods, in the places where we work or study, by means of social or environmental commitments.
- How can we live in greater harmony with creation through a simple and uncluttered lifestyle, contributing in this way to the struggle against ecological disasters and global warming? This fight is not only for the leaders of nations; everyone can, for example, consume more local products, use public transport more...
- Can this question remain alive in our hearts: am I ready to follow Christ, the One who is gentle and humble of heart, choosing to belong to him forever in the simplicity of a yes, in a spirit of generosity?

Third proposal:

Come together to allow the dynamism of the Gospel to be revealed

Every day the first believers continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (Acts 2:46)

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. (1 Corinthians 12:4–5)

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

The Bible tells the story of two men, Peter and Cornelius, who were deeply opposed on all counts, but who met one another and in so doing discovered a truth previously unknown to either of them. They needed to be together in order to understand that the Holy Spirit brings down walls and unites those who thought they were strangers. The dynamism of the Gospel is only revealed when we are together. (Read chapters 10 and 11 of the Acts of the Apostles.)

When Christians are divided, between denominations or within the same Church, the Gospel message is obscured. Will we be able to walk together without letting our differences separate us? If we, as Christians, find a way to show that unity is possible in our diversity, we will help all humanity to be a more united family.

- Christ unites in one community men and women, children and elderly people, of all horizons, languages and cultures, and even those from nations historically opposed. Let us find simple ways to show this in the places where we live.
- To remain alive, every community is called to go out of itself. Can we develop an attitude of hospitality, in the image of God, towards Christians who have positions very different from our own? Such openness of heart requires an effort of “translation,” since different beliefs and convictions can be like languages foreign to one another.
- Even if the memory of mutual intolerance among Christians separated over the course of history remains alive and not all the threads can be untangled, will we dare to welcome each other anyway, by forgiving,

and without trying to establish who was right or who was wrong? There is no reconciliation without sacrifice.

- Hospitality goes hand in hand with recognizing the otherness of others. When their beliefs remain incomprehensible to us, we can at least be attentive to their authenticity. There should be a festive element in the discovery of others!

Fourth proposal:

Allow friendship to grow in order to prepare peace

Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:11)

Jesus said: You have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. And do not call anyone on earth “father,” for you have one Father, the one in heaven. (Matthew 23:8–9) He also said: Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (Matthew 12:50)

People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the banquet in the kingdom of God. (Luke 13:29)

Contributing to peace and to international justice is another path of hope that we can open today.

Peace on earth begins in the heart of each person. It is first of all our hearts that have to be changed, and this change involves a simple conversion—allowing God’s Spirit to dwell within us, welcoming a peace that will spread out and be communicated from one person to another. “Achieve inner peace and thousands around you will be saved.” (Seraphim of Sarov, a Russian monk, 1759–1833.)

- With our own lives let us write the new pages of a simple solidarity that goes beyond partitions and walls: physical walls constructed in different parts of the world as well as walls of ignorance, prejudice and ideology. Let us be open to other cultures and mentalities.
- We cannot allow the rejection of foreigners to enter our hearts, for the refusal of others is the seed of barbarism. Instead of seeing foreigners as a threat to our standard of living or our culture, can we welcome them as members of the same human family? Why not go to visit refugees, simply to get to know them and to listen to their stories? Then—who knows?—other steps of solidarity may follow.
- How can we get to know others who are different from us? And share with those who think differently, in a dialogue where we really listen to one another, without getting into arguments even before having understood the other person. Can we find ways of remaining present in places of division, and of building bridges? Let us pray for those whom we do not understand and who do not understand us.
- Signs of solidarity can be multiplied beyond the borders of religion. Meeting believers of other religions encourages us to deepen our knowledge of our own faith, while asking ourselves what God wants to tell us and to give us through these brothers and sisters who are so different from us.

During the coming months, we will publish on the Taizé website and on our social networks personal experiences of those who attempt to live out the “Proposals 2017.” You can share your initiatives with us by writing to echoes@taize.fr and already remain in touch by means of the following pages:



www.taize.fr/news



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A Call to Church Leaders for 2017

On the road together!

In 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation offers an opportunity to advance towards unity and to go beyond mere cordiality.

There will always be differences between the Churches, as well as within each Church. These differences will remain subjects for frank dialogue; they can be an enrichment. But, in all the Churches, over time denominational identity has taken precedence: people define themselves as Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. Has not the time come to give precedence to the Christian identity shown in baptism?

A question follows from this: should not the Churches dare to come under the same roof without waiting to reach agreement on all the theological questions? Or at least to come under the same tent, going beyond a view of unity which is too static in order to create events and find ways, even if they are provisional, which already anticipate the joy of unity and cause visible signs of the Church of God, the Body of Christ, the Communion of the Holy Spirit, to appear.

Communion among all those who love Christ can only be established if it respects their diversity; but this communion can be credible only if it is visible. We need a new starting-point to head towards such a reconciled diversity. The starting-point is Christ, who is not divided. “It is only through Jesus Christ that we are brothers of one another... Through Christ our mutual belonging is real, integral and for all time” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

In this way a sharing of gifts can be realized: sharing with others what we consider as a gift of God, but also welcoming the treasures that God has placed in them. “It is not only a matter of receiving information about the others in order to know them better, but to accept what the Spirit has sown in them as a gift for us as well” (Pope Francis).

How can we come under the same roof? How can we set out on the road together? A few suggestions:

- With neighbours and families of different denominations, gather as “grass-roots communities,” praying together by listening to the Word of God, in silence and in praise, helping each other, getting to know one another better.
- Every local community, every parish or congregation, should do with Christians of other denominations all that it is possible to do together—Bible study, social and pastoral work, catechesis—and do nothing without taking the others into account. Agencies that do the same work in parallel could be merged.

- Undertake acts of solidarity together, pay attention together to the misery of others, to hidden distress, to the plight of migrants, to material poverty and all other forms of suffering, remembering also to care for the environment.
- In the many cities where trust has already grown among the Churches, could not the cathedral or the main church become a common house of prayer for all the Christians of the area?
- Move forward with theological dialogue while developing the dimension of common prayer and an awareness that we are already together. When we grow in mutual friendship and pray together, theological questions are seen in a different light.
- Even if all Christians have received some share in a pastoral gift to watch over one another, the Church also needs ministers of unity at all levels. A ministry of communion on the universal level has traditionally been associated with the bishop of Rome. Is it not possible for the Churches to develop varied ways of associating themselves with this ministry? Could not the bishop of Rome be recognized by all as the servant who watches over the concord of his brothers and sisters in their great diversity?
- Should not the Churches which emphasize that unity in faith and an agreement on ministry are necessary in order to receive communion together give equal weight to the harmony of mutual love? Could they not offer a broader Eucharistic hospitality to those who show their desire for unity and who believe in the real presence of Christ? The Eucharist is not only the culmination of unity; it is also the road that leads to it.

Our Christian identity is formed by journeying together and not separately. Will we have the courage to come under the same roof, so that the dynamism and the truth of the Gospel can be revealed?

Towards the Unity of the European Continent

As migrants arrive, let us go beyond fear!

The meeting in Riga organized by the Taizé Community at the end of December 2016 brought together young adults from across Europe.¹ Coming both from member-countries of the European Union and countries that do not belong to it, they had an experience of community capable of uniting people from the whole continent.

This Nordic gathering also enabled young people from other regions to discover the Europe of the Baltic States, one of the facets of the beautiful diversity of peoples on this continent, each with its own history, traditions and special characteristics.

A future of peace requires Europeans to broaden their awareness and allow solidarity to grow among all the countries that make up the continent. Multiplying contacts, forms of sharing and collaboration is essential.

Building the unity of the continent can only take place if there is more dialogue and listening between countries: those of the European Union and the others, those of Western Europe and those of Central and Eastern Europe, those of the North and the South. Each country, large or small, should be able to have its voice heard, with its specific character. It is important to make the effort to understand from within the mentality of others: only in this way can sometimes discordant attitudes be better understood and reactions motivated by emotion alone be avoided.

Can Europeans discover that their common roots are much deeper than their differences?

In the wake of the Second World War, Europe developed a momentum towards reconciliation. Then, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was a new era of seeking unity. Many young people feel that Europe will only be able to progress if it enters more deeply into this ideal of fraternity. They aspire to a Europe not only united within itself, but open to the other continents and in solidarity with the peoples undergoing the greatest trials.

Throughout the world, women, men, and children are forced to leave their homelands. It is their distress that causes them to leave. This motivation is stronger than all the barriers erected to block their way. The anxiety expressed in the wealthier regions will not keep those who undergo unbearable suffering from leaving their homes.

Some people say, "We cannot welcome everybody." Others think that the current

population movements are inevitable, since they are brought about by intolerable situations. To attempt to regulate these movements is legitimate and necessary. To leave refugees in the hands of human smugglers and at risk of death in the Mediterranean flies in the face of every human value.

Rich countries cannot evade their share of responsibility for the wounds of history and for the environmental disturbances that have caused and continue to cause huge migrations—from Africa, the Middle East, Central America, and other regions too. Today, certain political and economic choices made by wealthy countries are still creating instability in other areas. Western societies now need to go beyond the fear of foreigners, of cultural differences, and begin courageously to shape the new face that migrations are already giving them. Although the arrival of migrants does pose real difficulties, their coming can be an opportunity to stimulate Europe to develop openness and solidarity.

There are places where the number of arrivals is so high that the inhabitants are overwhelmed and exhausted, and this is comprehensible. The burden is too great for them, since the countries of Europe have not yet found a way to carry it together. But many people are offering a generous welcome to refugees and are discovering that personal contacts can often lead to a beautiful mutual understanding.

Nothing replaces personal contacts. This is true notably with respect to Islam. Muslims and Christians can look for practical steps to witness together to peace and to reject together all violence justified in God's name. Some 800 years ago, Francis of Assisi, in his desire to contribute to peace, did not hesitate to travel to Egypt to meet the Sultan. Mother Teresa devoted her life to the poorest of the poor, whatever their religion.

European countries that want to isolate themselves will have no future. Among Europeans themselves, as well as in their contact with refugees, friendship and mutual support is the only path to preparing peace.

¹ From 28 December 2016 to 1 January 2017, young adults from the entire continent—Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants—took part in the 39th European meeting animated by the Taizé Community at Riga, the capital of Latvia. On 2 January, this gathering was extended to Tallinn (Estonia) and Vilnius (Lithuania). It was a stage in the “pilgrimage of trust on earth” undertaken by Taizé for many years now.

Taizé 2017

Throughout the year:

Each week, from Sunday to Sunday, youth meetings, to go to the wellsprings of faith, to look for ways to open paths of hope together, in ourselves, around us and for the human family.

From August 20–27:

Week reserved for young adults from 18 to 35 years old—students, young professionals, volunteers, those working or looking for work. They can reflect together on their future in the light of faith. Different speakers have been invited to talk about their own experience.

Birmingham (UK)

Brother Alois will help lead a young adult gathering in Birmingham, England, from Friday 28 April to Monday 1 May, 2017. The weekend, *Hidden Treasure*, is being prepared with the local Churches of the city. It will celebrate the beauty of the commitment lived out by many Christians and others of goodwill — with very humble means they contribute to the building up of trust and community. Birmingham is a particularly young and ethnically diverse city: participants from other countries are welcome!

St. Louis (USA)

An American stage of the pilgrimage of trust will take place at St. Louis, USA, where tensions remain after the events in Ferguson two years ago. A year-long series of evenings bringing together people from different Churches for a time of prayer and conversation on building trust will culminate in a larger gathering from May 26 to 29, with the participation of young adults from throughout North America.

Egypt

With brothers and young people from different countries, Brother Alois will go to Egypt from September 26 to October 1 to visit the Coptic Orthodox Church in particular.

From Wittenberg to Geneva

This year of 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, the Taizé Community has been invited to lead two prayers:

- Saturday May 27 at Wittenberg, the city of Luther, as part of the Kirchentag of the German Protestant Church,
- Friday November 3 at the cathedral of Geneva, during a youth gathering organized by the Federation of Protestant Churches of Switzerland and by the network of Evangelical Churches.

Basel 2017-2018

The fortieth European meeting will be held from 28 December 2017 to 1 January 2018 in Basel, in Switzerland.

For details concerning the different meetings, see www.taize.fr