



## Notes from a pilgrimage

I have recently returned from a week's retreat to the ecumenical community of brothers in Taizé, in Burgundy in the centre of France. For those of you who aren't aware of it, Taizé was set up by a young man in 1940 called Brother Roger. Originally from Switzerland, Brother Roger was called by a firm conviction that he urgently needed to come to the assistance of those affected by the outbreak of the Second World War. He moved to the small village of Taizé, which was very near to

the demarcation line dividing France in two, and was well situated for sheltering refugees. Gradually people in nearby Lyon began to give the address as a place for those seeking safety, and Jews, atheists and agnostics were among those who sought refuge. Over time, other young men joined the group, until on Easter Day in 1949 seven of them made their vows of celibacy and committed to live in common life together. The community has grown ever since, and there are now around 200 brothers from countries all around the world who live together a life of simplicity and prayer.

Today, the community welcomes young people from all across the world every year to spend a week or two sharing in the common life of the community. At any week between Easter and September there may be up to 7,000 people living alongside the community, most of whom have travelled from across Europe and mostly between the ages of 15-35. Every day, these people eat together, spend time in reflection, form groups to discuss the Bible and foster solidarity, and most importantly to join with the brothers in morning, midday and evening prayer. Prayer at Taizé is quite extraordinary, lasting about 30 minutes, with all that number of people joining in the singing of the beautiful, simple chants, and keeping a long period of silence, usually about 8 minutes. It's a place where the presence of God feels especially close to those who are present.

At this period in Europe's history there is a high state of alert and anxiety, especially in the light of recent attacks. This is the first time that I have been to Taizé when it has been guarded by the French army and *gendarmes*. There is also the unstable political situation continuing on Russian borders, and a general suspicion of religious behaviour and of the influx of refugees fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Perhaps you yourself may have detected some of those sentiments on this little island of ours. Which is why I have to say that being in Taizé was not just a week to nurture my own spirituality and development, but also a vision of everything that gives me hope.

What I saw was a group of young Europeans behaving not only with polite tolerance for one another, but with a genuine desire to make friendships, deepen understandings of different cultures, and strive to build relationships with international neighbours. I saw Serbs and Croats playing football together, bonded by a love of sport. In my own age group, Russians and Ukrainians listened to each other's experiences and learned about who they were. In church, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Dutch Reformed, Anglicans and denominations of many other stripes came together to pray for each other and for the world. It was a heartening and uplifting experience to see young people finding out for themselves that peace, love and forgiveness are not just words to be thrown around, but the basis of relationships to be formed.

Millennials often get a difficult time in this country, and it's no different in many other places. And it's easy to be cynical about the value of spending a week together away from the pressures of everyday life. But I have hope in the generations yet to make a difference across the world, because I have seen firsthand that when we take the time to listen to God and listen to each other, new solidarity can be built in our world.

Give thanks for Brother Roger's call those many years ago. It is bearing fruit right as I write to you. I pray that you can take inspiration and find hope in our younger people. They have plenty to offer.

Rob Glenny

