

Indignation, Passivity or Commitment

In the course of the year, we are continuing to reflect in Taizé on the road “towards a new solidarity” launched in Berlin by Brother Alois. In recent months, a workshop has invited young people to reflect on the topic: “Indignation, passivity or commitment—the place of youth in today’s society.” In the same vein, in this issue young people evoke concrete commitments to others, in society and in their Christian communities. The inside pages offer a portrait of the prophet Elijah, a reflection on Jesus casting out the buyers and sellers from the Temple as an example of “the violence of a peacemaker,” and an answer to the question: “Must a Christian always avoid violence?”

Walls exist not just between peoples and continents, but also close to us, and even within the human heart. Think of the prejudices between different nationalities. Think of the immigrants, so near and yet often so far away. (Brother Alois, *Letter 2012 – Towards a New Solidarity*)

Tom (Canada)

On one of my first days at Taizé, Brother Alois took a few minutes after evening prayer to highlight the plight of immigrants in Europe. As someone who had spent most of the prior two years working in shelters for refugee claimants in Toronto, Canada, I was touched to hear the prior of Taizé acknowledging the difficulties of people who leave all that is familiar to them to find a better life elsewhere.

It also quickly occurred to me that Brother Alois’ message was an urgent one to hear for the pilgrims gathered in the Church of Reconciliation. It has become the political norm in many Western countries to vilify immigrants; prominent national leaders have recently made comments declaring the “failure” of multiculturalism, or bemoaning the presence of “too many foreigners”.

My pilgrimage to Taizé inspired me to seek solidarity amongst newcomers with a renewed vigor. My prayer is that in 2012, the young people coming to Taizé will have the desire to encounter the other in their midst, and leave with an intention to live lives of tolerance and compassion.

Let us try and be attentive to the weakest, to those who find no work.

Jermer (Philippines)

My country is affected by many social injustices, and I have experienced this myself by the work I am now undertaking. In our community we have been working with some of the people within our reach who are victims of injustices, particularly the marginalized sector. There are still a lot of poor people and they need help in housing and education. Being part of a family who is somehow financially blessed, I serve, through our community, to help our marginalized brothers and sisters by helping them out building their homes. Together with this, we conduct tutorial sessions to give them good study habits. I believe from the Gospel that I should go out and help our marginalized friends because as a Christian, I am asked to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18). Education is not only for those who have money, but it is for everyone. And I will share this conviction with my future sons and daughters.

Our attentiveness to the poorest can be expressed by getting involved in some form of social action.

Benjamin (Austria)

A few years ago, I moved from Austria to Romania to help former street children. Life in our social centre is never boring. We mostly take care of young adults, and it is always noisy. The day starts with a little prayer in our chapel, and it is very touching to hear how thankful people who have next to nothing can be. The intercessions take a long time, everybody wants to say something. Angelica always starts her prayer with “Dear God, thanks that you have awakened me to the light”...

Our educators work together with volunteers from Western Europe, but also always with former street children “assistants”. I can see how not only youths, but also volunteers receive much in return for their service. They go back changed: more experienced, knowing what they want from life, and able to understand problems they didn’t encounter before.

On a still deeper level, it is an attitude of openness to all.

Armen (Armenia)

In the society of the 1970s under the Soviet regime, people with disabilities and their families were isolated and excluded. In most cases the parents were alone and helpless in the face of this suffering. It was hard to find someone who could be with them and share their difficulties. Today the situation has changed, although there is still much to do to integrate people with disabilities and their families in society. I work as a volunteer with some of them. I see that the commitment of volunteers comes from deep within their heart. I received this as a great gift—being able to work with disabled children and take care of them.

Any commitment requires a sacrifice of time, energy, health, for the people who need assistance. But this sacrifice is rewarded by the unusual feeling of being useful to someone else who really needs my help. Quite often, the gratefulness of a child with a disability is visible in his smile: I receive this as a great gift. The feeling of being able to brighten the day of one of these children is one of the greatest joys possible—realizing that my abilities, generously given by God, were able to help someone whose abilities are in some sense reduced.

In the face of poverty and injustice, some end up by revolting or are even tempted by aimless violence. Violence cannot be a way to change society.

Elisa (Dominican Republic)

Given what I consider injustices in my society I cannot help but feel anger, pain, a kind of powerlessness in thinking that I can do nothing, and yet at the same time I feel a courage, a courage that compels me to act and not to stand still, not to keep quiet, and not to remain alone passively observing situations around me.

Violence has never been part of that impulse of my heart; my heart's response has always been to act through love. It's easy to get carried away by the first impulse of violence or to follow the easy route and to turn a blind eye to countless injustices, but God always calls us to love. I always answer through love and even when I do not have the strength or desire to keep going, the best gift God has given me arises—my joy. My smile is always there for those who need it, because that joy comes from God, and from this I draw the strength to begin once again to act through love.

But we need to listen to the young people who express their indignation in order to grasp the basic reasons for it.

Pito (Puerto Rico)

My experience has been strongly marked by the right to an accessible college education. The current administration has tried to limit the access to the public university through the creation of laws, obstructing the inclusiveness of education by making it more expensive. Given this outrage over the abuse of power, I have sought to bring through the youth ministry a message of truth, love, justice and freedom. These values of the God's Kingdom have been instrumental in the process of expressing our feelings of nonconformity. During my pastoral ministry I have actively participated in demonstrations seeking equal opportunities for those who aspire to a decent education. I have planned and organized, together with the pastoral youth, prayers and meetings calling for unity and solidarity in the academic community. For I believe that everyone has the duty and responsibility to take part in a non-violent struggle for a just and more inclusive society.

Young Spaniards involved in the movement of the *indignados* in Madrid wrote to me: "Anything can happen if the situation does not get better. Many people are unemployed; they are losing their homes and their basic human rights..." (note 6)

Marga (Spain)

These past weeks have been very interesting because of the events celebrating the anniversary of the May 15 movement. In Madrid, the *indignados* came together last year for gatherings, workshops, and working-groups. I attended a meeting about a project of cooperatives that seeks to find a new and simpler way of life, to produce only what we need and to live in a simple and healthy way, with organic produce. Groups of unemployed are trying to find a way to share among themselves and with their neighbors by seeking solutions to short- and long-term work in cooperative networks.

The rest of this last article and other texts are available on <www.taize.fr/letter>. If you want to react or contribute your own experiences and reflections to the search launched by the *Letter 2012 – Towards a New Solidarity*, you can write to the following address: <echoes@taize.fr>.