

Peace to Those Who Are Near

“Christ came to proclaim the joyful message of peace: peace to those who are far away and peace to those who are near” (Eph 2:14-18). It is this quote from St. Paul that provides a title for the latest issue of the *Letter from Taizé*. On the first and last pages, young people from different continents share experiences of solidarity lived out concretely in their immediate environment. On the inside pages, one article addresses the issue of “thinking globally, acting locally” and two biblical commentaries are offered on passages related to relationships within the family, the natural place for solidarity close at hand.

In our attempt to create new forms of solidarity and open up ways of trust, there are, and there always will be, trials. At times they may seem to be overwhelming. So what then should we do? Is not our response to personal trials, and to those which other people endure, to love still more? (Brother Alois, *Letter 2012 – Towards a New Solidarity*)

Calin (Romania)

We often forget how important solidarity is in our life and it seems we ignore the benefits that it brings to us. Solidarity does not necessarily mean that you need to travel across the world to help some poor people from a Third World country; it starts with a simple “Hello”. Solidarity is part of our life from the first moments. If we want to create a world in which solidarity is normal we should start small, with our family, with neighbors, with that stranger in the bus or that moment when you can help an elderly person just by keeping the door open for them when they leave a building. I think solidarity is very easy to achieve; it does not require anything but love, and everyone has that from God. I also consider that the road to true happiness starts with solidarity.

Hannah (Britain)

Being friendly can often fall in the trap of being cliché and saying all the normal phrases. A commitment to be authentic can be a way of sharing peace with those we came near to. We cannot be best friends with everyone. If we try we will probably lose a depth to our friendship. At the same time, it is important that we stay awake and notice the outsiders or the new people that have stepped into an unfamiliar place (university, church, etc.) and we take responsibility to recognize them and ensure they are welcomed.

Judith (Netherlands)

For me, solidarity begins by meeting people in a genuine way. Recognizing the humanity in others and in oneself. We must allow the needs of others to affect us. When I returned home after a stay in Taizé, I realized how easy it was to close off any opportunity to meet others, to deal with their needs. For example, I always turn on my MP3 player when I leave home. Looking around me on the bus or train, I saw how many people were just listening to their own music. So I decided to take off my headphones and be more present to the people around me. That has allowed me to have some good conversations with strangers and, in a certain way, to express my solidarity.

Katarzyna (Poland)

Every day I thank God for having been born into a wonderful family. If I am the person that I am, this is primarily due to the values I received from my parents and grandparents: faith, openness and disinterested generosity. I am grateful to my grandparents who are always willing to help and listen, who helped me to discover God and the beauty of the world. Along with my parents, they showed me by their own lives how to see with the heart, with sensitivity and empathy for others.

Family ties have taught me to live in community since my childhood. It is in community that humanity fulfills itself. The dialogue between generations, based on understanding and openness, is a mutual gift whose purpose is to reveal the goodness that lies within each of us.

Alphonse (Tanzania)

I work in a university hospital in Dar-es-Salaam. There I have learned to deal with the physical needs of the rural population. The hospital receives thousands of patients from many remote areas. Most of them are poor and remain in the hospital for months while waiting for treatment. Some are even abandoned by their families.

It is thus not enough to meet these people only from a professional point of view, in a doctor-patient relationship. There is a pressing need to meet them as friends, as children of God. We are called to share their difficulties in order to offer sympathy and empathy and to serve them better.

Michio (Japan)

In my Caritas base-camp in Japan, many young people come to help the victims of the earthquake and tsunami of 2011. With them, we have several activities: cleaning up the city, working with fishermen and trying to create a community in temporary housing. After work, we share what we have discovered through these experiences. When we share, we realize that there are no barriers between generations.

I have often heard adults impressed by the large number of young people who do not think about money but just want to help those who have lost their family or home. Many Japanese are worried about the future because of the nuclear-power plants and the political situation, but through this experience we feel hope and trust.

Nicholas (USA)

Recently, I participated in a university delegation to El Salvador. Twenty years after their civil war, the village we visited still suffers. They cannot forget the violence and loss they experienced. There was a seven-year-old boy there named Hector, who would take us by the hand and follow us. One day I saw him digging holes in the dirt. "What are you doing, Hector?" I asked him. He looked up at me and smiled brightly. "I'm building a house for the ants!"

This moved me very deeply. I am twenty-six years old, and as I grow older, I can see that I am expected to become stronger, more independent...perhaps even more cynical. Hector reminded me of the value of a child's tenderness, especially towards the littlest ones who are like ants in the eyes of the world. The innocence and idealism of youth can be so extreme sometimes that it looks ridiculous. But perhaps, if we pay attention, it can actually be a pathway to radical love and peace.

Cathel (France)

A few years after first working as a volunteer in Mexico, I went back in 2011 to start a day-care center for elderly people who are extremely poor, the Casa de Dia "San Agustin". Mexico is plagued by social inequality: the richest drive around in their sedans, while others have no water. It is enough to visit a city to see how precarious things are.

Our house works mainly with old people exhausted by insecurity, needing more than food in order to survive. That is the main challenge of an association like ours—to provide an adequate framework, conducive to sharing and to the struggle against loneliness. The world will not change without us. Without wanting to change it in a revolutionary manner, we can always put all our energies to work in order to improve it.