

*Proposals 2022*

# *Becoming Creators of Unity*

Helping unity to grow, creating bonds between people: this is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

The present day is characterized by contradictory developments.

On the one hand, humanity is becoming more and more aware how interconnected and linked it is to the whole of creation. The pandemic has made us realize once again that we are one human family; we undergo certain hardships all together and we can only overcome them together.

On the other hand, the world is becoming increasingly polarized socially, politically and ethically. This leads to new rifts in societies, between countries and even within families. Christians are not immune to these antagonisms. Between Churches, and even within them, differences are hardening and turning into divisions, at the very moment when our witness to peace, in all our diversity, would be vital.

In some countries today, these antagonisms are coupled with an immense loss of trust in Christian communities caused by the revelation of sexual assault and spiritual abuse committed in them. Many people have seen their trust betrayed. At Taizé, as elsewhere, in recent years we have been undertaking a process of working through the truth concerning these serious questions. And we wish to do all we can so that Taizé may be a safe place for every person ([www.taize.fr/protection](http://www.taize.fr/protection)).

The Church is called to be a place of friendship for all. For this purpose, a radical conversion is necessary today out of faithfulness to the Gospel message. Christ, by his love that went to the point of self-giving, opened a new wellspring from which we can draw the energy to live as brothers and sisters, to promote the

dignity of every human being, and to take care of creation. Christ asks us to be, by our brotherly and sisterly communion, the sign that he came to unite all human beings in God's love.

I would like these proposals for 2022 to invite us to question ourselves: what role can we play to help unity grow in the human family and with all of creation, with those close to us, in our Churches and communities, and even in our own hearts?

*f. Abis*

- *Each of the six proposals is followed by a text to help deepen our reflection. These short quotations will be explored further in articles on the website, in podcasts and during workshops offered at Taizé.*
- *Bible references and commentaries will be published online for each of these six proposals. They will inspire the choice of texts used in the bible introductions at Taizé. See [www.taize.fr/bible](http://www.taize.fr/bible)*

## *The pilgrimage of trust in 2022*

Although the effects of the pandemic continue to be felt, we hope to be able to continue the pilgrimage of trust at Taizé and elsewhere:

- Throughout the year, weekly meetings at Taizé.
- From May 8 to 15, 2022, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
- From July 13 to 17, 2022, a meeting of friendship between young Muslims and Christians.
- From August 21 to 28, 2022, a week of reflection for 18 to 35 year-olds. During this week, those who wish can take part in a special program on safeguarding biodiversity.
- From December 28, 2022 to January 1, 2023, the next European meeting – the location will be announced in Turin.

## First proposal | *The Joy of Receiving*

All of us can contribute to a future of peace and unity in the human family. This begins with the relationships that we build up with one another. We need to take care of each other, in our families, with our relatives and friends, especially in times of trial.

The unity of the human family also increases every time we open ourselves to those who come from backgrounds different from our own. Can we go towards others more often, including those whom we would not approach spontaneously? Often we will be surprised to receive from them what we could never have imagined.

If we do not let ourselves be paralysed by our hesitations or fears, we will be granted the joy of receiving. We find our own identity in our relationship with others, and they can even help us to emerge from times of inner sadness and give meaning to our existence.

In one of the parables that Jesus tells, a wounded person is helped by a passing stranger. By doing this, that man ran the risk of going beyond ethnic, political and religious barriers. Did not that spontaneous act through which he became a neighbour to the wounded man give meaning to his life that day? Still today, we remember and are inspired by this figure, the “good Samaritan” (Luke 10:29-37).

*“One of the sayings in our country is **Ubuntu** – the essence of being human. **Ubuntu** speaks particularly about the fact that you can’t exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world.”*

From the Anglican archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu, a figure in the struggle against apartheid and for reconciliation in South Africa

## Second proposal | *Fostering Dialogue*

Helping unity to grow requires first of all creating bonds of trust. But far too often human relations are imperilled by mistrust. Verbal violence is more and more common in public debate and in social media, and people are manipulated by fear. How should we respond to such aberrations?

We can choose to listen and enter into dialogue. This does not mean telling the other person we share their opinion if this is not the case, but instead doing everything we can to continue a conversation with those who think differently than we do. Let us try and do all in our power to avoid a breakdown in dialogue.

Let us resolve never to stick a label onto anyone, and never to pass on prejudices. No one should be reduced to a particular action or opinion of theirs. And a disagreement, even a radical one, can be expressed without aggression, though we must admit that at times, in the face of certain situations of injustice, anger must be expressed.

There are reflexes of protecting one's own identity that aggravate the rifts in our societies, and this is also true in Christian communities. Instead of defining ourselves in opposition to others, can we develop an identity and a sense of belonging that does not exclude openness to others?

*“The truest and most intimate friendship can exist between people who think differently about essential matters. This naturally involves an element of pain, but it makes our friend still more dear to us.”*

From the French philosopher Jacques Maritain in 1970

## Third Proposal | ***We Are All Brothers and Sisters***

Helping unity to grow means refusing social inequalities. Some polarisations find their origin in the exclusion suffered or felt by so many people, and even by entire nations.

With Christian of all Churches, with believers of different religions, with women and men of good will who do not believe in God, we can be in solidarity with people in precarious situations, with those who are excluded, with migrants whose life-journeys have often been marked by great suffering.

Living as brothers and sisters begins at our doorstep. Let us go beyond segregations and create friendship. And we will see our hearts become more open, wider, more human. Are we aware to what extent our personal way of life can have an impact even at the other end of the earth?

For believers, living as brothers and sisters is inseparable from faith. Jesus said, "Whatever you have done for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done for me" (Matthew 25:40). By coming into the world, Christ Jesus became united to every human being. We come closer to him when we go towards those who have been wounded by life; they enable us to enter into a deeper relationship with him.

*"The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us. When we begin to take the lowest place, to wash the feet of others, to love our brothers and sisters with that burning love, that passion, which led to the cross, then we can truly say, 'Now I have begun.'"*

From the American journalist Dorothy Day, on the front line of the struggle for human rights, in 1963

## Fourth proposal | ***Solidarity with the Whole of Creation***

Today, we see more clearly the unity of creation. The interdependence of all living things makes us realise that we are, in some sense, sisters and brothers of all beings. For believers, our marvellous planet is a gift that God has entrusted to us and that we have to pass on to the next generation.

We see today how much the planet is weakened by human activity. In recent times, environmental disasters and extreme climate events have affected a great many parts of the world. More and more people will be forced by these crises to leave their homelands, which have become uninhabitable. And for decades now, a large body of research has been warning us about the destruction of biodiversity.

In the face of these ecological emergencies, political responses, scientific innovations and social choices are crucial. Many young people are making courageous commitments, but it is true that some of them are haunted by frustration and anger – and this is understandable.

We should not get discouraged for all that! It is often starting with “almost nothing” that a transformation begins. For believers, faith in God stimulates a commitment and trust in the ability of human beings to respond to these crises. Could we all ask ourselves: what concrete step, however humble it may be, can I take in the near future to begin or to deepen an ecological conversion?

*“All of us—whoever and wherever we are—can play a part in changing our collective response to the unprecedented threat of climate change and environmental degradation. Caring for God’s creation is a spiritual commission requiring a response of commitment. This is a critical moment. Our children’s future and the future of our common home depend on it.”*

Joint statement by Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, September 1, 2021

## Fifth Proposal | *A Passion for Christian Unity*

The search for unity is a major challenge for Christians. How can we be a ferment of brother- and sisterhood if we maintain our divisions? In Christ we find a unique source of unity (John 17:20-21; Ephesians 2:14). By giving his life on the cross, he went to the furthest extent of a love that destroys hatred and the barriers between human beings.

The Gospel calls us to go beyond divisions and to bear witness that unity is possible in a great diversity. Is that not a particularly important contribution that Christians are invited to offer so that the human family may live together as brothers and sisters? This kind of witness speaks louder than words.

The Gospel impels us to cultivate the art of creating unity. We can all be creators of unity by forging links of listening and friendship wherever we are.

In the dialogue between Christian denominations, the differences that remain must be taken seriously and theological research is indispensable. But dialogue by itself does not lead to visible unity.

To go forward, we should come together more often between baptised members of different Churches, in a common prayer centred on the Word of God. Who knows? The Holy Spirit could surprise us. We may discover that Jesus is the one who brings us together and that the love of Christ can shine out far more clearly when we recognise humbly what we are lacking and when we open ourselves to what we can receive from others.

*“The important thing is accepting to give and receive from one another. Not to fall into a dogmatic relativism, but to reach the point where we understand that the essentials of the apostolic faith can be expressed along different but converging lines. And for the rest, to hope and await a new outpouring of the Spirit and be ready to welcome it.”*

From Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Orthodox theologian, in 1986

## Sixth Proposal | *Let God Unify Our Hearts*

Allowing unity to grow requires a commitment of our entire being, one that begins within our own heart. In the words of an age-old psalm, our prayer rises to God: “Unify my heart so that it may revere your name” (Psalm 86:11).

To head towards an inner unity, is it not necessary at times to sort out our desires, accepting that we cannot do or experience everything? If many possibilities lie before us, let us try to discern which ones lead the most towards peace, light and happiness.

In us there is a deep thirst for communion and unity that comes to us from God, and we can express it in prayer. Even with very few words, remaining in silence alone with God helps us to find the meaning of life and renews our readiness to let the Holy Spirit be at work in us.

To find unity of heart, one path is always possible: turning our eyes to Christ Jesus, learning to know him more, entrusting our joys and troubles to him. Even in the midst of difficulties, even with very few certainties regarding the future, we can continue our journey step by step in this way, trusting that, through the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ is always with us.

*“Entering into silence means listening to God, removing everything that keeps us from listening to or hearing God. It means listening to God wherever he expresses his will, in prayer and outside of prayer as such. We need this silence to do God’s will, silence extended by that other disposition of ourselves that we disregard so much... or that we despise out of ignorance—recollection. We have to “collect” the tracks, the clues, the invitations, the orders of God’s will like the farmer who gathers his harvest into the barn, like the researcher who assembles the results of an experiment.”*

From the French writer and social worker Madeleine Delbr el, in 1968