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**Proposals 2016**

**The Courage of Mercy**

Throughout the year 2015, at Taizé, we looked for ways to get involved in new solidarities; these are so urgent today. Across the earth, new forms of distress — migratory, ecological and social — are a challenge for believers of different religions and for non-believers alike.

Armed violence is wreaking havoc in the name of inhuman ideologies. While remaining clear-headed, we shall continue our “pilgrimage of trust” as a way of resisting the fear generated by insecurity. It is even more urgent that those who are looking forward to — or already living — a globalization of solidarity support one another.

When the storm rages, a house built on rock remains stable (Matthew 7:24-25). We want to build our lives on the words of Christ, and so our rock will consist of a few basic Gospel realities, accessible to all: *joy – simplicity – mercy*. Brother Roger set these at the heart of the life of our Taizé Community; they enabled him to keep going, even in difficult times. He assimilated them in order to return to them day after day.

These three words will guide us on our journey over the next three years. In 2016, we shall begin with mercy, in the same spirit as the Year of Mercy launched by Pope Francis.

The Gospel calls us to bear witness to God’s compassion. Here are five proposals to awaken in us the courage of mercy.

*f. Alois*

## **Entrust ourselves to God who is mercy**

*You are a God who forgives, a gracious and compassionate God, patient and abounding in love. (Nehemiah 9:17)*

*Be merciful as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36)*

According to the Bible God is mercy, in other words compassion and kindness. By telling the parable of the father and his two sons (Luke 15), Jesus shows us that God's love does not depend on the good we can do; it is given unconditionally. The father loves the son who remains faithful his whole life long. And he already holds out his hands to the one who left him, while that son is still far away.

God created humankind in his image. So "you come to be in the likeness of God by acquiring goodness. Acquire a heart of mercy and kindness in order to be clothed with Christ" (Basil of Caesarea, fourth century).

God's love is not just for a moment, but for all time. By our compassion, we can be a reflection of this love. As Christians, we share with so many believers of other religions the concern to place mercy and kindness at the centre of our lives.

- Let us welcome God's love. God never closes his heart to us and God's faithful goodness is our constant safeguard, even when our faults cause us to stumble. If we have turned away from God, we should not be afraid to return and to put our trust in him; God always comes to meet us.
- We should not view prayer as a laborious search, but rather welcome it as a time to stop and breathe, when the Holy Spirit fills us with God's love and enables us to continue a life of mercy.

## Forgive again and again

*Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:12-13)*

*Peter came up to Jesus and asked him, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times." (Matthew 18:21-22)*

God's forgiveness never fails. In the course of his entire life and even on the cross, Christ forgave; he refused to condemn anyone.

To know that we have been forgiven and to forgive in our turn — this is one of the most liberating joys. It is the source of the inner peace that Christ wants to communicate to us.

The Church, the gathering of those who love Christ, is called to let herself be transformed by mercy. "When the Church listens, heals and reconciles, it becomes what it is at its most luminous — a communion of love, of compassion, of comfort, a clear reflection of the Risen Christ. Never distant, never on the defensive, freed from all harshness, it can cause the humble trusting of faith to radiate right down into our human hearts." (Brother Roger)

God's message of forgiveness cannot be used to justify evil or injustices. On the contrary, it makes us freer to recognize our faults, as well as the faults and injustices around us and in the world. It is up to us to put right whatever can be made right.

- Let us try to forgive — even seventy times seven times. If the wound is too big, we can try and go forward step by step. Before it emerges, the desire to forgive can sometimes remain overshadowed for a long time by the wrongs suffered.
- We can show that the Church is a community of mercy by being open, without discrimination, to those around us, by showing hospitality, by refraining from judging others categorically, by defending the oppressed, by forging an all-embracing and generous heart...

**Draw near to a situation of distress,  
alone or with a few others**

*If you give yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. (Isaiah 58:10)*

*If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no mercy on them, how can the love of God be in that person? (1 John 3:17)*

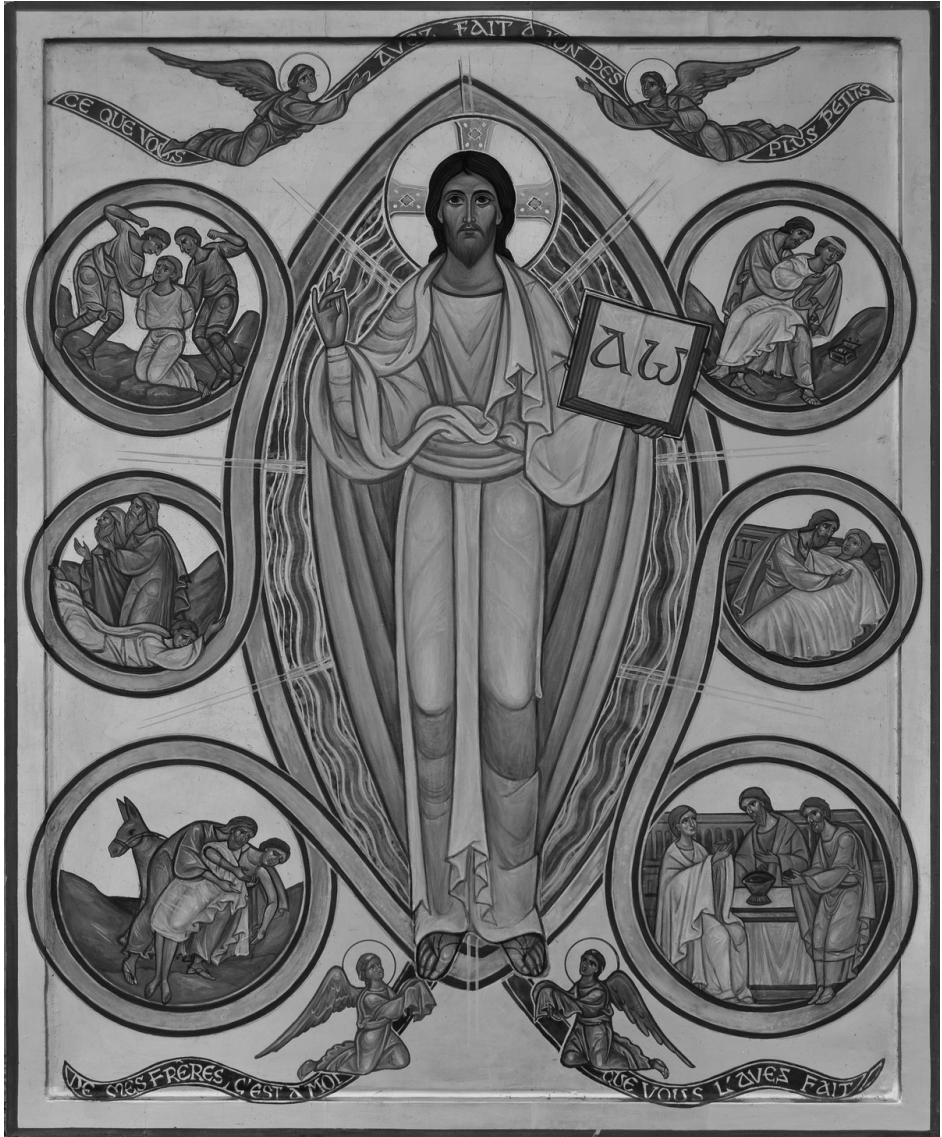
The icon of mercy shows Christ looking at us with love and telling us the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10): a man is left half-dead on the roadside; a priest and a Levite pass by and continue on their way; a foreigner, from the land of Samaria, approaches the wounded man, takes care of him and brings him to an inn.

Mercy opens our hearts to the hardship of others, to hidden forms of distress, to material poverty as well as to all other kinds of suffering: a child going through a hard time, a family in difficulty, a homeless person, a young adult who sees no meaning in his or her life, an elderly woman or man who is alone, an exile — as well as those who have no access to education, art or culture.

In the poor, it is Christ himself who hopes for our compassion and who says to us, “I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat” (Matthew 25). “Out of compassion, Christ takes upon himself the sufferings of every human being. In his goodness he mysteriously shares the suffering which is in each person until the end of the world” (Maximus the Confessor, seventh century).

When we have been wounded by trials, Christ takes care of us. His look of affection can reveal itself through someone who comes near to us, sometimes through a person who is looked down upon, like the stranger in the parable, the Samaritan.

- Let us dare to draw near, alone or with a few others, to a situation of distress around us, on our roadside. Mercy is not sentimental but demanding; it knows no limits. A law sets clear limits to a duty, whereas mercy never says, “That’s enough; I have done my duty.”



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**Icon of mercy**

*Someone asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

*(Luke 10:29-37)*

## *Fourth Proposal*

### **Extending mercy to its social dimensions**

*I am the Lord, who acts with kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.  
(Jeremiah 9:23)*

*This is what the Lord requires of you: to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)*

In the heart of God, all human beings make up a single family. So mercy extends to ever vaster dimensions.

For a worldwide solidarity to become a reality, it is indispensable to strengthen the international institutions that set rules democratically in order to ensure greater justice and to keep the peace.

The debt of poor countries is often caused by more powerful nations and corporations exploiting their resources. Even if it seems impossible for us to do anything to change this, we can remember that forgiving this debt is a way of restoring justice. In a context different from today's, the Bible reminds us: "If any of your kin become poor and are unable to support themselves, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you" (Leviticus 25:35).

Across the world, women, men and children are being forced to leave their homelands. Their plight generates in them a motivation stronger than any barriers. Rich countries must become aware that they bear a share of the responsibility for the wounds of history that have led to massive migrations, notably from Africa and the Middle East.



- It is important to realize that, even if the influx of refugees and migrants creates difficult problems, this can also be a positive opportunity. Those who knock at the door of countries richer than their own inspire these countries to live in solidarity with them. Do they not help them to gain new vitality? By tackling together the challenges presented by a wave of migrants, the countries of the European community can recover a dynamism that has subsided.
- We need to go beyond the fear of strangers and of cultural differences. Such fear is comprehensible — those who help to welcome migrants generously are sometimes totally worn out. Fear will not diminish, however, by isolating ourselves behind walls, but rather by going toward those whom we do not yet know. Instead of seeing in the stranger a threat to our standard of living or our culture, is it not urgent to welcome one another as members of one and the same human family?

## *Fifth Proposal*

### **Mercy for the whole of creation**

*Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest. (Exodus 23:12)*

*For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. (Exodus 23:10-11)*

In the language of its time, the Bible calls us to extend our compassion to the environment, to respect all living creatures, not to work the land without discernment. A Christian of Mesopotamia wrote, “A compassionate heart cannot stand to see the least evil or the least sadness in the midst of creation” (Isaac the Syrian, seventh century).

The primary victims of ecological disasters are usually the very poor. The effects of climate change are already forcing many people to leave the places where they live.

The earth belongs to God; human beings receive it as a gift. We are entrusted with an immense responsibility: to take care of the planet, not to waste its resources. The earth is limited, and human beings too need to consent to their limits.

The earth is our common home and today it is suffering. There is no room for indifference in the face of environmental catastrophes, the disappearance of entire species, the threats to biodiversity, or the massive deforestation in certain parts of the globe.

- How can we express our solidarity with the whole of creation? By making decisions that affect our daily lives, by giving serious consideration to our activities as consumers or citizens, by making a conscious choice for a simpler lifestyle. Simplifying our way of life can be a source of joy. There are people who take initiatives like fasting for the climate and for justice on the first day of every month. Taking such steps to show God's mercy for everything which is a part of our common home, the Earth, is not something optional; it is a condition for living on it in happiness.

*During the coming months, we will publish on the Taizé website and on our social networks testimonies concerning the "Proposals 2016". You can share your initiatives with us by writing to **echoes@taize.fr** and already now remain in contact with us through the following pages:*



[www.taize.fr/news](http://www.taize.fr/news)



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## **Taizé 2016**

*Throughout the year:*

Each week, from one Sunday to the next, there are meetings of young people, to go to the wellsprings of the faith, to deepen our understanding of God's mercy and to look for ways of witnessing to it by the lives we live.

*From August 28 to September 4*

A week meant for young adults between 18 and 35 years old, whether students, young professionals, volunteers or those looking for work. Sharing a similar life-situation or professional experience, they can meet and share about their future in the light of faith.

## **Bucharest 2016**

With some brothers and 150 young people from different countries, Brother Alois will go to Bucarest from April 28 to May 1 to celebrate Easter with the Orthodox Christians of Romania (in 2016 their Easter celebration is a month later than in the West).

This pilgrimage follows the visits to Istanbul (Epiphany 2013), Moscow (Easter 2011), Moscow, Minsk, Kiev and Lviv (Easter 2015).

## **Cotonou 2016**

After Johannesburg (1995), Nairobi (2008) and Kigali (2012), the fourth young adult international meeting in Africa will be held in Cotonou (Benin) from August 31 to September 4.

This new stage of the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" will bring together thousands of young people from West Africa. They will find an opportunity to support each other in hope in the future of Africa.

This gathering will also welcome participants from other parts of Africa or other countries of the world who will discover this part of the continent.

The Cotonou meeting wants to highlight the vitality, the potential of the younger generation in Africa, the values that this very young continent can share with others.

## **Riga 2016-2017**

The 39th European meeting will be held from 28 December 2016 to 1 January 2017 in Riga, in Latvia.

*For details about the different meetings, see [www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)*