

Staying in Taizé as a volunteer

MUTUAL COMMITMENTS BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS AND TAIZÉ

Introduction

Taizé is an ecumenical Christian community that welcomes young people, adults and families for weeklong meetings. The community also welcomes young people aged 18-29 who stay for a longer time as volunteers to help make the meetings possible. Such a stay is different from being in Taizé for a week. This charter describes the experience the community offers to the volunteers as well as what is expected from them. It completes the general guidelines which everyone receives on arrival¹ and which also apply to volunteers. The charter also describes the position and role of the volunteers within the wider circle of people who carry a responsibility in the running of the meetings.

Welcome of volunteers

The brothers of Taizé and the sisters of the different communities that are present in Taizé want to share with the volunteers what is most essential in the life of their communities: prayer, common life and service.

Those who stay several weeks or months do so in agreement with the brothers and sisters.² After an initial period of 6-12 weeks, those who want to prolong their stay are invited to speak about it with the brothers and the sisters in charge of the volunteers, who take the final decision.³ They can also ask for the opinion of the brother or the sister accompanying the volunteer and/or other people who carry responsibilities in the Welcome.⁴ Stays longer than three months are usually reserved for those between 20 and 29 years old.

Mutual commitments

A. PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

The brothers and sisters understand a longer stay in Taizé as a step in the search for Christ, an opportunity to understand more about the place of God in one's life, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of life. The rhythm of life in Taizé is set by the daily common prayer, three times a day. Common prayer is at the heart of the community, and therefore at the heart of the life of the volunteers.

In Taizé we believe that Scripture plays a central role in the construction of a common life. Therefore, an interest in understanding the Bible more deeply and sharing about it is essential for those who stay longer.

1 See program and map given at arrival in Taizé.

2 In order to volunteer, one needs to be free from important engagements outside Taizé (online studies or work etc.) which could hinder the full participation in the rhythm of life in Taizé.

3 A longer stay can be ended at any time, even after the initial period of discernment, either by the volunteer, or by those in charge of the volunteers if the attitude of a volunteer does not conform to what is asked of them in this charter.

4 By Welcome we mean all the meetings, in Taizé or elsewhere, organized by the Community.

Each volunteer is accompanied personally by one of the brothers or sisters.⁵ These meetings help volunteers reflect on their time in Taizé, on their faith and spiritual life, and on the next steps they will take in life. This accompaniment is not a psychological accompaniment.

Taizé⁶ commits to:

- organising Bible reflections for the volunteers each week
- providing each volunteer with personal accompaniment
- providing the possibility to spend a weekend or a week in silent retreat for those who wish

The volunteer commits to:

- taking part in the three daily common prayers
- taking part, as much as possible, in what is offered to nourish their faith and their reflection; for example, Bible introductions.

B. COMMON LIFE IN THE GROUPS AND LIFE IN TAIZÉ IN GENERAL

A longer stay is an experience of common life in a group whose members have not chosen the others.

The life of the volunteers is organised in several smaller groups or “communities”.⁷ One or more brothers and/or sisters are in charge of each group. They are mandated for this service by their communities. They accompany the common life according to the identity of their own communities; it is they who organise the material life of the groups, in a spirit of simplicity.

Common life is more than moments listed on the timetable (meals, times of sharing). It is also built up through spontaneous moments, by being present in the common room and spending time with the other volunteers of the group.

Romantic relationships or deep friendships may form between volunteers. It is important to remain available for others, because exclusive relationships do not always fit easily with common life in a group as it is proposed to volunteers in Taizé.⁸

Sexist, racist, and violent words or actions of any kind are not tolerated. This is especially important in Taizé where volunteers come from very different backgrounds, cultures and traditions.

For some, a longer stay in Taizé may be an opportunity to distance themselves from certain attitudes or habits: for instance, the consumption of alcohol and drugs, the use of social media (including instant messaging apps), as well as certain approaches to affectivity and sexuality which can be common outside of Taizé. Out of solidarity and respect, volunteers need to be considerate of others concerning these things.

Openness towards those who hold responsibility for the particular group of volunteers is important.

5 See note 7.

6 This means the brothers of the Taizé Community, the sisters of the different communities present in Taizé, employees and others who are involved in the running of the meetings on a long term basis.

7 Usually, young men and young women live in different groups. Occasionally, mixed groups are formed for a determined period. Men are accompanied by a brother, women by a sister. Those who don't identify as male or female or with their biological gender, can speak with a brother or a sister to find the best possible way for them to integrate one of the groups of volunteers. Usually this is done before arrival at Taizé.

8 At certain times of year Taizé proposes a group for couples (under 35 years old) without children. The rhythm of common life and the organisation of this group are adapted to the life of a couple and therefore can be different from what is offered to the other groups of volunteers mentioned in this charter.

Taizé commits to:

- › organising the practical and material life in the groups of volunteers
- › communicating how the common life is organised in each group
- › engaging in dialogue with volunteers in the case of material or social difficulties, with the aim of finding a solution
- › arranging activities that build the common life of each group and that of all the volunteers

The volunteer commits to:

- › taking part in the common life of the group in which they live
- › being present at moments of common life, such as meals and weekly times of sharing
- › respecting the common timetables and being punctual
- › making sure that the brother/sister in charge of their group is informed if they are ill (for example via the First Aid station), and/or if they cannot be present for the activities proposed
- › behaving and dressing in a way which is representative of the Welcome in Taizé
- › respecting the guidelines given by the brothers and sisters for the common life

C. SERVICE IN THE MEETINGS

By coming to Taizé for a longer time, volunteers make themselves available for the services that are needed for the youth meetings. They carry out different practical tasks. These tasks are organised on a weekly basis and usually spread over 7 days. The daily rhythm is intense (with the prayers, common meals, the service and other meetings) and can be demanding for some. Therefore, someone who stays longer needs to be fit enough, physically and mentally, to follow the rhythm of life in Taizé for the length of time they stay as a volunteer.⁹

Volunteers come in the first place to live and help in Taizé itself. Occasionally, some may be asked to make pastoral visits for the Community outside Taizé. Also, a visit to their family is possible during their stay. For other visits, it is always possible to speak with those in charge of the volunteers.

The coordination of the practical tasks is done by the brothers and the sisters in charge of the volunteers. By choosing to stay in Taizé, volunteers consent to receive their task and to not choose these tasks themselves.

For each area of the meetings, and for each place where volunteers help, a brother, sister or employee is in charge and carries the final responsibility. Although volunteers may be asked to take on a large measure of responsibility, they always undertake their tasks under the responsibility of someone else, whether this person is physically present or not during the work.

Taizé commits to:

- › dialoguing with each volunteer in order to take into account their possibilities and abilities
- › giving explanations of the tasks and providing sufficient training
- › being available to speak with the volunteers about their tasks, especially if difficulties arise
- › providing each volunteer with a certain amount of free time each day

The volunteer commits to:

- › making themselves available and accepting that sometimes unexpected changes in the timetable may be necessary
- › showing a personal responsibility towards the task entrusted to them
- › accepting and respect the tasks that have been given to them by those in charge of the volunteers
- › heeding those who hold a responsibility in each place of service

⁹ It is possible that because of (physical or mental) health reasons, a longer stay might not be possible or cannot be extended.

D. SAFEGUARDING

We want to do everything possible to offer a safe space which respects the diversity of each person. The volunteers share in the responsibility for keeping Taizé as safe a place as possible for all who live, work and visit.¹⁰

Taizé commits to:

- › offering training on safeguarding to all new volunteers
- › listening to and dialoguing with volunteers about questions concerning safeguarding
- › offering the possibility of speaking to a team of people from outside the community

The volunteer commits to:

- › signing and respecting the Code of Conduct for volunteers
- › following the safeguarding practices of the meetings
- › attending safeguarding training for volunteers

E. HEALTH MATTERS

The brothers and the sisters responsible for the different groups of volunteers do not have a mandate to make decisions concerning the health of volunteers. If a volunteer is ill, they should first of all inform the brother or sister in charge of their group. If they feel unable to continue the usual daily rhythm of Taizé, or if they need medical treatment or rest, they should contact the First Aid station. An established procedure for this is posted in each house where volunteers live.

After a longer stay in Taizé...

The Taizé Community is not a movement. Though it is normal that a sense of belonging develops during a longer stay, young people who spend some time as volunteers do not remain formally linked to the community. Therefore, after their departure it is important for them to take a distance from life in Taizé in order to continue their life. This distance also means leaving social media groups of the volunteers who are still in Taizé. This is important, not only for the person who leaves, but also for the volunteers who stay.

It is important that any return to Taizé after a period of volunteering is intended to participate in the youth meetings, and not to reconnect with those who are continuing their experience as volunteers. For this reason, it is requested to contact the brothers or sisters responsible for the volunteers, or the brother or sister who accompanied the person during their stay, before returning to Taizé. In general, it is advisable to allow a long period of time (about a year) to gain some distance.

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¹⁰ For more information about the Taizé Safeguarding Policy, see: <https://www.taize.fr/protection>