



## A Pilgrimage to Taizé

Mary Stallard

In July 2013 eighteen young people spent a week in the Taizé Community in Burgundy in France. The young people were from four local high schools including St Joseph's Catholic and Anglican High School and St Brigid's School, Denbigh and also from Yale College, Wrexham. They joined with young people from all over the world in the shared life of a Christian community dedicated to reconciliation. At Taizé everyone joins in with; prayer three times a day, Bible study and practical work as well as having plenty of time for fun and relaxation. It is an amazing place of welcome and hope, where singing, silence and shared food help people to grow in faith and friendship.



Listening to the responses of the young people and teachers taking part in this pilgrimage is a valuable and thought-provoking experience. Teacher, Mrs Marie Schwarz, reflects:

A week at Taizé is unlike any other week in the lives of the young people from North Wales who visited there this week. It has its challenges: the accommodation is basic, the food is very simple, they will sit in silent prayer three times a day, and the singing is in a variety of languages. It has been a privilege to watch the gentle transformation of these young people during the week. They have learned to accept the simplicity of the food as a part of the community life of Taizé. The initial hesitancy of attempting to sing an unknown chant in Russian or Spanish has turned into confident, lusty singing (in any language) worthy of their Welsh heritage. Their openness to each other and to young people from all over the world allowed a sharing and honesty which has been humbling to see. Their consideration and concern for those around them has steadily

grown during the week and they have quietly supported each other in finding ways to cope with – and later to embrace - the silences which are central to every prayer. As the week comes to its end, tents are being packed away, tearful goodbyes have taken place and I'm watching a group of our students choreographing a dance sequence to the accompaniment of their friends singing in German. A week in Taizé is unlike any other week...

The young people said:

**I enjoyed:** "Learning a bit about languages without having to do an exam in it." "I liked the prayer groups as we got to discuss our faith and beliefs." "It connects us all together and gets us closer." "It feels like Taizé is already your home."

**I gained:** "New friends, a deeper faith, more confidence and a henna tattoo." "I learned how to pray in new ways". "I learned never to take things for granted." "A stronger faith and a greater connection with God." "It's important not to sit waiting for God to act, your commitment, patience and initiative is what'll make your faith grow." "A spiritual guidance, a sense of the true importance of community."

**I was challenged by:** "The silence at first but it got easier as the week went on." "Numb legs in church!" (*we sat on the floor*) "Adjusting to the simplicity". "The amount of prayer (a little bit of prayer is okay)" "At first I found church challenging, but as the week went on it became easier and enjoyable"

**I learned:** "Respect for others", "silence is important." "I learned that the world is a small place and that everyone of us are connected." "It has been one of the best experiences of my life."



*Thanks are due to co-organiser for the trip, Tim Feak – Under 25's Officer for St Asaph Diocese. Also to St Joseph's Catholic and Anglican High School which was the lead organising school, to Mrs Marie Schwarz and to my colleagues in St Brigid's especially Mrs Louise Bollard, to Rhosnesni High School and Ms Catrin Rowlands, Ysgol Dinas Bran and the Revd Janice Jones from Yale College, Wrexham. I also want to thank the Wrexham Parochial Educational Foundation for their generous support and the Community of Taizé for all they do.*

*The Revd Mary Stallard is Anglican Chaplain at St Joseph's and Director of Faith Development, The St Giles' Centre for RE and Faith Development, Wrexham.*