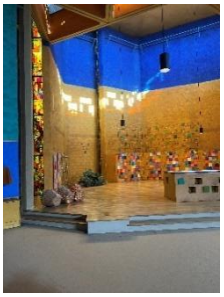


Our September 2026 visit to the Community:

Learning to Live with Questions



We were very surprised to see that our last post about visiting Taizé was as long ago as 2018, and especially to be reminded that that 2018 trip was our first visit without our tent. So much has happened since then, not least the pandemic. Our memory at that time was of the brothers continuing their witness online, with just a handful praying together in a small chapel whilst, alongside, so many heart-rending messages and prayers from all over the world flashed down the side of the screen.

How wonderful that everything is still there – as one always says, always the same and always different.

One big change has of course been the change of Prior, with Brother Alois stepping aside after years of guiding the Community after the death of Brother Roger. So, we now have Brother Matthew, an Anglican from Pudsey!

Before our trip this year, we had actually returned to Taizé in 2023, and in the Spring, when we had our full measure of nightingales singing all day and all night, and very bold, perching on and flitting between the tree branches as we walked past. A lovely visit then though our discussion group was UK only, so the joy and fascination of meeting with folk from round the world (those at any rate who had some of the English language) was rather deflated.

When Brother Jean-Marie visited Norwich in early 2025, we wondered with him whether we might have visited for the last time but were encouraged by his 'Oh, just come!'

So, this past September, off we went. Not straight there, but a few days on the way in Paris as this has been a special year for us. If you are heading that way, we can highly recommend our studio flat in Sebastien's Maison Zen on Rue de Lyon. Happily, the No 91 bus stops right outside on its way between Gare du Nord and the nearby Gare de Lyon. The city was very busy as we had inadvertently chosen the European Week of Culture, though busier still one can imagine would have been the week after; when we visited Notre-Dame, we were able to sit listening to a cantor taking the building through a long series of invocations to the Virgin Mary, possibly in preparation for Pope Leo's visit the following week.

Once again, our trip was by public transport. Not always the cheapest way but perhaps the most interesting.

Norwich to King's Cross via Ely, Eurostar St Pancras to Paris + bus 91 + SNCF to *Mâcon-Loché* TGV station. Where, to help pass the long wait before the arrival of Mobigo bus 701, a very 'different' outside waiting area! Actually, a (plastic!) lawn with lovely garden furniture, including a rocking chair on which to relax in the warm sunshine:



There, we met a young German woman, Paulina, who was excited to be paying her first visit to the Community where her friend awaited her. She had become aware of Taizé worship during a stay with the Findhorn Foundation near Forres in the north of Scotland!

Mobigo are still doing the transfer to the Community for two euros – great value!

On arrival, the Community site was showing clear signs of the scorching summer, though we were very happy to have once again been placed in El Abiodh with our own room. The outer areas of the church were closed, partly because we were in a slightly lower season, but also because the flooring was being attended to by White Van Man in the shape of Messrs Paray Lino.

As we sat waiting for our registration to open, we were joined by a tall, strapping young man, Max, who with his flowing, streaked blond locks, big back pack and long, carved wooden walking pole might have arrived straight out of *The Lord of the Rings.* He had come from Zurich and was staying at Taizé en route for the Compostela pilgrimage.

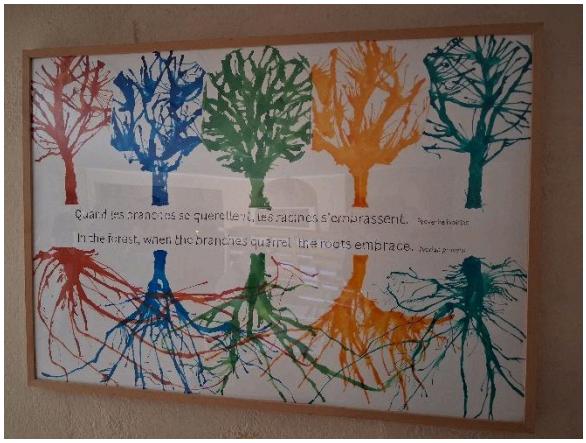
Once we had settled in, the pattern of the week was familiar, with the three daily prayers in the Church interspersed with teaching, workshops, and language groups. Brother Pedro from Puerto Rico gave the teaching in the adult camp with a lovely combination of thoughtfulness, honesty and impish humour.



The questions, all biblical, addressed through the week were: *Where are you? What are you looking for? Do you want to get well? Do you want to leave me? Who do you say I am? Why did you strike me? Do you love me?*

The Brother suggested there were no easy answers. We have to learn to live with the questions which keep returning again and again over our lives. We must continue to look for answers, though not on our own. We should search together, in silence and with Christians of other denominations, becoming one community of prayer, open to experience. Faith and doubt are inseparable. Without doubt, faith becomes illusory. Doubt purifies our faith. 'Faith is the bird that sings before dawn' (Rabindranath Tagore).

Our small language group was as interesting and instructive as has ever been. A Lutheran pastor from Denmark; a priest and retired hospital chaplain from Hanover; a couple from Holland and Bernard from Germany who had no English but joined in happily with help from the others. And, a Methodist Minister from Kuala Lumpur who had been General Secretary to the Malaysian section of the World Council of Churches. From the latter, we heard of the high level discussions about the bringing together of the different Christian denominations, especially the issue over the full sharing of communion. So, the group looked at the tension between the 'local' and 'personal' and the thorny debates at the broader level. In the office at La Morada, there was a lovely picture illustrating an old saying from Côte d'Ivoire which might be said to sum up the situation:



Quand les branches se querrelle, les racines s'embrassent.

In the forest, when the branches quarrel, the roots embrace

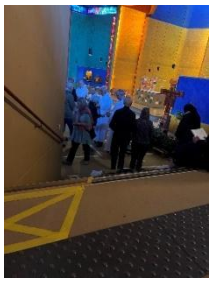
The UK visitors later met with Brother John Patrick who told us the brothers were encouraged by a uplift in visitors from the UK. A young man, Dougie, had come with his mother from Shetland and was loving his visit. He had decided to return as a 'permanent' from February till going to Uni in the autumn. So, any of you visiting in 2027 may well come across him. Also, two young women from the US and Canada but living in the UK, one in London very happy to have Lucy Winkett as her priest at St James, Piccadilly. The other had actually stayed at the Julian Centre in Norwich! She was sadly having to leave the UK to return to North America after the expiration of her visa. Our loss is their gain?

Moving to more prosaic issues, our visit in 2023 brought Steve's fourth consecutive assignment to the washrooms and toilets; and it is fair to say our visit this year found him pretty much reconciled to his fate. However, wondrous to relate, the lovely Flora from Germany instead gave us both washing up after the evening meals. Result.

As far as the sung prayers were concerned, we found that since our previous visit, the song book had been substantially revised. Our immediate thought when glancing at the new book was how they could possibly have fitted 320 chants into a book that didn't look any thicker than the previous ones. Further investigation revealed a good number of gaps, with some such as Alliluias (*sic*) and Kyries bunched at the back.

Some lovely new songs, with two particularly striking, one in French and the other in Slovenian! Getting these into English might be a bit of a challenge, especially the Slovenian one, though it sounded divine when sung late at night by the wonderful female cantor.

Also, the 'tongue and lip twisting' nature of Slovenian's stacked consonants was not the only linguistic challenge in the week. Coming up very frequently was what we know in English as *God is forgiveness* but this time always in Polish. Plus one of the Orthodox invocations of the Virgin Mary in Old Slavic. And as if that was not enough, another very frequent appearance was *Bless the Lord my soul* – in Mandarin! This was in honour of the large '5th European Chinese Pastoral Meeting' being held at the Community.



But at morning communion, *Jesus Christ bread of life* and *Let all who are thirsty come*, in English, were as uplifting as ever.

And so, with the 'Easter' celebration on Saturday night and the full Eucharist the following morning, it was time again with a heavy heart to pack up and wend our way to the bus stop. But not this time the Community's bus stop. We had been advised by an English priest who could not afford to miss her connection in Paris to pick up the bus one stop further back in Ameugny. We were doubtful but our doubts did not last long. The No 701 arrived in Ameugny from Chalon already pretty full; and at the Community there was a very long queue and a huge pile of luggage. That did not include the good number of others waiting at Massilly and Cluny. Amazingly, everyone managed to pile on.

Aside from events 'on site', we had been very pleased, in the heat of the afternoon, to take the recommended walk to the nearby farm shop, *Parfums de Terroir*, where we did justice to their delicious apricot and mirabelle sorbets. Only slightly less welcome than the Community's idea of breakfast – lovely rolls with chocolate sticks every day.



On our journey home, we had taken the bus to *Macon Ville* station, whence we squeezed into an extraordinarily packed (Sunday afternoon!) local train to Lyon, staying overnight near Part Dieu station before taking the train back to London via Lille. More expensive than via Paris and not quite as straightforward as expected. Any next time we would revert to a change in Paris!

Then to Norwich via King's Cross, once that is we had accepted that Platform 0 actually did exist, rather than being a fictional extension of Platform 9¾.

One of our best trips and once again *maybe* the last….

…but will those bells start ringing again……?

Steve & Jane