

A note from Brad about Taizé

To date we have held 3 Rhythms of the Spirit retreats and also at the April, 2015, NLC meeting a Rhythms of the Spirit day. There were about 30 people at the first Rhythms retreat in Green Lake. 35 at the second one which was also at Green Lake, and 12 at the third one at Redwood Glen south of the Bay Area. The next will be a Canonicus (ABC/Rhode Island's conference



center) the first week of August, and the final one under this grant at Green Lake again in October. Rhythms has developed a team of leaders including Rene Colson Hudson, Betty Wright-Riggins, Jeff Savage, and Jennifer Davidson.

I have created a Spiritual Directors ABC website which has provided a means of connection for spiritual directors in ABC life. We actually spent some time with ABCUSA Legal Counsel David Knipel discussing how we best avoid any indication of endorsement of individuals in the wording we used. The best testimony to its impact is the high numbers for the biennial workshop and time of connection. Rene Colson-Hudson has organized a panel presentation for the first workshop on Sunday afternoon featuring American Baptist spiritual directors, then we'll have a time of connection and encouragement for Spiritual Directors at the second workshop.

What participants are saying...

I'm still in awe of the experience I had at "Rhythms...life-changing for me."

I certainly had a profound and life altering experience at the "Rhythms of the Spirit" retreat. Thank you for excellent music and leadership.

Thanks for faithfully leading. My family and I found the last 4 days at "Rhythms of the Spirit" to be a great blessing.

Last week was pure gift of the Spirit and I am humming the tunes in my heart as I move ahead in ministry.

My pilgrimage to the Taizé Community began in an unusual place. Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey is known for its excellent choral program, brilliant faculty and the presence of world- class organists. Since I was studying music, I did not expect to experience a prayer form that would captivate my heart. Then one morning, our class was introduced to the music and prayer of Taizé.

The prayer began with singing a simple eight-bar phrase and these words — *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*. As I sang, I focused first on the words, identifying with the one who spoke them to Jesus — the thief on the cross. However, with each repetition I found myself relaxing deeper into the presence of Christ, the one to whom I sang. Occasionally, an oboe or cello would add an *obligato* to the singing. Singers began adding choral parts until all four parts wrapped around my

soul as a cloak. As I sang in that community of musicians, I prayed in a way I'd never prayed before. A few years later, I walked into the crowded sanctuary of the Church of the Reconciliation on a hill top in Burgundy, France and sang that prayer with people from 50 other nations around the world.

Recently, I took a group of young people to Taizé in August for the week-long program. 5,000 young people, age 18 – 30 attended that week. 72 languages were represented and we sang in 20 of those languages during the week.

Because Taizé's global emphasis, those praying in our weekly Taizé prayer in Denver have made a commitment to use the songbook from the community and sing in a variety of languages (including English) during our Sunday evening prayers. The English translation is always available in the book, but those who take part usually find that singing a simple phrase in another language connects them with a spiritual family around the world and takes them to a place of deep communion with God even if the words they are singing are not their primary language.

The Community



Taizé is a village in the Burgundy region of France. Roger Schütz, son of a Swiss Protestant minister, was only 25 years old when he came to Taizé from Switzerland in 1940. In the war-torn years that followed, he began sheltering Jewish refugees and praying in the village church. Others joined him and soon a small community of brothers was formed. Believing there would always be war in Europe until Christians stopped killing Christians, Roger and his

followers committed themselves to a ministry of reconciliation, a challenging and difficult task in postwar France and Germany. Slowly, one by one, brothers began making life-long commitments to communal life. Donning white robes, adopting a Benedictine style of daily life and receiving Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant brothers from many countries, Taizé has become a monastic model of ecumenism. Roger referred to this community as a "pilgrimage of trust on earth." Over the years that followed, young people from all over Europe made their way to Taizé to open themselves to this communion which gives meaning to their lives. Today, from March to November, as many as six thousand young people a week come to Taizé for the weekly meetings with the brothers. Focusing on three periods of communal prayer each day, participants delve into the meaning of their own spiritual journey, explore their faith commitments and worship with people from all over the world.

The Music and Prayer

Contemplation has been described as a "long loving gaze at what is real." Worship at Taizé is *contemplative* in its style in that it gives



the worshiper time to focus on God's presence within and without.

Much of the praying is in silence. Taizé music is composed in an *ostinato* pattern —a short, simple phrase repeated many times.

Often a scripture text and sometimes a quotation attributed to a devote person, each phrase expresses an essential reality, quickly understood by the intellect, which is then integrated slowly into one's attitudes and actions. Instrumentalists pray through their playing by adding an obligato above the communal singing. Descants — often a psalm — are also sung above the chant. One song may take as long as five minutes. In this atmosphere of simplicity and focused attention, one is free to "rest" in the presence of God. For years, many of the songs written for the Taizé community were written by French composer, Jacques Berthier. Following Berthier's death, French Jesuit priest Joseph Gelineau composed new chants for the community. Today, a small group of Taizé brothers is composing new songs for prayer. These songs are available in a collection called *Christe Lux Mundi: Music from Taizé*.

Taize and American Baptists

In May, 2015, I will lead another group of pilgrims to the community in France. This group, made up of American Baptist young adults from around the U.S., an ABC pastor from New York and others from a variety of denominations. Because of the community's emphasis on ecumenism, young people and a world-wide ministry of social justice in Christ's name, American Baptists find much in common with Taizé's ministry.

Quotes from Taize participants

"As a young pastor hungering for a deeper relationship with Christ, I visited Taizé. My week there answered my quest for a spirituality that spoke deeply to the heart and the call to justice and peacemaking. Part of the richness of the experience was worshipping and studying with folks from all over the world. We offer this pilgrimage for those who wish to explore new depths of Christ's love for them and all creation."

- A. Roy Medley, General Secretary of American Baptist Churches USA

- "One of the most incredible parts of the week I spent at Taizé was the community. When we arrived at Taizé, I felt a bit like the new kid on the first day of school in a foreign country. But despite the fact that there were people from many different countries, with many different languages (fortunately most people did speak English), with different cultures, different beliefs and denominations, I have never made friends so easily and quickly. That place was so full of peace, trust, hope, love, friendship, acceptance, simplicity, unity, and community. It was unlike any other experience I have ever had, it was unlike any other place I have ever been to. Even though I was only there a week and its half way around the world, Taizé quickly became one of my favorite places and a home away from home."

-Nora Daly, Young Adult

- "In the silence, my soul felt energized and quickened by a profound sense of two things: of Christ's love – of His for me and of mine for Him. And I truly felt His holy presence in a different and deeper way than I usually do. I was changed by my time in Taizé ...I know I was. When I returned, I knew that what I wanted more than anything was

just “to be still in the presence of God.” That is the “Wow” of prayer: that comes after you finally allow yourself to unpack all your ‘stuff’ and to simply sit silently in the presence of God.”

-Rev. Ruth Merriam

- “Taizé was an amazing experience! Taking time to slow down and listen is such a rarity in our world and Taizé is the perfect place to step out and make it happen. There is such a feeling of peace and community; to share the experience with people from all over the world just enhances it all. Traveling on a pilgrimage with Brad is worshipful, peaceful, educational, refreshing—every follower of Jesus should make time to share in such a journey!”

-Corey Hughes, Young Adult

“Refreshing. Hopeful. Rededicated. Awed. Joyful. Renewed. Full. All of these words can easily and simply describe a week at Taizé to someone who has not been. Spending a week at Taizé and fully immersing in a wholly unique, peaceful, community lifestyle allowed me to reconnect with the Spirit and grow immensely.”

-Bridget Holmstrom, Young Adult

Rev. Brad Berglund
Lent, 2015

(Portions adapted from the book *Reinventing Sunday* by Brad Berglund, © Judson Press)