

Sharing What We Have

Letting ourselves be penetrated by the thirst for God does not detach us from the concerns of the world around us. On the contrary, this thirst leads us to do all we can so that others may enjoy the benefits of creation and find joy in living. (Brother Alois, *Letter from China*)

Christa and Samir (Switzerland) spent nine months in Cairo last year.

One of the projects of our Anglican parish was to visit foreign prisoners in an Egyptian prison, who had no relatives or friends to take care of them. We joined the team that visited them once a week. The prisoners taught one another different crafts and made, for instance, handbags and wallets with glass pearls. Our team procured the necessary material for them and sold the finished products. With the money they earned in this way, the prisoners could take care of their daily needs—toothpaste, soap, food and clothing. The team did the shopping for them and brought these purchases to them. If one of the prisoners needed something but had no money, the funds we collected could also be used for him.

The purpose of our visits was also to get to know the prisoners. They told us how things were going with them and their concerns, and we told them about our life. We were struck by how the prisoners were able to come to terms with their daily life and how much they were rooted in their faith. At the end of each visit, we stood in a circle with the prisoners, held hands, sang a song of blessing and the pastor said a prayer. It was always a very moving moment. Back in Switzerland, we are still in touch with some of the prisoners.

Scientific research, artistic expression, political, trade-union or social commitments can be a way of serving God.

Alexander (Sweden), 17 years old, is active in his church as part of a group preparing for confirmation. He is also a volunteer for Swedish search and rescue at sea.

I am working with distressed people in the nearby coast and sometimes even further out on the open sea. It's an amazing feeling helping people who are in trouble; it can be anything between sickness, damaged boats or saving the environment. A lot of the time we do practical exercises to keep in shape, and we always hope we will never have to use any of it.

This work takes a lot of your spare time and you have a responsibility for being there if something happens. I work as a volunteer with no wages but I get something better, a smile and a thank-you. Knowing that you may have just saved a life, or something that someone really loves, is perhaps the best wages you can get, and it only takes a little time out of your life.

Sorting out our desires, accepting not to have everything, leads us not to monopolize wealth for ourselves.

TJ (USA) is spending some time in Taizé. In 2005, he helped the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

I had the opportunity to spend six months working with various groups trying to help the victims of one of the worst natural disasters in our history. In that time I witnessed God's grace and charity at work in profound and unexpected ways; whole neighborhoods shared whatever they had with each other. A memorable story was of a wealthy business owner who lost everything except his truck in the storm, which he started using to shuttle people and supplies around the city. He felt he had only started to feel alive after he lost everything and began living a life of service. When we share what we have, whether our time or our resources, we recognize that the value of life doesn't rest in our possessions, but in the relationships we forge with each other and in the spark of the divine that resides in all humanity. It is in this way we bring the gospel message of Christ to life and become instruments of God.

Learning not to have everything preserves us from isolation. Material affluence is often accompanied by a turning inwards, with a loss of real communication. It would not take much for things to be different.

Emma (Portugal) traveled in India.

Learning not to have everything is perhaps the main precondition for reaching out to others, to dialogue with them and to live together. It is an essential condition to enable us to be open to welcome all that the people we meet, who seem to have nothing, want to share with us.

Living together and cooperating with people of other cultures can cause some tension in our lives. We feel divided between the knowledge we have about the organization and functioning of our countries of origin, and the practices of the country where we are welcomed. Sometimes we would like to implement new ideas and bring change with impatient enthusiasm while being disconnected from reality, from the people we want to help. It is important to get to know the context in which we are and it is perhaps even more important to be open to listening, and involve the people we are trying to help to develop solutions relevant to them. [...] Our desire to create better living conditions will not diminish but instead will be strengthened by the trust that people will show us by sharing their lives with us. We earn this trust through perseverance in our work and the sincere interest we have in them.

It takes little to reveal the goodness present in the human heart.

Jeni and Colin (USA) spent five months in Tanzania, sent by their Lutheran parish.

We were welcomed by a family of nine to make a household of eleven people. Though Andy and Elieshi housed us, the whole community shared themselves in different ways. Metili took us to the market; Carol and Randy taught us to wash our clothes; Irene and Naema taught us African cooking; Sam and Naomi played their games with us; Glory, Masome and Beatrice gardened with us; the professors and students of the university taught us the questions that guide the church in Tanzania as it answers the question «Who do you say that I am?» while the ministers and people of the congregations we visited pointed out places where we needed to recognize God's work and gave us new words and songs of praise to tell what we saw.

Many initiatives of sharing are within our grasp.

Sylvia (Germany) speaks of her professional experience as a social-worker.

I am confronted very often with people who are going through difficult times and who are asking to be accompanied. Nevertheless, we are all asked to help people, and not only in a professional way. Maybe our friends, a family member or even someone in our parishes or at our working places, are asking for a listening ear, for encouragement, trust and so on. I have realized that offering to accompany someone means offering precious time to him or her. This time of closeness should help the other to find his or her own resources, without giving advice on an unequal level. [...] The most important thing for me was being confronted with my own helplessness while accompanying others, and learning to deal with this, either in my profession or in my private relationships.

Respect for others is a priceless blessing to prepare peace. The borders of the richest countries must become more open. Greater justice on earth is possible

Carolina (Chile) lives in Santiago, where a new stage of the pilgrimage of trust on earth is being prepared for next December.

Sharing what we have, being just and responsible in the way we live with others, is something we are convinced of, even though it costs us to live in this way. Every young person has in their hands the responsibility for awakening the hearts of many others, of being tireless cultivators of justice and truth in our country and in the world. We are encouraged to stand up and take part in the tireless work of proclaiming the Gospel, because it is important to defend the innocent, the oppressed and the poor.

An example of this is given by the young people who work with the Santiago campus ministry, and in many other places in our country. [...] Through the encounter with Christ they have discovered that they have to live their role responsibly, in an authentic service of others. These young people have the desire to change the world, and they sense that they have to take part in the building up of a Chile with greater justice and solidarity. They manage to combine their times of study and family with volunteer aid to children who are having trouble in school. In the summer, they take part in the medical missions, making use of their qualifications. And they join social and political organizations because they believe that Christians should be present in those areas so that the consistency of their life can show forth God's love.

The Gospel calls us to simplicity. Choosing simplicity opens our heart to sharing and to the joy that comes from God.

Andy (New Zealand) took part at Taizé in the workshop on the topic: "How can we remain alongside someone in difficulty?"

I have always found it difficult to know how to help others without making myself somehow superior to them. I love the idea that the solution to another's difficulties always lies within the person. It is not our job, when we accompany them, to create answers for them. But rather to be near, to help them find their own resources.

In my own life, it feels like this is also the way Christ works in me. When things are hard, he seldom changes the situation. Instead, he helps me discover that he created me with the solution already waiting within. His companionship makes me whole.

What better example when we accompany others! Instead of trying to become the hero, we empower them to find strength in themselves, keeping them our equals, free to move on, not depending on us. This is the kind of gift I want to learn to give others.

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