



L'ARCHE®
saskatoon

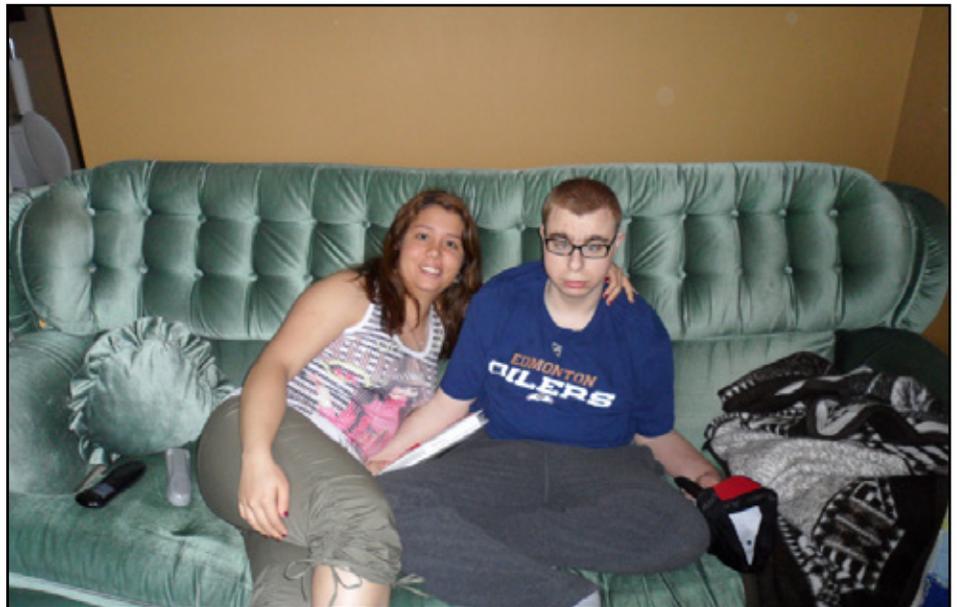
www.larchesaskatoon.org

Reflection from the Community Leader

by: Wyndham Thiessen

Bridges

December 2011



Morgana and Billy hanging out on the couch

This summer, I had the privilege of spending four weeks in Trosly, France, where the first L'Arche community began in 1964. I was there as a participant in "La Source," a formation and renewal program offered by L'Arche International, and I was joined by fifteen other participants from L'Arche communities in Canada, Switzerland, Slovenia, Ivory Coast, India, and Kenya. We heard from a number of speakers over the four weeks we were there, including Jean Vanier, and I ended up filling an entire notebook with notes! It was a rich and nourishing experience, and I am very grateful to have been able to go.

The first day that Jean spoke he told us about his personal story and the founding of L'Arche. One thing he stressed a number of times was just how "crazy" the beginning of L'Arche was, and that he really didn't know what he was doing at the start. He had a significant amount of experience both as an officer in the navy and as a professor of philosophy, but he had no background in assisting or being with people who

had intellectual disabilities. What he had was trust in God and a desire to "do something" for people who had been institutionalized, so he took a step in faith and welcomed Raphael and Philippe to live with him. His initial lack of relevant knowledge and professional experience brought real challenges, but it was also, Jean told us, at the heart of L'Arche.

While he didn't use the word, what I heard Jean saying was that L'Arche was founded by an amateur, in the root sense of the word: "amateur" comes from the Latin word "amator," meaning one who loves, and from "amare," meaning to love. An *amateur*, in this sense, does something out of love, and not as a professional. Jean founded L'Arche as an amateur. His initial decision to welcome Raphael and Philippe was rooted in his love for God, and in time, he was sustained by the friendships he developed with those who were welcomed to L'Arche. Now, of course, very quickly—immediately, in fact!—Jean had to call on the skills and advice of doctors, psychiatrists,

and other professionals to help him provide competent support to the community members with disabilities. Professional knowledge was crucially important, and they wouldn't have survived without it! But L'Arche was not born out of a desire to provide competent professional supports to adults with intellectual disabilities: it was born out of love and developed into a community of friends sharing life together.

This aspect of our founding story continues to shape L'Arche today. L'Arche Saskatoon is an agency that provides competent professional supports to adults with intellectual disabilities. But at our heart, we are, as our Identity Statement says, a community of "people, with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life together." Our assistants are professionals in their roles as caregivers, but more importantly, we are all—all of us, regardless of our abilities or disabilities—a collection of amateurs: people working together to build a community founded on love.

PILGRIMS TOGETHER

This past September, almost 300 members from the seven L'Arche communities in Western Canada took part in a regional pilgrimage together. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet people from different communities and to deepen in our journey of faith together. New friendships were made, old friendships were invigorated, and we all left with a stronger sense of belonging to the Region of Western Canada.



From very early on in the history of L'Arche, communities have made pilgrimages to places such as Lourdes, Fatima, Rome, and Canterbury. Normally, pilgrimages start at one location and end at another, and pilgrims walk to the destination. However, this traditional type of pilgrimage would have limited who could participate, so our pilgrimage was different. It took place in three different cities, beginning in Calgary on September 13th, continuing in Vancouver, and finishing in Winnipeg on the 24th. In each location, the assembled pilgrims were led by Hazel Bradley and Richard Keagan-Bull, two community members from L'Arche Lambeth in the UK, who shared stories and organized colourful and creative dramas. Each stage of the pilgrimage also involved a walk to a special location, culminating in the washing of feet liturgy.

Five community members from L'Arche Saskatoon took part in the Calgary leg of the pilgrimage, and nine participated in the final stage in Winnipeg. As we are the youngest community in our region—we are coming up to our fourth birthday in February—it was a wonderful opportunity for us to grow in our understanding of L'Arche and to deepen our relationships with other communities who are on this same journey with us.



In July we spent a week of community holidays in and around Saskatoon, and we were joined at different times by holiday groups from Lethbridge, Edmonton, and Winnipeg. On July 26th, we all got together for a BBQ at Christopher House.

L'Arche Identity Statement

We are people with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life in communities belonging to an international federation.

Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together.

We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognise our need of one another.

L'ARCHE SASKATOON'S NEW BOARD CHAIR

In October of this year I began the humbling service of working with an exceptional team and chairing the board of directors for L'Arche Saskatoon. Allan Hjelte sat as the previous chair and carried out this task with great commitment and zeal, and I'm very thankful that he continues to be a dedicated member of the board. L'Arche as a philosophy or outlook on human nature has become a thread that has transformed my heart and mind by being continuously awakened to the substantial gift each human being calls us to realize: to know and to love. L'Arche is a call to walk with all people in community acknowledging that each person brings meaning and joy to the lives of each of us. Living as an assistant for two summers in L'Arche Edmonton and acting as a board member for the past year, I've come to realize that L'Arche is a school of beauty in humanity that continues to energize and rededicate me to this call to live out L'Arche in different facets. I look forward to coming to know the community further and to participate in the active outreach and the many exciting up and coming events through which L'Arche communicates its message.

Shalom,

Myron Rogal

NEW WEBSITE ON FRIENDSHIP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

On November 2nd, 2011, L'Arche Canada launched an innovative, accessible and comprehensive online resource for young people with an intellectual disability, their families, teachers and others who support them. Visit iBelong.ca

MEET ALYSON BOURASSA



Alyson Bourassa was born in Estevan, Saskatchewan forty years ago on April 17, 1971. She has five sisters and one brother. Her mother and father are no longer living, so when Alyson goes to visit her family, it is to visit her sisters or brother. She loves to travel, especially to be with her sister in Deer Lake, Manitoba. Alyson works in the sewing department at the Saskatchewan Abilities Council where she has many good friends. Her favourite food is spaghetti—though she always enjoys the pizza suppers served at the monthly Friends of L'Arche Gatherings.

Alyson is an enthusiastic, long-time member of the Friends of L'Arche community. She attends every monthly meeting where she dearly loves to use the microphone to announce special events and celebrations in her life, her family and in her group home. Alyson really cares for her friends and those she lives with—Evelyn, Marilyn and Margaret.



This year, Christopher house welcomed a new core member, Billy. He is a big fan of the Riders, and loves horses—as you can see



Shelton and Amy take part in the pilgrimage in Winnipeg

WAYS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN L'ARCHE SASKATOON

- Attend a Friends of L'Arche Gathering (once a month).
- Come to a Prayer Night (Wednesday evenings).
- Become a prayer partner for L'Arche Saskatoon.
- Volunteer to work on a L'Arche Committee: Gatherings, Communications, Newsletter, House and Garden, Development and Fundraising, Finance, Special Events Planning (coffeehouse, garage sale).
- Assist with ongoing financial support for the special programs of L'Arche. Many thanks, if you have already donated -- and please continue to keep L'Arche Saskatoon on your list of worthy charities to support.
- Donate goods or services.
- Learn more about Jean Vanier and L'Arche around the world by reading books by and about Jean Vanier, Henri Nouwen, Sue Mosteller and others.
- Check out: L'Arche Canada: www.larche.ca; L'Arche International: www.larche.org; L'Arche Saskatoon: www.larchesaskatoon.org.
- Add your e-mail address to our Friends of L'Arche e-mail list to receive notices of events and copies of the newsletter by e-mail. (Your e-mail information is only for the use of L'Arche Saskatoon and will not be shared with anyone else.) Send your request to: wthiessen@larchesaskatoon.org.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE FINANCIALLY

By cheque to:

L'Arche Saskatoon
c/o Wyndham Thiessen
P.O. Box 23006
Saskatoon, SK S7J 5H3

- You will receive a charitable receipt for income tax purposes. Be sure to include your full name and mailing address so we can prepare the receipt.

For more information or to be removed from our newsletter mailing list, please send a message to Wyndham Thiessen, Community Leader, at: wthiessen@larchesaskatoon.org or by phone at (306) 262-7243.

About L'Arche Saskatoon Community

L'Arche Saskatoon is one of 29 L'Arche communities across Canada. At the present time we have one home, Christopher House, and an extended community called Friends of L'Arche, which has a monthly Gathering. Ecumenical prayer nights are held weekly at Christopher House, and our Collective Kitchen members meet one Sunday a month. In these and other settings, we are working to build community and strengthen friendships as we live, work, play and pray together.

About L'Arche Saskatoon Inc.

- We are a non-profit organization and a registered charity (#86345-4872 RR0001), able to provide charitable receipts for tax purposes.
- We have an Executive Director/Community Leader (Wyndham Thiessen) and a volunteer board of directors.
- We receive core funding support from the Government of Saskatchewan for the operation of Christopher House and we rely on donations from individuals and groups to cover additional expenses and special programs.
- Financial contributions are received with gratitude and used with great care to support our mission and our work.