



Newsletter

Fall 2009

Reflection from the Community Leader



Candace, Melanie, Eddie and Wyndham make some music

In early November of this year, I had the privilege of attending the L'Arche National Assembly in Montreal. The Assembly is held every four years, and each of the 28 L'Arche communities in Canada is able to send four delegates. There was a lot of formal business to accomplish at the Assembly. Reports were delivered, and votes were held—votes to change national bylaws, and to approve our new national mandate and our new national leadership, among other things. But the best part of the event for me was not so much the business side of things—as important as all of that was—but rather having the opportunity to spend a few days with other L'Arche people. We sang and we ate, we talked and we prayed, and we were all together for a few wonderful days.

To my mind, this is what L'Arche is fundamentally about: people being together. The L'Arche Identity Statement puts it this way: “We are people, with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life together in communities belonging to an international federation.” Of course it is true that in L'Arche, as the Identity Statement says, some of us have

intellectual disabilities. In fact, there are all sorts of things that distinguish us: different abilities, disabilities, cultures, languages, faith backgrounds—and the list goes on. But at the heart of it, beyond all of our differences, we are simply people sharing life together, building relationships with one another, maybe even being friends with each other. Cody, one of our residents at Christopher House, recently described L'Arche in this way: L'Arche, he said, is about “friends helping friends”.

As I describe L'Arche in this way, it might sound simple—it's just people being together!—but of course the reality is not so simple or straightforward. Trying to live authentic relationships with other people on a day-to-day basis is challenging. There can be strains, and misunderstandings, and conflicts, as we all know. But when different people commit to building relationships with each other, through all of the difficulties, good things can happen. People can grow. Wounds can heal. Seeds of hope are planted.

As I write this, Advent is just around the corner. It's time to prepare my heart for the coming of Jesus, born in a stable

in Bethlehem. If I keep my mind's eye focused on the manger, it looks like a simple scene: there's just a baby, with his loving parents around him. But of course, there was so much more going on! The shepherds were on the way, as were the magi. Herod would soon put all of their lives in danger. And Jesus came in the middle of a story that was already well begun: he was the long-expected Saviour of a people, and the future hope of many more.

This Advent season, may we find a way to be touched by the simple, but profound, truths that are sometimes obscured by the challenges and busyness of our daily lives. Today, in L'Arche, I give thanks for the simple truth that relationships can be a source of hope and healing. Today, as I consider the Christmas story, I give thanks for the simple truth that Love came down to be born in a stable.

May you, and those with whom you share your life, experience the good things of Christmas this year.

Wyndham Thiessen
L'Arche Saskatoon
Community Leader

Shirley: “At every Gathering, I'm reminded of those gifts of friendship that matter so much when people are together—especially acceptance. My favorite Gatherings are the ones in March when we bring soup and buns and have a fundraiser for L'Arche Brazil. Fundraising for our sister L'Arche community brings us all closer as the Friends of L'Arche.”

From Jean Vanier's Letter to the Communities of L'Arche

Sept. 2009 (an excerpt)

L'Arche is a school of love where we learn to love others who are different. This requires each person to grow in humility and to work on themselves. It means learning to see each person as somebody in whom God dwells, a person from whom we can receive gifts and who can help us to grow in love.

.....

[There is a] need for what I call "intermediate communities", where very different people with vulnerable and humble hearts can meet as human beings and as seekers of God, justice, and peace. At the root of these meetings is humility, which implies a loss of fixed ideas and certitudes and from our need to show that we are superior, an elite. One day someone asked Martin Luther King if there would always be groups who believed themselves to be an elite and who despised other groups. "Yes", replied Martin Luther King, "unless we all become aware of what is wounded within each of us, of our fears, our underlying handicaps and inner darkness." The question then is how to grow in humility and see all that is from God in other people. What transformation must we undergo and how? Is this not the issue at the very heart of L'Arche?

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.

CHRISTOPHER HOUSE

Christopher House, the first L'Arche home in Saskatoon, is now into its second year of operation and is developing into a lively and welcoming household. Core members and assistants at the present time are Laurie, Laura, Cody, Carina, Lindsay, Oleksandr (Sasha) and Andrea -- with additional casual assistants, friends and volunteers who come to help with meals and activities from time to time.

A Reflection by Laurie

I cannot carry a tune, and my friend Lindsay doesn't speak. Despite being musically challenged, I love to sing. Out loud. A lot. One day I was helping Lindsay pick out her clothes for the day, and we were having a bit of trouble deciding what to wear. So, as I often do when Lindsay and I are hanging out, I sat on the floor in front of her

while I waited for her to make a decision, and I began to sing. After I had finished a couple of songs, I started to talk with Lindsay about her choice of clothes again. She made a hand gesture indicating that she wanted more. I had a sense that she was not requesting more clothing options, but I also couldn't believe that she wanted more "singing time with Laurie." Nevertheless, I started into another song, and when I finished, Lindsay again signed for more. I sang to Lindsay for nearly an hour before she felt the concert was over and stopped asking for encore performances. Thanks for listening to me Lindsay even though I am often off key. I hope that I too will listen to you, even when I find it hard to hear.

Laurie Carnduff
L'Arche Christopher House Assistant



Laura and Laurie at Folk Fest

Stuart: "I like to meet my friends and make new friends at the Gatherings. I love the pizza and salads, and especially Mrs. Z's cupcakes. . . . I really enjoy all the Gatherings, and especially the ones the students do at St. Thomas More College and at Holy Cross High School. My visit to Noah House with my mom at L'Arche Edmonton was very special for me."

Quest for a Name

We are hoping to find a special name for our newsletter -- a word or phrase that expresses something of the purpose and nature of this publication (to provide information about L'Arche Saskatoon and its various activities -- and to invite involvement and support from individuals and groups in the larger community).

You are invited to do some brainstorming and then send in your ideas -- lots of them if you wish -- and then the communications committee will look at all the submissions and choose which one they think will work well. Name suggestions are to be submitted to MargaretSanche: (margaret.sanche@usask.ca) by January 15, 2010 and then, when we prepare our newsletter #2, it will have a new name.

Charlotte: "I like everything about the Friends of L'Arche Gatherings: visiting, meeting new people, learning about peoples' backgrounds. . . . I enjoy the Christmas Gatherings at Holy Cross most. We have everything there: dancing, acting, food, fun, and gifts!"



Charlotte at the June Friends of L'Arche Gathering

L'Arche Mission Statement

To make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships.

To foster an environment in our communities that is inspired by the core values of our founding story and responds to the changing needs of our members.

To engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society.

Clarke: "I like the food, the singing, my friends—everything! It is hard to pick one Gathering as my favorite—though the washing of the feet at the Easter season Gathering is one of the best."

TALENT NIGHT AT THE FRIENDS OF L'ARCHE GATHERING

At the November Friends of L'Arche Gathering we held a talent night. After the sharing of pizza and salad and cupcakes and oranges, it was time to get ready for the show. Anyone who wished to do so could sign up to sing a song, play an instrument alone or with others, tell a joke, read a story or a poem, or whatever. Charlotte shared a story with us that she had written.

The Christian Butterfly Story *By Charlotte T.*

My wish for everyone on this world is love each other as you are.

I like everything in the Bible but this part of it always touched my heart, Psalm 22: It was you who brought me safely through birth, and when I was a baby, you kept me safe. I have relied on you since the day I was born, and you have always been my God.

Be glad what you have in this world, big things and small things.

Don't be someone famous or someone in the magazines, be glad to be you.

Be glad to be you because God made you so special on this world, he has a plan for everyone on this falling world.

Thank you, Charlotte, for this beautiful story -- and thanks to all who shared their talents with us at the November Gathering!



WAYS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN L'ARCHE SASKATOON COMMUNITY

- Attend a Friends of L'Arche Gathering (once a month).
- Come to a Prayer Night (Wednesday evenings).
- Come to the L'Arche Crafts Group on a Sunday afternoon (once a month).
- 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. Donations can be one-time, once-a-month, once-a-year, a five-year pledge or whatever suits you best. 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 the L'Arche websites: 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

For more information, contact Community Leader
Wyndham Thiessen at 262-2743.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE FINANCIALLY

By cheque(s) 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.

About L'Arche Saskatoon Community

L'Arche Saskatoon is the newest L'Arche community in Canada, one of 28 across the country. At the present time we have one home, Christopher House, and an extended community called Friends of L'Arche, which has a monthly Gathering. We hold weekly prayer nights at Christopher House, and our craft group meets Sunday afternoons once 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 Community Living Division of 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.