



MARCH 2015



BUILDING BLOCKS NEWS

OUR VISION ~ Places of belonging in Newfoundland and Labrador where adults with intellectual disabilities and others live fulfilling lives.

OUR MISSION ~ Working together with adults who have intellectual disabilities, our mission is to create and sustain L'Arche homes and programs in Newfoundland and Labrador; and to educate others about the value and contributions of people with intellectual disabilities.



BUILDING COMMUNITY BY GATHERING TOGETHER

Thoughts on watching "Love and Belonging"

On February 22, 2015 a group from Cornerstone Housing, myself included, gathered to watch "Love and Belonging," a powerful 45 minute film which explores the beginnings and philosophy of L'Arche.

Early in the film Jean Vanier reminisces about how he began in 1964 creating a community that would be the seed from which L'Arche would grow. He began, he said, with a small irreversible act, not quite realizing what it was he was doing; except that he knew it was about justice and truth and he knew it felt right.

A small pebble is thrown and the ripples flow out from that impact. A single candle glowing in the darkness. The voice of one crying in the wilderness. All of these symbols came to me as I listened to Jean Vanier speaking. It is like a balm for the soul in the midst of the pervasive violence of our times where there is such blatant disregard for human life to hear a man proclaiming that each person is precious and important and valuable. It is an awakening for me personally. As the mother of a handicapped son, I have always loved him but I

have also seen him as a heavy burden and a life-changing responsibility. Now here is this man saying that my son is precious and he has gifts that he can offer the world and it makes me see my son from a whole new perspective. Also there is some hope that he can have a life separate from me with people who also feel that he is "precious." It is a vision and a philosophy that touches my soul deeply and affects all my relationships.

At its most basic level L'Arche is founded on that premise and its corollary that each person must be treated as such. It is an entirely new way of thinking about the mentally and physically handicapped. L'Arche homes are communities to which they can belong and which belong to them. There they live with assistants who have been trained to be with them in mutually beneficial relationships and who through touch and laughter and music and daily routine can assure each core member of his "preciousness." In the process, it seems, the assistants also find out something about their own worth. "You are not everything, but you are something" was how one of the assistants put it. The idea of "community" is integral to L'Arche. According to Vanier, "People don't get lost if there are enough people to hold their hands." Yet, he concedes, community is not always about harmony. It is rather about welcoming differences and learning to live with difference. Vanier said that his own life has been a gradual process of learning about himself and his limitations and about how to love.

The message of Jean Vanier and of L'Arche is a vision for all of us. We all have something to give to make this a better world. We can all do good every day. We can all make a difference. We can all light our little candles. I recommend this film, "Love and Belonging" without reservation to anyone interested in finding a better way not just for handicapped people but for all of humanity.

Lorraine Angelopoulos



NEWS FROM THE BOARD

Strategic Planning was on the agenda the weekend of January 9 and 10 when the Board met at Rotary Sunshine Park under the guidance of Jenn Power, L'Arche Atlantic Regional Leader and John O'Donnell, L'Arche Canada Public and Media Relations Director. We developed both vision and mission statements as well as produced an initial action plan aptly titled "From Vision to Action." Another significant result of our productive weekend was identifying the committees needed to help us work towards fulfilling our mandate.

~ We Welcome New Committee Members ~
To express your interest in participating on a committee, please contact the person(s) listed or come to the Committee Fair at our April Gathering.

Executive Committee – Directing the activities of the Board; cultivating relations with government
 Chair contact: Evelyn 722-3786

Finance & Audit Committee – Establishing the budget; managing the finances of the Society.
 Chair contact: Mel 722-3786

Fundraising Committee – Attracting donors; writing and submitting grant proposals; raising money through various activities; attracting and cultivating relations with donors
 Chair contact: Lewis 738-3681

Outreach & Education Committee – Connecting with the civic community; developing or acquiring public and media relations resources
 Co-Chairs contact: David 753-3559 or Brian 786-1808

Community - Building Committee – Overseeing the Monthly Gatherings, Regular Formational Meetings, Newsletter, Member Relations, Special Events, and Spiritual Life of the Community

Gatherings Sub-Committee – Planning the Monthly Gatherings

Newsletter Sub-Committee – Preparing and publishing the Newsletter

Co-Chairs contact: Peter 747-1107 or Don 754-0129

L'Arche Liaison Committee – Cultivating connections with L'Arche communities and personnel
 Chair contact: Evelyn 722-3786

Nomination Committee – Ensuring the health of the board by nominating new members each year
 Chair contact: Don 754-0129



THANK YOU, JANE

Jane Pippy has been with us from the beginning. Her commitment and faithful support, her wisdom and vision, are valued and appreciated. We respect that Jane has decided the time has come for her to step off the Board but we look forward to her continued involvement with us, and to the day when she shares with us the joy of celebrating our first L'Arche home in NL. Thank you, Jane, for your ongoing service to Cornerstone Housing Society.



~ CELEBRATING 3 YEARS ~

On March 15 we gathered at Rotary Sunshine Park to celebrate the 3rd anniversary of Cornerstone Housing Society.



Core member Mark Andrews with his mother Marilyn lighting the celebration candle to open our 3rd Anniversary gathering.

Eight of the nine people who were at our first meeting in 2012 at Sobey's Merry Meeting Community Room were there to celebrate, along with many others who have joined us on the journey. Those founding members include Beverly Ann White, Jane Pippy, Lorraine Snow, Petra Sunner, Marie and Don Rowe, Evelyn and Mel Friesen. Supporter Joan King has since moved across the pond to the U.K.



CONGRATULATIONS

Clotilde Raydon on placing first in your class at the Kiwanis Music Festival with your piano rendition of Claude Debussy's "Suite Bergamasque."



CALLED TO FOSTER COMMUNITY, MADE TO FEEL WE BELONG

The gentle and powerful message of Jean Vanier in the 50th Anniversary of L'Arche Communities video, "Love and Belonging," is that at the core is community. The message for healthy communities is that "diversity" within community is essential.

A common view amongst many sectors of our society is that groups need to be homogeneous such as groups for just one race, for just one religion or one denomination within one religion, etc. This may be referred to as dualistic thinking, creating an "us" and "them" perspective, instead of an "all of us" perspective, a humanity perspective, or even a creation perspective. After all Jean Vanier says in "Love and Belonging," that everyone in community is "precious." This surely fosters the "all of us" together perspective, regardless of race, culture, creed, or degrees of abilities.

The viewing of "Love and Belonging" on February 22nd at West End Baptist Church, St. John's, was very well attended and there was the generation of wonderful energy and fellowship. This was the goal for the event and the feedback seemed to indicate that this goal was realized. Community by one definition is "a group of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting with each other." In our case we gathered as a group of interdependent people brought together with the goal to view, reflect upon, and dialogue about the video, "Love and Belonging."

The word, "interdependent," implies a sense of mutuality that has the potential to break down barriers of "us" and "them," that separate people. Jean Vanier reinforced this concept when he said that unity comes when we learn to live difference, i.e. "Community is not the place of security, community is necessarily the place where there can be divisiveness, because community is about welcoming difference."

It is with all of this in mind that Cornerstone Housing, a soon to be L'Arche Community, strives to live and foster interdependence and mutuality in all our gatherings. This commitment is supported in our Vision Statement, which says, "Places of **belonging** in Newfoundland and Labrador where adults with intellectual disabilities and others live fulfilling lives."

Peter Barnes
Co-Chair Community-Building Committee



L'ARCHE IN THE NEWS

Thanks to Sister Diane Smyth for bringing our attention to two articles highlighting the work of L'Arche in the March 2015 UK Journal "The Tablet". We are sharing these articles in print as extra pages added to this newsletter.



L'ARCHE OTTAWA & CORNERSTONE TO MEET VIA SKYPE

Core Members, Family, Friends, and Interested Others are invited to our April Gathering to foster community building and greater understanding of the L'Arche model for persons with intellectual disabilities.

An opening reflection based on a L'Arche related book or video will be followed by an interactive meeting with people from L'Arche Ottawa via Skype. We will hear from several Core Members along with Assistants and a Leader about life in their L'Arche homes in Ottawa. People in St. John's will have an opportunity to ask questions and speak about the experience of growing a L'Arche Community.

Our April gathering will also feature a Committee Fair with representatives of the various Committees, along with Core Members from Cornerstone, offering information on their work and inviting anyone interested to become involved.

You are **welcome** to join us Sunday, April 19th from 2:30-4:30 at the Salvation Army Citadel on Adams Avenue as we continue our efforts to build on the L'Arche model in Newfoundland and Labrador.



CONNECTING TO L'ARCHE

This summer, from July 5 – 12, we look forward to welcoming a vacation group of 3 Core Members and 3 Assistants from mainland communities of L'Arche Atlantic Region. This is a wonderful opportunity to forge a connection with others who live the L'Arche experience. Watch for details! We hope to provide them with a rental vehicle (van) as well as host homes for several nights. Let's give them a memorable Newfoundland welcome.



FUNDRAISING

Sincere thanks to those who participate in the on-going work of Cornerstone Housing Society with tax deductible contributions. Donations may be made directly to Cornerstone Housing Society, 209 Marine Drive, Logy Bay, NL A1K 3E2; online through Canada Helps; or via e-transfer to cornerstonehousing@nl.rogers.com,

Watch for details of our upcoming 2nd Grand Cornerstone Indoor/Outdoor Yard Sale to be held Saturday, June 13 at the Longside Club on Shaw Street, St. John's.



CORNERSTONE MEMBERSHIP

Are you a member of Cornerstone Housing Society? Has your membership expired? We welcome all who want to participate in the decision making of our Society, and remind you that according to our by-laws memberships must be valid a minimum of 30 days prior to our AGM. The membership fee is \$20 with membership application forms available on our website www.cornerstonehousingociety.ca



EASTERN HEALTH SEEKING MEMBERS FOR ETHICS COMMUNITY INTEREST GROUP

Cornerstone Members and others may wish to consider participating in Eastern Health's Ethics Community Interest Group. A March 26th press release from Eastern Health indicates Eastern Health Ethics Services is looking for individuals from the community to join the Ethics Community Interest Group to share their ideas on ethical decision-making by serving on committees, forums and discussion panels.

The Ethics Services is a comprehensive one that includes ethics education, policy review and development, as well as consultations on ethically complex issues.

Applications must be received by **April 10, 2015**. No special training or skills are required to participate. Those interested in this opportunity are asked to complete the short application available on the Eastern Health website at www.easternhealth.ca/services, under *Ethics Services*, or to contact Ethics Services directly at 709-777-8940.



BOARD ELECTIONS AT THE AGM

More detailed official notice of the Cornerstone Housing Society's 2015 Annual General Meeting, to be held on the afternoon of Sunday June 14, will be sent to all members in due course. However, one important item on the agenda of the AGM will be the election of three members for a term of three years to the Board of Directors of our Society.

The term of office of three current members of the Board (David Buckley, Mel Friesen and Jane Pippy) will be completed at the coming AGM and their positions will be up for election. So far, Jane Pippy has indicated that she will not be seeking re-election and Mel Friesen and David Buckley have indicated that they have not yet made a final decision.

Under the Society's Bylaws, and the Policies and Procedures for election of Board Members approved at last year's AGM, all persons who are members of the Society (for at least 30 days prior to the meeting) are eligible for election,

provided that they have been nominated by a member and the nomination has been seconded by another member. A Nominations Committee appointed by the Board will oversee the election process.

The Committee will receive nominations and if necessary ensure that at least a minimum number of nominations to fill the three positions are in place prior to the AGM. Nominations can also be accepted from the floor of the AGM. Election of Board Members will be made at the AGM by those present who have been members of the Society for at least 30 days.

If you are interested in being elected to the Board, wish to nominate some other member for election, or have other questions, please contact the Chair of the Nominations Committee, Don Rowe, at dfrowe47@gmail.com for further details.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR Cornerstone Upcoming Events

Sunday, April 19, 2:30 PM Salvation Army Citadel

- Community Building with L'Arche Ottawa
- Committee Fair

Sunday, May 17, BBQ @ Rotary Sunshine Park

Saturday, June 13, YARD SALE / Flea Market

Sunday, June 14, AGM @ Salvation Army Citadel

Sunday, July 5 – Sunday July 12 Vacation Group from L'Arche Atlantic Region

Cornerstone Housing Society
209 Marine Drive, Logy Bay, NL A1K 3E2
CRA Charitable Registration Number 81025 5042 RR0001
This newsletter is coming to you either because you are a member of Cornerstone Housing Society or because you indicated interest in our group. If you do not wish to receive any email communication from us, please email cornerstonehousing@nl.rogers.com with **UNSUBSCRIBE** in the subject line.

'Universal peace can only come if we develop and awaken those very human qualities, hidden under the more superficial needs for power and of winning, which lead us to welcome reality. These qualities are those linked to the heart – the capacity to love people, to respect them deeply, to live authentic relationships with others, to yearn for truth and justice in the huge family of humanity; qualities of humility, of forgiveness and of compassion for those who are weaker and in need; in short to seek the wisdom of the heart.'

Jean Vanier

Humanist, Philosopher, Theologian, Man of Letters on winning the 2015 Templeton Prize

The founder of L'Arche, Jean Vanier, says he is less surprised at being awarded this year's £1.1-million Templeton Prize than he is at the global success of his idea for a small community where the mentally disabled live side by side with those who assist them / **BY TOM HENEGHAN**

Real care in real communities

FIFTY YEARS AGO, Jean Vanier, a former Canadian naval officer and philosophy lecturer, invited two mentally disabled men to live with him as friends in Trosly-Breuil, an hour's drive north of Paris. The idea was that a small community where the mentally disabled live with the people who assist them would be far better than the grim large institutions they were kept in at the time. He called this community L'Arche.

Now L'Arche is a web of 147 such communities in 35 countries, most of them residential houses or clusters of homes but also day centres where people meet or work. Another 1,500 Faith and Light groups in 82 countries come together to support the mentally disabled and their families. Last Wednesday, Vanier, now aged 86, was named as the winner of the 2015 Templeton Prize, awarded annually to a person who has made "an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension". Speaking at his home in Trosly-Breuil last weekend, he seemed less surprised by the prize than the fact his modest project had been a success at all.

"The development of L'Arche has been quietly progressive over the years. It just happened and the strangest thing is that it worked. It was in the atmosphere of the times, with the movement after Vatican II, people talking about living in communities, the Jesus people and all that." Once he started the first L'Arche community, the implications dawned on Vanier, as he explained: "Living together, we discovered what it means to be human. It's been a gradual understanding that we do good to people but they do good to us too. We are healed and become more human."

In Vanier's eyes, this was a "complete revolution" in the way society should look at the disabled, "from saying they are a punishment from God to discovering they're a way to God". But the global expansion his movement has seen was not part of Vanier's original project.

"I could say I couldn't have imagined it one minute," he laughed when asked if he had that goal in mind. But once the first community was launched, he returned regularly to Canada to lecture about his new life and conduct retreats, and that began to attract volunteers from outside. "People came to help and then they discovered it was fun," he said. A Canadian couple went home and started L'Arche's community in Toronto in 1969. The fourth L'Arche community opened its doors in Bangalore the following year. His sister, Thérèse, founded the first British community



MEMBERS OF a L'Arche UK community celebrate the fortieth anniversary of their organisation

near Canterbury in 1974. There are now 10 communities in Britain (see page 13).

Although they are part of a large international network, each L'Arche community is a separate entity and must assure its own financing. Local authorities subsidise much or all of their work in Canada, Britain, France and other European countries. Some communities in poor countries receive donations from L'Arche members elsewhere. He said it was not up to him to decide what happens with the £1.1-million cheque he will soon get from Templeton.

"It will go to the two L'Arche associations [that manage projects] and they will allocate it," said Vanier of his prize. L'Arche started out as a clearly lay Catholic endeavour, but its expansion pushed it to reach out to other religions, explained Vanier, adding that "our second community was in Canada with Anglicans and the fourth in India with Muslims, Hindus and Christians". L'Arche also has communities in the Middle East which bring together Christians and Muslims.

Despite Vanier's Catholicism, the Vatican originally regarded L'Arche with some scepticism because of its close work with other faiths. This changed by the late 1970s, he said.

"The important thing is to love, to reveal to the disabled that they are precious," he said. "To learn to love is a long road. Christianity is the revelation that God so loved the world that he gave it his only-begotten Son. Faith is at the heart of love. It can be sectarian. But it can also open us to others."

Professional psychiatrists have tended to keep their distance from L'Arche because of

the "whiff of incense" about it, Vanier said. Also, the trend now is to help the disabled towards "individual insertion" where they can live by themselves, rather than being in a community, he explained, but added: "Freedom can become anguish. It's difficult to live in community. Sometimes it makes you climb the walls. But belonging helps you become more human."

In France, Vanier sees worrying signs of division. He mentioned several times the prospect of the anti-immigrant National Front emerging as the country's biggest political party in local elections late this month. The killings at *Charlie Hebdo* and a Paris kosher grocery store in January were another example of a dangerous polarisation, he said.

In place of stressing differences with other faiths, Muslims and non-Muslims "can come together around the poor, the suffering and the broken", he said. "We have a community in Bethlehem where we come together. There's something deeper than the antagonisms and criticism. It's not just dialogue, but meeting. It's about meeting face to face, heart to heart." Asked if Pope Francis was a light of hope in all this, Vanier's face lit up. "He's super. We're on completely the same wavelength," he declared.

Announcing his prize, the John Templeton Foundation said: "By recognising the importance of every individual, regardless of their station in life, Jean Vanier underscored how each of us has the ability not only to lift up others, but also ourselves."

Tom Heneghan is religion editor for Reuters news agency in France.

Networks of friendship

When L'Arche Preston welcomes six new adults with learning disabilities into its new cluster of shared and single flats with live-in support this summer, the project will double the size of the community. As one of four new projects in development, the Loom will be part of the significant growth and change L'Arche UK has experienced in the last five years, *writes Hazel Bradley.*

So much has changed since the first British L'Arche community was founded 40 years ago, as a Christian community open to all who share its values and mission, whatever their personal beliefs. In the UK there is no longer a need to provide homes for people who have lived most of their lives in institutions.

As a society we now encourage people towards independence to live fulfilled lives. However, we need to be conscious that lack of funding can mean insufficient support, and this can lead to heightened

risks for people with learning disabilities who remain particularly vulnerable to isolation and loneliness, and even abuse.

Often the only person they encounter on a daily basis is someone who is paid to support them. L'Arche stands for the creation of networks of relationship and friendship, believing these are what help most to keep people safe, well and happy.

The increased pressure on social welfare budgets since 2008 is still accelerating and cash-strapped local councils are responding by commissioning support by the hour, at ever reduced rates and frequencies. However, despite the challenges, L'Arche in the UK and overseas is still growing.

A significant moment for the International Federation of L'Arche was the adoption of a new identity and mission statement in 2008, which focused the communities' move away from solely offering homes and work to people with learning disabilities for life to being

outward-facing communities of faith with mutual relationships and trust in God at the heart of our journey and responsive to changing needs and circumstances.

This deepening sense of our mission and identity allows for all sorts of new models of L'Arche communities. Indeed there could be a L'Arche community with no shared homes or work projects at all, as long as there are people with and without learning disabilities regularly sharing life together by eating, praying and celebrating.

Communities in the developed economies face challenges of secularist scepticism, increased regulation and further funding cuts. However, L'Arche communities in developing economies are often faced by overwhelming financial obstacles, and often in societies where stigma is attached to all disability. Solidarity is a central tenant of L'Arche and all communities are acutely aware that the relationship is reciprocal. Jean Vanier's award of the Templeton prize this week is a fitting tribute to one form of creative response to this need to belong.

Hazel Bradley is L'Arche Jubilee international coordinator.