

Transforming Care

A catalyst for building caring communities

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TRANSFORMING
CARE

Bringing L'Arche to Buffalo

Update

We have been working over the past several months to establish a model for a L'Arche community in Western New York. Through community networking we met Pastor Heather Mabrouk of St. James UCC Church in Hamburg NY who agreed to facilitate Pizza with the Pastor, a series of meetings where we reflected on our history and our future direction. From this process we created a sustainable model for building a supportive community of faith and friendship with confidence that we are moving closer to our dream of bringing L'Arche to Buffalo. Pastor Heather has since relocated to assume a new position. Interim Pastor Jan Hubbard is enthusiastically supporting our work now.



**Contact
Information**

716-796-4037

- Our model for *Intentional Communities of Care* pairs the development of L'Arche communities in Buffalo and surrounding suburbs with faith communities that share L'Arche values and appreciate the blessings of an inclusive community. We believe that forming relationships with faith communities will strengthen engagement for persons with and without disabilities in vital social and spiritual activities.
- In May we presented our model to the congregation of St. James UCC Church. Laura Goble, *Vice National Leader / Director of Community Support & Learning* from L'Arche USA was there and encouraged us to continue working with this model.
- In July we presented to the St. James UCC Church Council and we are now officially a mission of the church. St. James is an extravagantly welcoming, inclusive congregation. We look forward to hosting events and building community with the gracious assistance of this congregation.
- We are currently working on a strategic plan to submit to L'Arche in January 2020. Once accepted by the L'Arche Federation we will be in the Project Stage and closer to realizing our goal of a L'Arche community in Buffalo.
- We are entering a “companion community” relationship with the L'Arche in Erie PA including socializing, spiritual connection and story sharing, to gain practical advice, to brainstorm together and inspire one another.

REMEMBERING JEAN VANIER



Vanier created a wildly inefficient model of compassion. We can learn a lot from it.

With the passing of Jean Vanier on May 7, the sum of the world's welcoming kindness diminished appreciably.

More than 50 years ago, Vanier sparked an unlikely movement of conscience. Shocked by the despair and loneliness he found at a psychiatric hospital outside Paris, Vanier did *not* merely adopt the cause of the intellectually disabled; he decided to buy a dilapidated house and live with Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, two people with severe intellectual disabilities. “Essentially, they wanted a friend,” Vanier said. “They were not very interested in my knowledge or my ability to do things, but rather they needed my heart and my being.”

His highly personalized model of compassion now inspires who 10,000 people who live together in more than 150 L’Arche homes around the world. Those without intellectual disabilities — known as “assistants” — spend a year or more committed to a L’Arche home and its disabled members. And the relationship can be transforming for both.

When you visit one of these L’Arche communities, you are immediately impressed by the rigor and order of the average day. Chores and work schedules are taken seriously. But so are affirming celebrations such as birthdays and rituals such as communal meals and prayer. These homes offer safety, routine and acceptance. And people with disabilities often respond by showing unsuspected aptitudes for friendship and love.

The L'Arche movement is not sectarian, but it is clearly informed by Vanier's Catholic faith. His life's work reflects a Christian anthropology — a belief in the inherent rights and dignity of every human life. Vanier identified this as “the belief in the inner beauty of each and every human being.”

In one sense, Vanier's approach to compassion is wildly inefficient. Who would design a social program that strives for a one-to-one ratio of helpers to helped? How could that type of effort possibly be scaled? But that is precisely the point. L'Arche is not a traditional social program. Its commitment to the dignity of people with intellectual disabilities is lavish, extravagant. It rejects a utilitarian cost-benefit analysis. And it certainly rejects a social Darwinism that views the vulnerable as worthless. By serving a group of human beings that others ignore or discount, Vanier made the case that no human being should be ignored or discounted.

Vanier's radical Christianity goes even a step further. Not only are the disabled inherently valuable, but they also have much to teach us. “It has been this life together that has helped me become more human,” Vanier reflected. “Those I have lived with have helped me to recognize and accept my own weaknesses and vulnerability. I no longer have to pretend I am strong or clever or better than others. I am like everybody else, with my fragilities and my gifts.”

As a teacher and writer, Vanier spoke to a broader cultural unease. In modern societies, it is not only the disabled who feel isolated, abandoned and alone. Vanier diagnosed loneliness as the great challenge of our time. “Loneliness is a feeling of being guilty,” he said. “Of what? Of existing? Of being judged? By whom? We do not know. Loneliness is a taste of death.”

The answer to loneliness is the same thing that L'Arche offers. Human beings can thrive and be happy only in small, family-size communities. And communities of this type are created only through mutual vulnerability. And that sense of vulnerability requires knowledge of our frailties. And so the happiness and belonging we need most in life begin with recognition of our own weakness.

“If we deny our weakness and the reality of death,” Vanier wrote, “if we want to be powerful and strong always, we deny a part of our being, we live an illusion. To be human is to accept who we are, this mixture of strength and weakness. To be human is to accept and love others just as they are. To be human is to be bonded together, each with our weaknesses and strengths, because we need each other. Weakness, recognized, accepted, and offered, is the heart of belonging.”

Vanier's message was so different from our typical cultural emphasis on strength and independence. It will be terribly missed. But it is carried forward by the assistants and people with disabilities at L'Arche, who have much to teach us about the universal human need for acceptance and belonging.

By
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UPCOMING EVENTS

- *Carly's Cents for Socks Christmas Collection*

We're gearing up for the Christmas Collection. Please contact us at transformcarenow@gmail.com or 796-4037 if you can help collect money in the community or purchase socks. This is meaningful volunteer work for people with individuals, so if you know anyone who would like to join our effort please give him or her our contact info.

- *Social and Spiritual Activities*

- Please see additional flyer advertising our first annual St. Nick's Dance on 12/6/19 at 7 pm at St. James UCC Church, 76 Main St. Hamburg, NY 14075.

Watch for other upcoming events to be announced soon including worship services, and art classes in conjunction with Indicator Art. Y.

- *Fund Raising*

We are preparing for our first meat raffle in Spring 2020. Details coming soon.