



L'Arche Trosly Breuil, New Year 2008

Dear friends,

At a retreat that I gave in Lithuania last October for Faith and Light groups and people who wanted to start l'Arche, there was a mother who shared very movingly about her life.

When her daughter was born with a disability she saw it as a disaster. Whenever she used public transport and people would look at her and her daughter with curiosity and sometimes malevolence she at times felt that she didn't want to live anymore. Then one day she went into a church where she saw a group of people, some of whom had disabilities, who were happy, laughing and dancing. It was a Faith and Light community. Afterwards she joined Faith and Light and what she had seen as a disaster became a blessing.

For many parents their child's disability can appear to be a disaster. For many people in our world life can appear to be a disaster. What does it take for a disaster to become a blessing? Isn't this the question that we can all ask ourselves? How can we help to build communities that can become a source of blessing for those who feel they are living a disaster?

We hear more and more about the disasters that risk affecting our earth: environmental and climatic, terrorism and wars. Apparently, these risks are increasing with the industrial development of China and India and many other countries that want to make up for lost time as regards their economy. They are going to need a lot of petrol (China is currently creating 40 new airports!) and all of this petrol is going to create more and more carbon dioxide...there is a sort of mad race for development which risks taking humanity towards the greatest crisis it has ever known... is this a disaster?



**L'Arche La Grotte,
Fribourg, Switzerland**

Hélène Elsida, a professor in economy and theology, said in a recent public conference that this crisis could be a great opportunity for humanity! This disaster could become a blessing. The race for « more »: more energy, more money, more power, more competition, more production, will, according to her, "head us straight for disaster. » The solution is not to seek "less": less production, lower salaries etc., but to find together new solutions for humanity. We don't know what these solutions will be. They will not be decided in advance by a few of the powers-that-be. They will be something totally new. They will be the fruit of a dialogue where each person will not attempt to defend their own interests but whose sole purpose will be to find what is best for humanity. Together, not through competition or struggle, but through joint dialogue and research, we will find the solutions...peaceful solutions.

And this solution will imply less speed and mobility and more interiority: less consumption and more relationships; less technology and more humanity; less dissipation and more unity; less competitiveness and more community; less individualism and more sharing and living together.



Kolkata, India

It is Christmas time, a new year is beginning. It is a time when we want to live peace. We celebrate the birth of a child, the birth of the Child. The child so weak, so vulnerable, with no possibility to defend itself, but loved and protected by its parents' love. We must listen to this child who is filled with wonder and who contemplates, who teaches us to play, to laugh, to celebrate, to dance, to relax, to love one another, to exchange gifts, to embrace one another. This child teaches us tenderness and trust, it teaches us humility. Let us build together a world of children, for children, where there is less competition and more celebration and dance. Jesus tells us that to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must become like children. He also tells us that if we welcome a child in His name it is God that we welcome. Yes children have much to teach us! Let's enter into the children's game, let's enter into the children's dance to contemplate, to love one another and pray together to our Father in Heaven.

Hélène Elsidia said: less mobility and less consumption and more relationships. I am happy to be in L'Arche in my home, to celebrate life together. I have now been in Trosly for more than 43 years. It is my place, my earth, my community, even if I have travelled a lot in my life. Of course outwardly a lot of things have changed. We live in a world that values change. There must always be something new: new machines, sometimes new partners, new..., new...we get bored with what we have. But the fundamental things in community remain: the joy of relationships which last for 20, 30, 40 years. L'Arche is a place of covenant, of faithfulness, of celebration, of life together. A place of blessing?

God is in these relationships of tenderness and faithfulness, and in the community that celebrates. God is so vulnerable, so loving, so humble in the face of our freedom. And God is ever new. God makes all things new.

Happy Christmas, Happy New Year. I delight in L'Arche and Faith and Light communities and so many other communities that place those who are different and weak at the heart. May this year be a blessed year for all of us.

I like to quote this short text from Tagore and would like it to be true for me.

But I am thankful that my lot lies with the humble who suffer and bear the burden of power, and hide their faces and stifle their sobs in the dark.

For every throb of their pain has pulsed in the secret depth of thy night, and every insult has been gathered into thy great silence. And the morrow is theirs.

O Sun, rise upon the bleeding hearts blossoming in flowers of the morning, and the torchlight revelry of pride shrunken to ashes.
(Fruit-Gathering, Rabindranath Tagore)



L'Arche Haiti

I give thanks for my life that has been blessed, I give thanks for this communion between us which gives me life and hope. I feel deeply happy in L'Arche and Faith and Light. Thank you for your Christmas cards and your best wishes, thank you for your prayers and for this communion that helps me and fills me with joy.

Pray for me that I may continue on the path that Jesus gives me to take.

Jean Vanier