

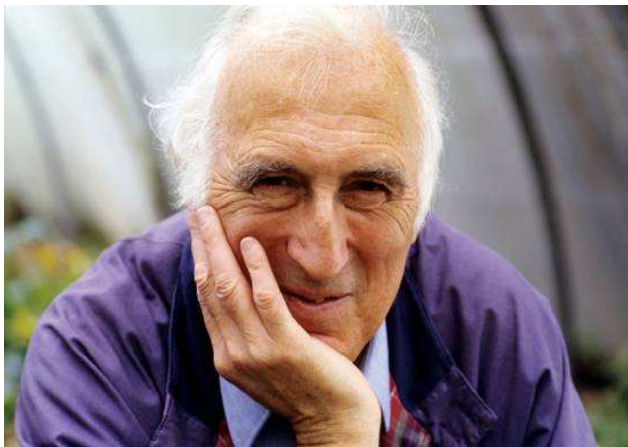


April 2010

Dear friends,

Recently I received a letter from a boy named Ted. He lives in Whitehouse, Ohio. As you may know, I still live in Trosly-Breuil, France, in the village where I and others began L'Arche in 1964. Not many notes from Whitehouse, Ohio, arrive in my postbox. Ted and his Sunday school classmates at the Community of Christ Lutheran Church wrote:

*Dear Jean Vanier: My class is very happy to know there are people like you who care for those with disabilities. We are thankful and we respect and look up to you for caring for others!*



I was humbled by the love these young people shared with me, an 81-year-old man so far removed from their own lives. And I was touched by their openness to L'Arche and to our calling to follow Jesus through friendship with persons who are most vulnerable in our world. For whether we live in Paris, Nairobi, Auckland, or Seattle, there are many people with disabilities who are in the streets, confined to institutions, or lonely. So many people yearn for a community that will help reveal their beauty and unique place in society.

Our God of tenderness wants to reveal to each of us that we are important and precious. So often, we believe we are important because we do “great” and admirable things. But our God of compassion loves us at a much deeper level: in our weaknesses, our vulnerability and our smallness. We are welcomed as we are and raised up so that we can be instruments of justice, peace and compassion.

I like to tell the story of a boy – of about the age of Ted and his friends – who had very real intellectual difficulties. One day, he said to his mother, who was in tears about his disabilities, “Don’t worry, Mommy, Jesus loves me as I am.” This boy did not need to be what others wanted him to be. He could simply be who he was. His significance, hidden to the outside

*Building communities of faith and friendship with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities*

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world, was visible and of value to God. He understood that fragility is not a barrier to the presence of God; rather, it's the very center where God resides.

Just eight years after I first welcomed Raphael and Philippe from an institution into our home in Trosly, the first L'Arche home opened in the United States. It was a small seed, planted in Erie, Pennsylvania, by a pilgrim people. We were aware of the needs in the States, and we trusted that others would, in time, join our vision to make visible the gifts of persons with intellectual disabilities.

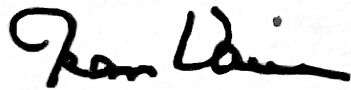
I give thanks for the growth of that little seed. And, indeed, many friends have come to water and nurture the garden of L'Arche in the U.S.! There are now 16 L'Arche communities and three emerging communities in your country.

On the whole, however, L'Arche remains relatively hidden in the U.S. Certainly, there are not many people like Ted in Ohio who know of me and of the life of our L'Arche communities. We hear that new friends in the States are moved by our life, and often ask, "So why have I never heard of L'Arche before?"

L'Arche communities are pilgrim communities. Around the world, and certainly in the United States, L'Arche is small. We are not like well-constructed monuments, glorious cathedrals, or prestigious universities. We are little homes and work programs filled with fragile but happy and prayerful people who have come together to share life in a spirit of love and of tenderness. And our life together transforms the world...one person at a time...wherever we find ourselves.

**Please consider providing your financial support to help L'Arche in the United States to grow: to grow in living our Mission and to grow in public awareness of the beauty of the sacred life that is lived each day in our communities.** And, as always, I ask for your prayers.

I give thanks for this communion between us,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jean Vanier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "V".

Jean Vanier  
Founder of L'Arche

P.S. Donations can be made to L'Arche USA at [www.larcheusa.org](http://www.larcheusa.org)