



At L'Arche, adults with and without intellectual disabilities share life and friendships in community. We welcome difference and celebrate the gifts of all people. L'Arche works toward a more human society by inspiring individuals, communities, and the world.

STATEMENT - SUMMER IN THE FOREST

L'Arche USA would like to draw attention to the independent film *Summer in the Forest*. The film, recorded in France and Bethlehem, portrays Jean Vanier's vision about living in community with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Over the past fifty years, Mr. Vanier's vision has influenced thousands of people all over the world to see men and women with intellectual disabilities as valued members of our society. How society understands and expresses that value has evolved from the time of de-institutionalization in France in the 1960s to today's disability movement in the U.S. And: Mr. Vanier's message is as significant as ever, here in the U.S. and elsewhere. L'Arche USA is grateful that the life of people with I/DD is made visible to the general public. We encourage viewers to engage in a dialogue with us. Read our own [reflections](#) and take a few minutes to think about the following questions¹:

- Whom do you see in this film?
- Whom do you not hear?
- Where do you see hope?

Let us know what you think via [email](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [twitter](#).

In brief

- Summer in the Forest will be released to the public in the U.S. on International Down Syndrome Day, Wednesday, March 21, 2018.
- This independent British film, directed by Randall Wright, is an intimate portrait of Jean Vanier and his legacy, illustrated through the lives of a number of adults with I/DD who live in L'Arche Trosly (France) and L'Arche Bethlehem (Palestinian Territories), with commentary by Jean Vanier himself.
- Jean Vanier founded L'Arche in 1964 in Trosly, France, following what he describes as a call from God, and based on the belief that authentic relationships between people with differences will reveal their mutual humanity.
- Today, the Federation has grown to 152 communities in 37 countries. While every single L'Arche community carries mutual relationships across difference at its core, how that is lived out in activities, work, meals, celebrations, etc. varies greatly from country to country and culture to culture.
- The film speaks with gentleness and patience about companionship and trust within L'Arche Trosly and Bethlehem. In the voice-over, Vanier offers a glimpse into his understanding of the human condition. Rooted in his Catholic faith, he offers parts of his story that underpinned L'Arche's founding and formation.

¹ Slightly amended from Fearless Dialogues: <http://www.fearlessdialogues.com/>

REFLECTION

Largely a film about Vanier and his early companions, *Summer in the Forest* respectfully portrays his vision of people with an intellectual disability. Mr. Vanier is given space to speak truth to his legacy and perspective, supported by the searching imagery of Patrick Duval, the cinematographer.

Summer in the Forest is a film, likely to please, touch and intrigue viewers who are unfamiliar with the lives of people with I/DD. Its strength lies in its extraordinary intimacy – both aesthetically and emotionally. The film’s close focus on the ordinary lives of people with disabilities is powerful. Too often, people with I/DD have been left out of cinematic storytelling, this film puts them at the center.

Some viewers will have encountered the capacity, need and right of people with I/DD to narrate their own stories and humanity. The portrayal of people with intellectual disabilities, in the beginning of the film, as weak, marginalized, crazy, anguished or violent could be troubling. Members of L’Arche communities in the United States do not live a hidden life in the forest. To the contrary, L’Arche offers places of belonging to confident, humorous and opinionated people with I/DD, men and women, who are valued neighbors, colleagues and friends.

We genuinely thank Randall Wright for his courage to shine a spotlight on those who are often hidden in the shadows. What a courageous endeavor! As the inheritors and guardians of Mr. Vanier’s legacy, we know of his dedication to and love of the humanity of people with I/DD. We wonder what stirs in you as you watch this film. Please take a few minutes to think about the following questions²:

- Whom do you see in this film?
- Whom do you not hear?
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L’Arche USA seeks to make known the gifts of people with I/DD

L’Arche in the U.S. welcomes difference and celebrates the gifts of all people through 17 communities, the intentional personal, spiritual and professional development of all our members, and programs that allow the general public to encounter and engage with the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities.

How we represent people with disabilities and L’Arche to the general public is critically important. L’Arche USA seeks to ensure that empowerment, inclusion and self-determination are held in balance with the need for belonging, love and friendship.

Our own mission to communicate the gifts of people with disabilities is framed by the following principles:

- L’Arche USA firmly believes in the power of L’Arche’s mission, which is to facilitate friendships between people who are different.
- Through these relationships across difference, our members experience true equality and learn to welcome the gifts of all. Stories that highlight these experiences of personal growth are powerful and allow our audience to experience their own encounter.
- In our communications, L’Arche USA seeks to provide opportunities for people with I/DD to share their perspective. We try to not speak on their behalf.
- Last but not least, we seek to provide opportunities to engage and commit in order to translate an impactful encounter into lasting change.

L’Arche USA believes that the dignity and inner life of people with I/DD is best expressed by the people themselves, as we seek to convey in L’Arche’s [As I Am series](#).

² Slightly amended from Fearless Dialogues: <http://www.fearlessdialogues.com/>
Position Paper and Reflection – Summer in the Forest 2