



H(ARK)!

A Sign of Hope in a Broken World

Winter/Spring 2011

The Impact of L'Arche

Recently I heard Nick Fellers, from the For Impact consulting group, say something that I really like. Nick said this: "I don't see the work you're doing as 'non-profit'; instead it's **'for impact.'** The heart of what you do is not about 'not making money.' What you do impacts society. You are social entrepreneurs. You are changing the world."

When Jean Vanier welcomed Raphael and Philippe in 1964 from an asylum to live with him and begin L'Arche, these three men had no idea of the impact this might have. *Jean simply wanted to do something concrete, to respond to the great cry of Raphael and Philippe to live more human lives. In so doing, Jean experienced two things: Firstly, Raphael and Philippe didn't want his 'help,' they wanted his friendship – so there was something irreversible about this. Secondly, while Jean hoped to offer them a more human life, he found himself becoming more human as they journeyed together. It was life-giving for all of them.*

From this beginning, thousands of lives have been impacted around the globe. L'Arche communities have sprung up on six continents, in forty different countries. People have engaged in living lives of inclusion, celebrating difference, and journeying together. Countless lives have been transformed as a result, as real friendships of mutual support have been built. As the gifts of people too often excluded are recognized and celebrated, societies have been impacted.

We will get a small glimpse of this as 500 people from the L'Arche family around the world gather at Agnes Scott College here in Atlanta in June 2012 (see article).

In the same way, here in Atlanta, we certainly cannot measure the life that will come as L'Arche Atlanta builds community centered around adults with intellectual disabilities. We do know that this is a gift that we've been given to live and to grow. And we know that it is growing in remarkable ways.

This is an exciting phase for us, as we begin – or launch – L'Arche Atlanta. It is also one with several challenges. From a business standpoint, some of our challenges include a long licensing period with the State before we can begin operating in our home; the fact that we'll be entirely privately funded until that process is over, in the summer of 2012; the current recession and the fact that investment in a young organization is always a risk.

While our vision is to open several homes in the next five years, and offer several types of meaningful day activities, the challenge of a young organization like ours is – as a wise guide told me recently – "to have people lock arms, say 'I believe we need this here in Atlanta,' and help it get through its initial stage." I am filled with gratitude and wonder as I see that this is exactly what is happening. Over thirty volunteers are engaged in this effort; many people are making significant financial investments in launching L'Arche Atlanta and several wonderful organizations have entered into partnerships with us.

In June 2010, we told the story of our joint venture with the Community of Hospitality, and the home this has brought to us in the Oakhurst neighborhood of Decatur. Thanks to our many friends, two-thirds of the renovation costs have been invested in this project to date, and we will begin renovations in mid May. As we plan to welcome four adults with disabilities and three young leaders in our first home, Georgia's first L'Arche community is taking shape. *(continued on p.3)*



FOLA Community Gatherings

I hope you have had a chance to attend one of our **4th Saturday Social Gatherings** for people with and without disabilities. If you haven't, you have missed a lot of fun. So far this year, we have enjoyed Bingo, Movies, Contra Dance, and lots of good food and friendship.

These events are a wonderful social time, but also give us a chance to experience the beauty of the depth of relationships we can share when we open our hearts to the different gifts that God has given to each of us. It's true that together as a group, we are made more whole which is one of the gifts that L'Arche seeks to offer the world.

Sign up on our website for the monthly email invitations, call us at 678-446-5790, or just come join us next month!

**Our next event is:
Talent Night
April 16th**

A Growing Board

2011 is off to a wonderful start. Friends of L'Arche Atlanta is blessed to have three experienced members join our board this year. We'd like to introduce you to our three newest board members:

Rev. Toni Belin Ingram is a native of Nashville, Tennessee. Pastor Toni earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia and a Master of Divinity Degree from Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. An ordained itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Pastor Toni served Saint Philip AME Church under Pastor George Moore before becoming the Pastor of Greater Smith Chapel in Atlanta in 2008. She is passionate about promoting truth, peace and justice and agrees with Ghandi's position that "there can be no way to peace; peace is the way." Pastor Toni resides in Atlanta with her husband, Raymond, and their soon-to-be-on-their-own children, Omar, Iman and Asha.



Sara Tomson-Hooper holds a Bachelor of Social Work Degree from Wartburg College and a Master of Social Work from Washington University George Warren Brown School of Social Work. She has twenty years experience in non-profit management and currently provides consulting services focused on program development and implementation; resource development and government/non-government grant writing; program evaluation; curricula design; and, staff development training. The majority of Sara's professional career has been spent working at The Salvation Army's regional, national and international offices. Sara lives in Atlanta with her husband.



Lisa White Persons moved to Atlanta in 1990 to live in the Community of Hospitality and work with homeless people at Café 458, a restaurant for homeless people in downtown Atlanta. She was drawn to community life after spending a summer at Koinonia Partners in South Georgia and later reading Jean Vanier's book, *Community and Growth*. After graduating with an M.Div. from Candler School of Theology at Emory she worked as a Hospice Chaplain and then began work at Community Friendship, Inc., a day program for people with mental illness. Lisa was very happy when the Community of Hospitality (COH) discerned that they wanted to partner with L'Arche and offered the house for the first L'Arche community. Lisa is on the Board of the COH, an active member of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church and an Associate of Green Bough House of Prayer. She lives in Decatur with her husband and two children.



Glorious Advent Concert! On December 12th an audience of 50+ fortunate folks gathered at St. John's Lutheran Church in Atlanta to enjoy a beautiful performance of Advent music by the extremely talented **Judy Aust**. Judy is the wife of **Otis** and both are ardent supporters of Friends of L'Arche Atlanta. You may recognize Otis' name from the moving testimony he gave for L'Arche in our Winter Appeal letter. While this was benefit fundraiser for FOLA, the enjoyment received by the attendees was priceless! Besides being a loving wife and mother, Judy is an operatically-trained singer and a lawyer by profession. We so appreciate the time and effort she gave out of her busy schedule to gift us with this performance. We are grateful also to **Rev. Bradley Schmeling** for the use of St. John's church.

Sue Mosteller, CSJ: Free Public Lecture on Henri Nouwen

Sue Mosteller, CSJ is a truly remarkable woman, and a dynamic speaker, whose life has been deeply enriched by her many years of sharing life with adults with developmental disabilities at L'Arche. She lives in the L'Arche Daybreak Community in Toronto, Canada and has written and lectured widely on the spirituality of L'Arche. She was a close friend of Henri Nouwen's, was made executrix of his literary estate and serves on the Board of the Henri Nouwen Society. Sue will talk about Henri Nouwen as a revered spiritual writer who embodied compassionate care in his life ministry, and service with a special focus on life in L'Arche. This presentation is a part of the Spiritual Directors International Conference in Atlanta. The conference theme is "Cultivating Compassion." In that context, Sue will explore what it means to flesh out the practical dynamics of compassion within the context of community life.

What: "Henri Nouwen: The Compassionate Life"

Lecture by Sue Mosteller, CSJ renowned author and L'Arche community member of L'Arche Daybreak in Toronto

When: April 28, 2011 at 7:45pm

Where: Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel, 210 Peachtree Street, Atlanta, Georgia, 30303

Cost: Free and open to public. Go to www.sdiworld.org for more information.

(cont'd from p.1) Another exciting venture that is taking shape for Friends of L'Arche Atlanta is a work program in Morgan County in collaboration with Camp Twin Lakes. Camp Twin Lakes is planning to begin an organic farm and they have invited us to partner with them to include adults with developmental disabilities from the local area in this venture. A feasibility study is in progress and the first part was completed in January. It's an exciting prospective partnership: We believe that this would provide a unique opportunity for adults with disabilities and that this could be a transformative experience for all involved. We will be exploring this further over the coming months.

Our monthly community events, which are in partnership with St Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, continue to be places where we have fun, celebrate the unique value of each person and build relationships of friendship and support. One favorite is our recurring contra dance evenings. A few phrases from our friends describe these well: "That dance is at the top of my list, and I've played hundreds of dances. There was so much love in the room" (Ann, from the band). And, "I truly enjoyed watching ... so many from so many different backgrounds enjoying the evening together with laughter, conversation and dancing. This evening would have been an example for the rest of the world if they could only have had an opportunity to peer through a window or magical looking glass..." (Beverly).

As we build homes, meaningful activities, and community, we're also conscious that a significant part of L'Arche's mission is helping to work towards a more human society. There is a real longing here in the metro-Atlanta area for more real communities where adults with intellectual disabilities can lead fully-engaged lives. Too many people continue to be victims of exclusion or lack true supportive communities. There are some beautiful initiatives that exist, but we need many more. And, truthfully, the need is just as great for a change in society's perceptions and self-understandings: for possibilities of discovering that our more vulnerable members are unique and beautiful individuals, deeply loved by God, who have much to bring to our human family. These realizations change society, inspire initiatives, and help us to become what we're created to be.

As our L'Arche community grows, we're all invited to be part of this movement. This is coming about through the energies and resources of so many people invested in the launching of L'Arche Atlanta. There is much more to do, and we are only getting a glimpse of what will be coming to life through this process. May we continue to grow, and build communities of inclusion and sharing gifts, where we are all, in fact, lifted up...

Gratefully,
Curt

Curt Armstrong, Executive Director

International L'Arche family to gather in Atlanta

Twice every decade, delegates from the international L'Arche family gather to celebrate, debate, deepen in our identity and mission and guide the global L'Arche movement towards the future. In June 2012, 500 members with and without intellectual disabilities from cultures as diverse as Ukraine, Japan, Haiti, Uganda and the US, will come to the campus of Agnes Scott College in Decatur. This general assembly for the International Federation of L'Arche, composed of 140 member communities in 37 countries, is a celebration of life and a sign of hope.

L'Arche is a global leader in changing the way people with intellectual disabilities can, and must be, seen from the perspective of their contributions and not as objects of charity. The gathering itself will be a symbol of inclusion and the transformation that comes as networks of long-term friendships are formed that enable each person to contribute creatively to their own society. It will also be a reminder to our societies that the disability rights movement leading towards the Americans with Disabilities Act is an ongoing call to action, both in the US and throughout the world.

Following gatherings in Assisi, Italy and Kolkata, India, people with and without a disability will advocate for - and be a sign of - their dreams in the city that has been one of the settings for America's most powerful movements for social change-- the civil rights movement. The Assembly's theme is appropriately "I have a dream." In partnership with local organizations and congregations, delegates will live a day of pilgrimage and outreach to learn about the civil rights movement and honor the philosophy of nonviolence.

Preparations have begun and the Federation is looking forward to our time together in Atlanta.

See you soon!

- Tina Boverman, Coordinator, 2012 L'Arche International General Assembly



A sign of hope in a broken world

PO Box 2359

Decatur, GA 30031

678-446-5790

(Curt Armstrong, Exec. Dir.)

info@friendsoflarcheatlanta.org

www.friendsoflarcheatlanta.org

The Mission of Friends of L'Arche Atlanta

To be a sign of hope to the greater Atlanta community by choosing to embrace the mission of L'Arche International and open a few small, family-like homes here in Atlanta to bring together people, some with developmental disabilities and some without, who choose to share their lives by living together in a faith-based community.

Board of Directors

Laura Magistro Wells, **President**

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Lisa Persons

Bobby Slotkin

Sara Tomson-Hooper

You can now donate online at our website www.friendsoflarcheatlanta.org and/or sign up to receive the email version of this newsletter!

A SIMPLE INVITATION: *This is an excerpt from Curt's sermon at Oakhurst Baptist Church on the church's Covenant Sunday in January. Read the full sermon on our website. "With God's help and with the help of my brothers and sisters in this fellowship, I make this covenant."* (from the Oakhurst Baptist Covenant Statement). This is our focus this morning. I think this is about recognizing our mutual dependency, our need for one another.

I just returned last night from a large L'Arche gathering in Jacksonville. L'Arche is a French word that means "The Ark," rhymes with "marsh", and L'Arche builds communities of faith and friendship centered around adults with developmental disabilities. And that's where I live and work, and have for nearly 15 years now.

In Jacksonville, an accountant from Toronto from the L'Arche Canada Board told the story of his first involvement with L'Arche, over 20 years ago: Dean was invited by a client to a L'Arche dance in a local church. Dean said that he was not doing well. It was the end of tax season, and he was tired, a bit depressed. He also felt shy, entering the room, not knowing anyone.

Gordy, a man with Down Syndrome, about 5' tall, saw him come in, went straight over to him, and said, "Hello, my name's Gordy. Would you like to dance?" Dean, tall, in his pin-stripe suit, was flummoxed. "I, uh... no, - uh, no thank you." And he sat down. Dean said he watched the dance, and the joy, the laughter, and the playfulness, from his seat. "I just couldn't enter in," he said. "Then I asked myself - who is the one with a disability in this situation? And I've been involved with L'Arche ever since." Dean made a choice, I think: of friendship. Of opening. Of growth on a path to joy and wholeness. Our choice to enter community is like this...

We Need Volunteers!

If you are interested in helping plan, organize or assist with any of our upcoming community events, we would greatly appreciate the help. Please email us at info@friendsoflarcheatlanta.org. In May we will begin monthly workdays to renovate our new L'Arche home. If you would like to help with those, please let us know.

We also need: people with accounting/finance backgrounds to help our finance committee; people with human resource, employment or job coaching backgrounds and those with program and non-profit experience.

