

International Meeting Ground

A Publication of L'Arche International

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Post Kolkata Syndrome

Jean-Christophe Pascal,
International coordinator.

I feel quite carried away by the momentum and the impetus generated by our General Assembly. This momentum is shared by a lot of people: not only the delegates, but also all those who were able to live a part of the experience at a distance, thanks to the Meeting Ground. I was very touched to see how many communities followed the progress of the Assembly on a daily basis. These tools also allowed a great number of isolated people, and in particular our spiritual members, to join the intense experience lived by some of us. The Web is helping us build community!

Appointments to the Board, our position regarding governance and structures, and the new commitment project are mobilising us at the present time. The new team is hard at work and implementation is now underway: that means transition and change on many fronts! Several zones have finalized their reconfiguration project, the Board has taken up the points to be worked on regarding governance, and several working groups are addressing the following priorities: the contribution of people with a handicap, unity and diversity (inculturation), commitment, and opening onto the world. These projects have been launched at a time when we are undergoing some changes in our international team, and a reorganization which requires everybody to get moving, to do things differently and often to do more!

At the end of the Assembly, we gave thanks for Hazel Bradley's commitment to the function of Events Coordinator. In addition to the Covenant retreats, the renewals and her international experience, Hazel was in charge of preparing and running the last three Assemblies at Swanwick, Assisi and Kolkata. Hazel is leaving this function, but will continue to contribute on the international level by leading various sessions. The post of Events Coordinator has evolved towards a «Training» function.



George Durner



Robert Laskowiecki

Summary

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This new international function will be taken on by George Durner, on a gradual basis as from 1st January, as he frees himself from his commitments with the French communities.

Tina Bovermann will also be leaving us at the end of the year. Tina was the first person to hold the position of Communications Director. Her personal talents and her ability to gather large groups of people around her have allowed this role to take shape, and to evolve from management of the various communication media to a real communication function. Tina has not as yet been replaced, and the various responsibilities of the function will be taken on by several people, including Arno Thijs for the Meeting Ground, and Robert Laskowiecki for the Letters from L'Arche. The process of recruiting a new Communications Director will be continued at the beginning of the year.

Millions of small investors have seen their savings disappear, the gap between rich and poor has widened dramatically, a few days ago terror struck Mumbai once again with the slaying of many innocent people. Also, the Americans have elected Barack Obama!

Our world is currently wavering between shadow and light. Yet there are signs of hope which give us new momentum: when hope conquers fear and we can suddenly start to dream again.



Ghislain du Chéné, international coordinator,
Marie-Hélène Mathieu and Jean Vanier,
founders of F&L

Over 200 delegates from Faith and Light's 1,400 communities spread over 78 countries, met in Lourdes for their General Assembly. The previous Assembly, held in Madrid, had decided to undertake significant work on the movement's identity and mission, and on its structures, and it postponed the nomination of an international

Faith and Light come together at Lourdes

■ Jean-Christophe Pascal, International coordinator.

coordinator. The past two years have been marked by discernment, by some intense discussion on the fundamentals of Faith and Light's identity, and by a complete review of governance and of the geographical organisation.

Do the language, the themes, and the process by any chance sound familiar? Have you got a slight sense of «dépjà-vu»? If so, it's hardly surprising! Because we are so close to one another. The same people, the same charisma, the same fundamental human values, the same fight against exclusion. Faith and Light has so much in common with us, including the questions they ask!

A few months ago, the two international

boards of Faith and Light and L'Arche met in Lviv, Ukraine. The time spent together helped us to recognize everything that unites us, as well as the different and complementary ways of expressing a shared charisma.

The delegates elected Henri Major, from Canada, President of the movement, and Ghislain du Chéné from France as Coordinator. The Assembly also adopted a number of directions to take over the forthcoming years.

We are fully aware, on both sides, of what unites us and what differentiates us, and also of the need to work together, to help one another, and to cooperate on the same projects.

Ivory Coast: Bouaké Community returning in waves

■ Martin I. Touré, Delegate Coordinator for West Africa

As a result of the Ouagadougou political accord signed in March 2007 by the parties (rebels and government) that have been the cause of the military-civilian conflict since September 2002, conciliation opportunities have given the country a chance to re-establish peace. Although pockets of resistance and acts of contradiction still persist here and there, the general climate is focused on reading the green lights in the peace process. The dismantling of the line of confidence and the appointment of a Prime Minister from the rebellion are some acts that bode well for the unobstructed end to the crisis. This has allowed the community to dream of returning to Bouaké.

Since returning from the General Assembly in Kolkata, the community's return to Bouaké has entered a very active phase.

On October 28, 2008 the first wave, comprised of seven long-term assistants and their family members, descended on Bouaké. The large house

was renovated and maintained by the first wave for the subsequent arrival of other community members. On November 15th, the second wave of the six least independent core members and two assistants returned. The community's minibus broke down approximately 200 km into the journey and the rest of the trip was made on public transit. Fatigue was visible on everyone's face, but they all arrived safe and sound. Glory to Our Lady of the Guard of Bonoua for guiding us! On November 17th, the third wave was ready for departure to Bouaké on public transit specially arranged by coordinators for the L'Arche mission. This wave included the most independent core members.

Yet the return of the Bouaké community was not complete and across the board. A L'Arche Bouaké house in Bonoua with a team of assistants led by Viviane Kouakou and six core members continues to bring the L'Arche mission to Bonoua at the request of the population. Could it really be any other way, if two residents (Amin and Mariam – rest



Minibus for the return to Bouaké

their souls) had been buried early on in the community's exile in Bonoua?

With all these experiences, it is logical for the community to have been deeply affected in its organization, operation and missions. The many crises of unruly behavior and defiance of authority are short, medium and long-term priorities for getting the L'Arche community spirit back on even keel. The mandates of the Board President and Community Leader should be renewed. Training of assistants, agency coordinators and support staff will be used to leverage the community to help it get back on its feet. Income-generating activities so that the community may have its own resources and mobilizing local funds are also essential to the rebuilding of the community.



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L'Arche's Web presence: Common tools for common needs

- Bernard Lebleu, Coordinator for the development of information management tools for L'Arche Canada

For years the communities in Canada had been asking for Internet tools and forums where they could privately exchange information, share experiences and discuss relevant issues. For many years L'Arche Canada invested large sums of money to pay consultants to come up with solutions to respond to these needs. After operating under this system for a number of years, we found ourselves with a series of disparate tools that quickly became technologically outdated and had very low user satisfaction.

It became evident to coordinators that a new approach was needed. The zone had to be able to control the development of web or information management projects internally. The person(s) working on these projects had to adhere to the organization's philosophy, as well as understand its unified structure and linguistic duality, as Canada is a bilingual zone. L'Arche had to be the full owner of its web tools. It was decided that a part-time developer would be hired to take care of all web projects and to be part of the communications team.

One year after its implementation, more than 300 different people have used the new Intranet tool made available by L'Arche Canada. They have published more than 650 news articles and have created close to 40 work groups within which they have exchanged a thousand documents. And as a tangible sign of the enthusiasm for this new platform, the Human Resources Coordinators in the 29 communities have unanimously agreed to adopt the new online system to manage applications for future assistants, a move that was proposed at their annual meeting in November.

Now that L'Arche Canada has taken full ownership of its web tools, there is nothing to prevent it from sharing these tools with other zones and pooling resources that meet common needs across all zones. Why not pool or consolidate technical services? Why not expand the platform developed in Canada to all zones, to facilitate the flow of information, enhance solidarity among zones and help keep expenses down?

It was this project of a common, although not unique, technical platform that we presented to the group of communications coordinators from the various zones in Wépion (Belgium) in June. The proposal seems to have brought to light some common concerns, since a consensus was established within the group to examine the feasibility of pooling skills and technical resources across all zones and defining the cooperation and financing mechanisms that would have to be put in place to make this approach a reality. A survey was recently sent to regional and zone coordinators and other responsables for their comments on the issue. The results of this survey will be submitted to the Web Working Group, which should be making its recommendations to the International Board (IB) and International Mission Council (IMC) in March 2009.

**L'Arche France annual session :
On the wings of hope**

■ Véronique Segalini,
Communications manager - L'Arche France.



L'Arche in France's 2nd conference on spirituality took place on 2 and 3 December and was entitled Corps and Community («Corps et communauté»). With humour and relevance, Christian Salenson once again

succeeded in putting our experience into words whilst demonstrating an elevation of viewpoint and depth of analysis that went straight to the participants' heart.

Following the enthusiastic response to the 1st conference on this theme in 2006, L'Arche in France deployed the means to welcome a greater number of participants this year. 180 people, most of them from communities in France but also from Northern Europe, Southern Europe and Canada, convened in Paris, together with representatives from the 'Vivre avec ...' Group.

Alternating plenary and subgroup sessions, the conference enabled participants to react in real time to what was being proposed. The first day sought to delimit the meaning of the L'Arche community's purpose : What is our founding principle? What brings us together? Though it is possible to describe the community in words, it is first and foremost something that is experienced from the inside. It is beautiful and mysterious, and what is visible is only the «tip of the iceberg». The second day was also one of profound soul-searching, and explored themes pertaining to the «corps»: correlation of the different corps that make up the community, the corps in relation to each other, the community corps, the sacramental corps. It would be pointless to try to say more, as Christian Salenson's words were profound and cannot easily be summarised. It will soon be possible to listen to the whole conference on the Internet. The text will also be available in the near future.

Surprisingly, his words seem to have created a sense of appeasement, provided an opening and a breathing space and for the participants. This anyway is what came out of the conclusions of the conference, even if Louis Pilote, coordinator for the France zone, put us straight to work, sending us back home to bear the tidings to our friends.

Verbatim

Christian singularity which is not reserved just for Christians. At L'Arche, it is for everyone.

To be of the church without necessarily belonging to a church

The community's centre of gravity is hope.

Unity is primary, radical, fundamental, seminal. Difference accounts for unity.

Receive what you are, become what you receive.

The aggrieved speaks about his grievance and from its standpoint. He says what being a man signifies. He also says what it does not.

The ecclesiality of L'Arche is determined by our relationship to the corps.



Christian Salenson, priest in the diocese of Nîmes, theologian, and director of the ISTR in Marseille

©L'Arche en France



Visit to Auschwitz

■ Richard Keagan-Bull, L'Arche Lambeth, United Kingdom

I arrived at L'Arche Lambeth two years ago in July. Before that I lived at a special needs college up in Shropshire where I was for 18 years. Last summer, I visited the concentration camp of Auschwitz.

I found it very moving when I went to Auschwitz. Just walking around and looking at some of the things there. What shocked me the most was that everyone had labels pinned to their prison uniforms and I asked Jacek, my friend, what label I would have had. I don't think I would have been here today, nor none of my friends. I think that if I were there they might have decided to do some tests on me in their so called 'hospital room'.

And I was just so pleased that there was me from England, Jacek from Poland and Caroline from Germany all stan-

ding there – together, and I just ask that we try and learn from our mistakes and that this never happens again.

It made me quite angry it did, and I wanted to kick something I did, but with a lady being there I felt I shouldn't do that. I feel quite angry inside now I do – about the way they were treated like cattle – like they weren't worth anything. I can see now why people who lived through that when they see those uniforms they feel sad and angry.

I think in life we should try and understand each other and work things out and never want war – just be happy with what we've got. It doesn't matter if you're black or white, if you can speak or if not speak – it's what you can give that counts.

Salzeday and Mozey Shee! The story of Paddy Delaney

■ By Peter Brabazon, L'Arche Kilkenny, Ireland

It's my pleasure to write a few words about Paddy Delaney, for three reasons. He was the first full-time core member of L'Arche in Ireland, he recently celebrated his 62nd birthday, and he was the first person to welcome me when I began as an assistant in L'Arche in November 1988 – we even shared a room for 9 months!

During that time I compiled a little book called 'Delaney's Dictionary' mainly to help new assistants understand Paddy's linguistic prowess. Among the entries are: 'jinjo' (music), 'mimbam' (noise) 'mishy' (rain), 'salzeday' (celebration/party) and 'mозey shee' (birthday cake).

Paddy is a man of great presence who doesn't seem bothered too much by the past or the future, but lives very much the present – a lesson we all could learn. He has a riotous sense of fun, not without a streak of devilment

thrown in! As long as you don't mention the war (i.e. the bath) you'll get on fine with Paddy. Some years ago he devised an ingenious solution to the problem of bath time; he simply removed the plug and hid it under his pillow. Lateral thinking at its best!

Never one for multi-tasking Paddy is at his best when giving his undiluted attention to one particular project at a time. I guess he would make a very good hypnotist. At home in 'An Siol' hoovering is a gentle rhythm which he enjoys (despite the mimbam), even if he needs to be encouraged to move on to the next patch lest the carpet be worn to a thread in one spot. I also recall an occasion when Paddy was asked to grate some cheese for dinner. The 'supervising' assistants must have been multi-tasking because when they returned Paddy was hardly visible behind the hill of cheese he had created!



In a world gone crazy Paddy is, for me at least, a sign of great

stability. The wisdom of L'Arche seems to rest easily on his shoulders and it's a privilege still to be a part of his life. When I arrived in L'Arche, little did I think that I would witness Paddy singing and dancing at his sixty-second birthday, 21 years hence. It is a testament to the dedicated love and care he has received from so many assistants over the years, and his own way of being in the world. One day at a time. Don't worry. Be happy. Have a salzeday with lots of jinjo and bring on the mozey shee!



Patients going to a MSF hospital

■ Jonathan Boulet-Groulx

Québec – Haiti Solidarity

Jonathan Boulet-Groulx is a young professional photographer who has been collaborating more and more with L'Arche Canada. He is currently working on a photojournalism project involving L'Arche Québec and L'Arche Haiti. He speaks Creole and has worked as an assistant at L'Arche Agapé in the past. The following letter dated November 10 is part of his travel chronicles from Haiti, which can be viewed online on the Meeting Point pages (Canada).

Dear friends of L'Arche,

(...) As is usual in L'Arche communities, I was literally welcomed like a friend, like a brother in the wonderful community of L'Arche Chantal. Having travelled with Antoine from Port-au-Prince to Chantal, the ceremony on our arrival, filled with music and singing, was as much for my very first visit to the community as it was for the return of a long-term resident who had been gone since early September. Antoine is one of the great travellers to have visited Calcutta last month.

I will begin with a short story that came to me when I met two little boys who have been living at L'Arche Chantal for barely four months. In our lifetime we come to hear many extraordinary stories; this is not one of them. This story about two young boys named Elizé and Elmond is, in truth, rather ordinary as Haitian stories go.

The two boys were abandoned at the Cayes general hospital. The boys, suffering from malnutrition and intellectual disabilities, were not taken care of by the hospital's medical staff. Neither doctors nor nurses deigned to touch them, feed them or even look at them. After all, who would want to touch dirty children who could not even speak! In the end it was the non-medical staff, the cleaning women, janitors, etc. who fed and washed the two boys.

The hospital's chief physician, in gesture of kindness, contacted the dispensary of the small community of Chantal to pass on these two little problems. The dispensary, not having the means or capacity to take in the two skinny little boys, called L'Arche. L'Arche, without really having the room or the means, accepted them into the community; quite simply because it was the right thing to do. Must I remind you that little Elmond and Elizé could not even stand up? No words, no strength...

And here they are four months later. Walking, laughing and almost speaking. What could have driven a mother to abandon her children thus? Misery I say; damned misery. I'm sure she clearly knew that her two sons would die of malnutrition, boredom... who knows. So the last resort: the hospital and its princely doctors! But let's be realistic; the last resort here for people like Elizé and Elmond, but also Samuel, Antoine, Esther, Françoise, Évelyne, Gabriel and I could go on, is not the State but L'Arche, which is a refuge for the most destitute in a destitute society. Today I ask for a minute of silence for those who, out of courage and openness, work at L'Arche in Haiti. As we say here: "Bon Bagay!"

URL of online chronicles:

English: http://larchecommons.ca/en/chronicles/jonathan_boulet-groulx/haiti_october_1st_2008-10-06

**1928 – 2008 :
80 years to celebrate !**

20 September 2008 : L'Arche in Trosly organized a great party for Jean's 80 birthday. 400 guests lived these unique moments. Happy birthday Jean !

©MGW



In the great Hosannah hall there was a show tracing the important moments of the foundation of L'Arche, led by Cariosa Kilcommons and her troubadours.



Jean takes part in the show and arrives in a beautiful living boat.



He is welcomed by Father Thomas, played by Jean-Baptiste de la Selle, and the king of the story, Nicolas.

©Maxence Gandoiphe de Witte



Ceremony of the washing of the feet with Jean-Christophe Pascal



Symbolic birthday cake in the shape of Noah's Ark



The mass was celebrated by Mgr Daucourt, bishop of Nanterre

■ By Jim Cargin, Regional Coordinator of L'Arche Poland

Northern Europe: Warsaw has been accepted as a project of L'Arche



Karol and Michal of L'Arche Sledziejowice

Joyful news to share from L'Arche Poland: the Northern European Zone Council last week welcomed Warsaw as an official project of L'Arche! Hallelujah! It is really exciting news, not just for us in Poland, but for our Zone, and for the Federation. Like L'Arche in Lviv, Ukraine, the community will probably be starting with workshops, rather than a house, since the group is already running two workshops for people with a learning difficulty – one on a voluntary basis – and they have good connections locally with parents and friends carrying the mission of L'Arche further in Warsaw.

– obviously easier to understand if you know Polish!

Apart from that, they are also supporting an elderly lady with Down's syndrome to stay in her flat – also through volunteers giving round the clock support. So they have lots of initiative, as you can see.

Baska Pestka – ex-L'Arche Inverness and Śledziejowice – is now leading the Chata Workshop, and will be acting with myself, supporting the group from the Regional side as Warsaw Coordinator.

Please keep us all in your prayers.

Check out one of the workshops on www.chatazpomyslami.org



Calendar of Upcoming Meetings and Retreats

2009

Covenant Fundamental Retreat

Atlanta, Georgia - USA

Coord: Sue Hudacek [sahudacek@nventure.com]

Speakers: Eileen Glass & Bob Sackel

January 22 to January 28, 2009

International Board (*location to be confirmed*)

International Mission Council (*location to be confirmed*)

March, Wednesday 11 (evening) to Sunday 15 (morning)

March, Sunday 15 (evening) to Thursday 19 (morning) 2009

Covenant Companions Retreat

France

Coord: Emile Marolleau [emarolleau@larcheseneve.org]

and Brigitte de Montlivault

Speaker: Michel-Marie Reynaud

April 19 to April 25, 2009

Covenant Fundamental Ecumenical Retreat

Southern Europe - Grandchamp (Switzerland)

French/ English with translation

Coord: Luisa Rossi [luisarossi@libero.it]

& Odile Skjellaug [odile.skjellaug@arche-corolle.ch]

May 13 to May 19, 2009

Covenant Companions retreat

Manoir d'Youville, Châteauguay - Montreal, Qc - Canada

Coord : Mary Egan & Agathe Dupuis

Speaker: Bill Clark

July 6 to July 12, 2009

Covenant Companions retreat

Northern Europe - Orval, Belgium

Coord.: Maria Garvey (leader@larchebelfast.org.uk)

and Michel Bacq

October 3 to October 9, 2009

International Mission Council (*location to be confirmed*)

October, Wednesday 14 (evening) to Wednesday 21 (morning), 2009

Fundamental Retreat

France

Open to families

October 25 to October 31, 2009

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