



GRATITUDE

L'Arche Winnipeg Newsletter #88



Michael 'Got the Work Done'

by Eliane Vieira
Newsletter Editor

At work, at home, or in community gatherings, Michael's priority is to "get the work done"- one of Michael's favourite expressions. After 45 years of dedication to his employment at ImagineAbility, Michael finally retired at the age of 65 with that rewarding feeling of **mission accomplished** in his heart.

Recognized by co-workers and supervisors as an example of a good employee, Michael's strong sense of discipline and work ethic brought him fulfillment as a worker. According to his long-term friend Petra, "Michael would never miss a day of work unless he was extremely sick. He knew his team was counting on him to do the job, and he felt committed to it." His role as a contributing member of his team and in society at large boosted Michael's confidence, which motivated him to do his best as a worker.

Petra also remarks that "through his dedication to work, Michael expressed immense gratitude for creating a life in which he feels valued and his voice heard. Retirement is a great accomplishment for him."

Beyond work, Michael actively participates in the community and treasures his feeling of belonging. He enjoys taking part in committees, councils, and meetings at L'Arche Winni-



Michael's birthday and retirement celebration at Kern Park, July 2022

peg. He values the opportunity to share his thoughts, vote, and hold people accountable - while always expressing concern for everyone's wellbeing.

"We need to stay put," - another common sentence from Michael, expresses his ongoing interest to make sure that the community members are well.

At work and in our community, Michael is considered a caring, understanding, and helpful person. His personality shines through his friendships and on occasions when he is asked to express his opinions. Michael's sense of humour is also highly appreciated among the people in his life.

"He is a very funny person! He has this witty sense of humour and a quick response when interacting with people. He has always brought so much fun into any group just by being himself," said Petra.



Michael holding a shirt given by his employers in honour of his retirement

Last July, the entire community gathered in a lovely outdoor setting to celebrate his retirement and his 65th birthday. It was an extraordinary afternoon for Michael. He wore a birthday hat and made a speech about his achievement and how happy he was for "getting the work done." When asked how he feels about being retired, Michael's answer was "I'm retired now; I had to load trucks and keep the place running. Now, I don't have to worry anymore!"

We celebrate Michael's transition from the workforce group into the retiree group. Furthermore, we celebrate Michael for being who he is - a wonderful individual who shares his gifts and love with everyone around him. Happy retirement, Mike.



Michael making a presentation at L'Arche Night, April 2019

L'Arche Winnipeg Prepares to Celebrate its 50th Anniversary



50th Anniversary

The year 2023 will mark a milestone for L'Arche Winnipeg. We will honour our 50th anniversary by sharing stories, reconnecting, and celebrating half a century of creating a world where everyone belongs. Read the full article on page 3.

Opening the Doors to Gratitude

by **Dominic Opaka**
Community Leader

For the past few months, my heart has been warmed in the most delectable way. I have thoroughly enjoyed hearing stories of what community members have been up to during the summer. One such member is Roger, who shared about his trip to Edmonton and how much he enjoyed being out there.

With the shadow of Covid 19 still hanging around us, most of our community members, just like Roger, weren't sure if their summer plans would go forward. By listening to Roger, I can tell how much this trip meant to him. He speaks rather nostalgically about all the activities, and his favourite ones: listening to the Beatles and

we gather, bring our gifts and enable the community to reconnect.

It is an amazing feeling to welcome people back after a long time apart. Through our events, we have brought celebration, spirituality, and connection found in L'Arche Winnipeg into the broader community. L'Arche Winnipeg core members, family members, and an ever-growing number of people with and without disabilities are drawn to our openness and come together to celebrate by sharing our gifts.

Everything L'Arche does is grounded in our belief in the unique gift of every person and the belief in mutually transformative relationships. This belief was tested almost to its limits by the pandemic. Two things carried us through, though: resilience and hope. Our hope is in God, who acts with perfect and

even when we don't know what the end will look like. These baby steps allow for great seeds to blossom - but we must always wait with unwavering patience. Winter is the season we live waiting with hope, which is meaningful. Winter welcomes us into a quiet place to hear what God would have for us. Waiting can be painful and slow and, in our contemporary world, that would seem boring. I thank each of you for your ongoing dedication to the message of hope L'Arche brings to our world. It is with a joyful heart that I look optimistically toward the season.



Roger's smile and cheerfulness help to resurrect us from the pandemic's isolation

going out for meals. It felt like the chains had been unshackled, and people could have their lives back.

Roger is a great storyteller, speaking with pride and love, reminding us that the practice of pausing, remembering, and reflecting on the good things is a great way to approach the new season and open the doors to gratitude.

After two years of continuous stress and anxiety, some normalcy returned to our community. With the lifting of many restrictions, people could take holidays and travel. Most importantly, we resumed in-person gatherings. Something beautiful happens when

complete wisdom in his goodness, grace, and sovereignty.

Our journey in trusting God will continue even more into the next season. We continue to work on our Mandate Action Plan, which provides the road map to journeying within our Mission - and to also boldly think about our future. During the recent National meeting in Montreal, communities were challenged to be bold, to imagine something new and build consensus on our own priorities.

As we enter into wintertime, I hope that we will be able to hear what God has for us and set our priorities. More importantly, have the courage to take a step of faith and begin implementing

“Songs of Christmas” Returns

Join the **Grace Family** singers and their musicians for an evening filled with music and Christmas spirit. The funds raised will support L'Arche Winnipeg and Solidarity (supporting L'Arche communities in poor countries).

The event will happen on Wednesday, **December 14, at 6:00 pm** at Blessed Sacrament Church, 710 Roanoke St., Winnipeg.

Refreshments will be served after the event (restrictions allowing).

Tickets - \$15

For tickets and more information, please contact our office:

Phone: 204-237-0300, ext. 0

Email: office@larchewinnipeg.org

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

- ◆ You can help L'Arche Winnipeg build a stronger future by giving a tax deductible gift.
- ◆ Please think of L'Arche Winnipeg in your estate plan and will.
- ◆ Your gift helps us carry our Vision and Mission into the world around us.

For more information on L'Arche:

www.larchewinnipeg.org

www.larchetovacafe.com

Highlights of the Year 2022

January

- ◆ L'Arche Winnipeg welcomes a new core-member: Rolande B. moved into the Ark house ◆

April / May

- ◆ L'Arche Tova Café celebrates its 10th anniversary with friends and supporters in a virtual and in-person ceremony ◆ The Café April's Special platter had all proceeds donated to L'Arche in Ukraine ◆ The 18th Vickar Automotive Group's Walk with L'Arche is a virtual event for the 3rd year ◆

June

- ◆ Community members gather for the first time after over two years for the Volunteers Appreciation BBQ ◆ New Human Resources Information System (HRIS) is fully implemented ◆

July

- ◆ The *Solidarity Pancake Breakfast* Fundraiser is held at L'Arche Tova Café. Tickets sales raised over \$544 ◆ Hubert Pantel retires from his role of Newsletter Editor after 29 years. Hubert was part of the Faith and Sharing retreat that resulted in the creation of L'Arche Winnipeg, in 1973 ◆ Michael O. retires at the age of 65 ◆

September / October

- ◆ L'Arche Night resumes in-person gathering since January, 2020 ◆ The Board of Directors has a new Chair: Lisa O'Hara ◆

November

- ◆ Flu and Covid vaccine clinic is held at the Welcome Centre ◆ *Our Christmas Pageant* is back to in-person this year ◆ Western Canada Regional General Assembly brings communities together in a virtual gathering ◆

December

- ◆ Community celebrates Christmas in-person with a dinner & dance party ◆ Fundraiser "*Songs of Christmas*" held at the Blessed Sacrament Church ◆



(Above) Rolande celebrating Halloween at the Ark; Volunteers Appreciation party (Below) Pantel family at L'Arche Tova Café for the Pancake Breakfast fundraiser



L'Arche Winnipeg Prepares to Celebrate Its Big 50

by Eliane Vieira
Newsletter Editor

The year 2023 will be a remarkable one for L'Arche Winnipeg. We will celebrate 50 years of serving and advocating for people with intellectual disabilities. Over the next year, we will incorporate our 50th-anniversary celebration into our traditional events and host other special events. We will share stories, reconnect with friends we made along the journey, and celebrate half a century with a dinner & dance party.

The history of L'Arche Winnipeg up to the present day has an abundance of dedication, resilience, faith, providence, and advocating stories from people who believed in a better world.

In 1973, Sister Marie Paradis answered the call to create a L'Arche community in Manitoba and opened up the first L'Arche house. L'Aîné (French word meaning eldest, first-born) used to be a convent where the Oblate Sisters lived. Inspired by the message of L'Arche, they donated their own home to L'Arche, in a great act of generosity. In the fall of that same year, L'Arche Winnipeg was accepted as a member by the International Federation of L'Arche, marking the beginning of our community.

Some of L'Arche Winnipeg's pioneers are still with us. We will hear stories from them at a story-sharing gathering next year in August at the Blessed Sacrament Parish – where our story began. The story-sharing event will be held in person and online, so we can welcome friends and members who live near and far. A dinner & dance event will happen a few days later. L'Arche members and friends will have the opportunity to connect, share more stories, and celebrate 50 years of building community.

Our Walk with L'Arche fundraiser event will resume in-person after three



L'Arche members perform a choreographed dance to ABBA's "I Have a Dream" at the 40th Anniversary celebration in 2013

years of virtual events. We plan to have a bigger and better event to celebrate our 50th anniversary. The 19th Vickar Automotive Group Walk with L'Arche will welcome members, friends, and supporters on May 6,

2023, at the Oxford Heights Community Club. We will walk 1k or 5k, then gather for a fun-filled party with music, dance, food, and prizes.

Also, in 2023, we will launch our new website – modern, easy to navigate, and accessible; a website that will better reflect our vibrant community. Our social media channels will share stories of our community throughout the year that will inspire you. Please check our website and social media channels to stay up-to-date.

The past 49 years have been intense and challenging at times, especially the last two years. But every step of this journey has also been fulfilling and rewarding. Today, we are blessed to have six homes, one Supported Independent Living apartment, programs, and a social enterprise L'Arche Tova Café. We welcome assistants from all over the world to share their lives with us in the homes, promoting friendship, inclusion, and mutual care. We have 25 core members living in our homes and about 15 live-in assistants.

We invite you to join us next year as we count our blessings and celebrate the gift of 50 years creating a world where everyone belongs. If you wish to join us at events or to support us by making donations towards the events, please contact us at office@larchewinnipeg.org

Nurturing a Grateful Heart

by Julie Rempel

Spiritual Life Coordinator

Is the cup half empty or half full? You may say that it depends on the day or the year.

Looking forward to Christmas is like looking at a cup and saying that it is half full. We look around us and reflect on the gifts and the fullness of our lives.

Can we do this authentically? Can we do this even when the cup looks half empty?

We have seen significant changes in the last few years, and it's an understatement to say that life hasn't been easy. Like many other people during the pandemic, our community has suffered the loss of loved ones.

How can we truly enter into the spirit of Christmas in the face of loss? All we can do is hold close the memories of our dear friends.

I think of an experience I had with our dear member with a developmental disability, Sandra, who died a few years before the pandemic. When I came to The Ark as an assistant, I didn't know Sandra very well. One day we went for a walk after supper. Sandra and I noticed all the barking dogs on the block and had fun barking back at them together. When I was about to leave, she quietly said, "I love you." I was surprised by how freely she offered those words to me, and I felt undeserving of them. When she declined in health, I spent several months caring for her in the hospital. Occasionally she would say, "I love you." Her words echoed in my heart. I was touched deeply and, over time, was able to respond with, "I love you too, Sandra."

After her death, I felt great sadness, and treasured the memory of her open heart even more. Her example taught me to say "I love you" more easily.

I learned that life is too short to hold back our love and care from one another, even if giving that love means we will suffer.



Sandra at a community gathering, 2013

Henri Nouwen writes,

"Every time we make the decision to love someone, we open ourselves to great suffering, because those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. The greatest pain comes from leaving ... the pain of the leaving can tear us apart.

Still, if we want to avoid the suffering of leaving, we will never experience the joy of loving. And love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking."

(*Bread for the Journey*, Henri Nouwen).

Nouwen reminds us that loving someone inevitably leads to losing them, which causes much grief. There is no way to take away this pain. There is no way to change it. Our hearts may hurt too much for a long time.

Though there is no fix for this kind of pain, perhaps (if we can give ourselves permission), we might consider exploring gratitude. Lisa Irish writes that nurturing a sense of gratitude can open us up slowly and gently to the world around us "*offer[ing] soothing relief for our hearts.*" (*Grieving with a grateful heart*, Lisa Irish)

As a community that feels the pain of loss, let us pray that the sacred gifts of love and gratitude reach across the chasm of these pandemic years and reconnect our hearts – so that we may freely say to the ones we have lost and to each other: "*Thank you for being you. I love you.*"

Christmas Pageant 2022

"Love Came Down at Christmas" is a living Christmas nativity play with carol singing put on by the members of the L'Arche Winnipeg community. It will take place on Monday, November 28 at 7:00 pm at Blessed Sacrament Roman Catholic Church (710 Roanoke St.). In order to allow for some physical distancing there will be space for only 60 guests in addition to the people from the community. Please note that there will not be a reception following the performance this year. The first 60 people to call or email the office will be eligible to attend. Please contact our office to reserve your spot.

Call 204-237-0300 ext. 0, or email office@larchewinnipeg.org



Christmas Pageant nativity play, 2016

GRATITUDE FROM WINNIPEG

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