

## COMMUNITY AS NOURISHMENT

What gives you life? How is your well replenished and how do you keep it from going dry? There are times when we are tired and we would like nothing more than to be alone, to be quiet, to not have to think, to pull the covers over our heads and just sleep. It is in these times that we need to recharge our battery, to refill our wells.

Jean Vanier said, "Many people in community tend to see the times they are alone as times of revitalization, as opposed to the times of 'dedication' or 'generosity' they spend with the community. This means that they have not discovered the nourishment of community."

This is something that I have realized for myself, a way that I have matured and deepened in my relationship and understanding of the gifts of community. It used to be that I would need time alone to rest, to recharge. Now I know that it is when I am the most drained that I need to be in community. It is when I am feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities of my role, with life, that I need to spend time in the homes, I need to sit with a core member or chat with an assistant. I need to be with the people who are also choosing to walk this path.

One of the most nourishing times for me is during prayer. Our weekly community night is rooted in prayer. We gather together in the living room, after the busyness of the day, and spend time together, praying. We have moments of silence, listen to readings, sing songs and speak our prayers out loud to the group or in the silence of our hearts. I can arrive at prayer time feeling like I have nothing else to give, that I am empty. Through the time of prayer I am replenished and usually leave feeling totally energized!



Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

I am witness to some of life's most beautiful moments and I don't feel it is a coincidence that they happen during our sacred time together. The honesty that I hear in the prayers that are spoken; prayers for family members, bus drivers, work friends, good weather, prayers spoken through tears and in pain, asking God to help with our struggles, to shine His light on those in need, on us. The vulnerability that is shown around the circle humbles me and shows me, time and again, that it is in sharing our fears, taking the risk and having the courage to let our darkness out that we find connection, acceptance and love.

Kelly Geddes  
Community Leader

### Identity Statement:

- We are people with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life in communities belonging to an International Federation.
- Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together.
- We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need of one another.

## BAKING WITH ANNA

Developing a relationship with someone can be like baking. Except instead of flour, eggs and sugar, you're combining things like emotional support, self discovery and challenge. Like the baker despairing over a rebellious batter, both parties can get frustrated if even just one of these components is added in the wrong amount. There can be trouble with challenge (How much is too much? How much is just enough, and what is the best method in which to deliver it?), emotional support (When should we control our emotions and when should we lay them all on the line?), and self discovery (When should the teacher sit back and learn?). Needless to say, all of these struggles can be magnified in a community like L'Arche.

Despite the magnificent way in which L'Arche integrates every community member, there is always a dichotomy which exists in an assisted living situation. The assistants and the assisted. In a "group home" setting, it's clear how this dichotomy works. A member of the assisted has needs and wants, it is the assistant's job to fulfill them. In a dichotomy like that, it's easy for society to place the titles of "primary" and "secondary" on either end of that dichotomy. The assistant makes things happen, she is in charge of fulfilling the needs and wants, she gets paid, so she would be the primary, right? The baker and her baked goods.

L'Arche is where the dichotomy is flipped, not on its head so that the primary becomes secondary, but on its side, so that everyone is equal. Assistants and core members help each other. We use our individual strengths to make sure that everyone's lives run as smoothly as possible. Rather than the assistant looked at as the baker and the core members as her goods, everyone in community is a baker and the relationships we form together are our muffins.

That is where my relationship with Ms. Anna Gardin comes in. If there is one person who has tested my will, my resolve, and my understanding of the so called "hierarchy" of community (for the best, I'd say), it's Anna.

I've always known that Anna possessed empathy that even she doesn't fully understand. I can see it when she gets frustrated, she just wants to help but sometimes she can't quite find the appropriate way in which to do it. That can be a source of stress for her, and sometimes she says things she doesn't mean.



The most beautiful part of Anna's relationships in L'Arche is that it doesn't matter if she gets frustrated, or has difficulty expressing herself. She is almost always ready with an apology, or to accept one from someone else. All of the negativity, all of the struggle, is instantly eliminated with two words, "I'm sorry."

While in the kitchen, Anna and I are on the most even ground possible with regards to the educational power we wield. She's taught me how to cook my first meatloaf and how to spice frozen fries just right so they have a kick (but not too much), and I've taught her how to take her time and read recipes carefully.

One particular example, which will stay with me forever, is when late one busy and hectic evening Anna and I were baking muffins together for the next morning. The phone was ringing off the hook, and I found myself trying to do too many things at once. The next thing I knew, the batter was ruined.

Since I knew that nobody was home at Cana House, I politely excused myself and ranted and raved alone. I even cried. I cried! Over messing up a recipe! We needed those muffins, sure, but that wasn't the true nature of my upset. I was stressed, spread too thin, and tired so I needed to relieve that tension.

After picking myself up and putting myself back together, I went back into Vanier House with nothing but a smile on my face, ready to start over again from scratch. Anna, however, had a different idea of what we were going to do. Completely aware of my emotional distress, she had been devising a plan to fix everything while I was crying alone.

"It just needs more flour, see?" She smiled as she thickened our runny batter.

I couldn't help but smile back. We tinkered with the batter until it seemed to be the right consistency, and baked the densest, funniest tasting muffins I've ever eaten. But that didn't matter to Anna. She didn't care that the muffins weren't perfect, she just had fun baking together.

"We'll do better next time," she told me.

I've never been more proud and humbled at the same time. Proud of the woman who I've watched come a long way with her patience and empathy, and humbled by the reversal of our roles. Suddenly, I wasn't reminding Anna to relax, she was doing it for me.

The dichotomy was eliminated in that moment. There was no "assistant" and "assisted." No "primary" and "secondary."

Just two bakers working together on the same muffins.



I look forward to continuing my journey with Anna, I can't wait to see what she'll teach me next, or what I can teach her. When we work on projects together, I know we both have those unique "aha!" moments of self discovery which make it all worthwhile. We can fight and argue and talk until we're blue in the face but it always ends the same way. She laughs and smiles and jokes about not looking at it that way while I step back and take a breath, flabbergasted by the new outlook presented so bluntly to me. No matter what, though, every moment of emotion, learning or challenge is absorbed into us, it becomes a part of who we are.



I couldn't be happier to get to know a person. I am grateful for every member of my community, but it is the ones who push us to our limits who teach us the most about ourselves and others. The members who push buttons and test boundaries may cause frustration, but in the end it is those traits which define Anna and compose her unique and inquisitive nature. Without her compassion, caring and love, she wouldn't push people like she does.

She also wouldn't think to just add more flour.

Adam Sigrist  
Assistant

**Our Mission is to:**

- Make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships.
- Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members, whilst being faithful to the core values of our founding story.
- Engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society.



### COMMUNITY PRAYER NIGHTS:

Where: Ward 5 Neighbourhood Centre  
5540 Russell St, Halifax, NS

Time: 7 pm

Dates: April 8, 2014  
May 13, 2014  
June 10, 2014

### SUNDAY GATHERINGS:

The Friends of L'Arche and L'Arche Halifax in to join them for fellowship and fun.

Where: St. Agnes Church Hall

Time: 1:30 pm

Dates: March 9, 2014  
June 8, 2014  
September 14, 2014



You may donate financially to L'Arche Halifax by:

1. Mail a cheque to L'Arche Halifax, 5512 Sullivan Street, Halifax, NS B3K 1X7
2. Credit card - Phone (902) 407-5512 and provide the following Information: Type of card, card number, expiry date, name on card **or** by completing the following and return it to the above address:  
Type of card: \_\_\_\_\_ Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Through CanadaHelps.org – Go to website: [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org), search for charity and complete online information
4. United Way – Pledge through United Way and request your pledge be allocated to L'Arche Halifax
5. Monthly Giving – call Office at (902) 407-5512
6. Leave a Legacy – call Office at (902) 407-5512

**Thank you for your generous support!**

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