

# GRATITUDE

The L'Arche Winnipeg Newsletter November 2023 Issue 91



# 50 years & BEYOND



Photos from the 50th Anniversary Gala. Community members photographed include Gina, Margaret, Juliette, Tom, Patricia, Hazel, & more!

## 50 Years of Transformation



**Erin Sawatzky**  
*Community Events*

***"I have an important announcement," said Michael O'Connor, holding up his butterfly wings during a dance rehearsal- "We should do this more often!"***

2023 has been a very special year for L'Arche Winnipeg. Not only has it been our first year fully returning to in-person gatherings since the start of the pandemic, but it also marks our 50th Anniversary as a community. Celebrations spanned the year with our Walk with L'Arche event and 50th Anniversary merchandise sale, but centred around 2 events in August: a thanksgiving service with Blessed Sacrament Parish, and Gala Dinner at CanadInns Event Centre.

Celebrating with Blessed Sacrament Parish brought us back to our beginning - our spiritual roots,

and our relationship with the parish and Oblate Sisters who were so instrumental in the early years of L'Arche Winnipeg's story. Through a beautiful evening of song and reflection, our community held up the cornerstone values that have always defined our spirituality: Joy, Belonging, Solidarity, Fidelity and Unconditional Love.



*Julie & Leonard lighting the candle of "Belonging"*

Mutual transformation has been another guiding core value through the years. Originally formed to help adults with disabilities move out of institutions and gain independence while belonging in community, the relationships formed at L'Arche through the years have transformed not only our core members but hundreds of assistants, staff and

— *Continued on back page*

## Storytelling Change



**Jubilee Dueck Thiessen**  
*Communications & Fund Development*

**M**y name is Jubilee, and I am delighted to be L'Arche Winnipeg's Communications and Fund Development Coordinator. I am thankful for this opportunity to steward L'Arche Winnipeg's stories, donors, and sponsors, and I look forward to participating in the joy and mutual care of the L'Arche community.

While the financial side of donor relations and fundraising ensures the health and stability of our community, I am most interested in the generative power of storytelling. During my undergrad degree I majored in English, studying poetry, memoir, and fiction that moved me to initiate change, to pursue creativity, and to live more tenderly. In my work at L'Arche, I hope to tell stories that move people into generous action, mutual relationship, and deep belonging.

As I begin the process of learning and belonging in the L'Arche community, sharing personal conversations and stories is proving to be just as informative as the data records, and much more formative.

**The stories we tell at L'Arche honor our legacy of life-sustaining inclusion, nourishing meaningful relationships that have the power to sustain our community for 50 years to come.**

# The Radical Gentleness of Nativity



**Julie Rempel**  
*Spiritual Life*

As I waited at the Concert Hall for the #47 bus on my way to work, I noticed a striking contrast between two men who were disembarking from a bus. One was guiding a person who seemed visually impaired, and once off the bus, the guide released the visually impaired person and trudged roughly on ahead without looking back. The follower stepped forward slowly and unsteadily, arms outstretched with palms strikingly facing up - such an open gesture for someone who had many reasons to be fearful. His movements were unsure. They were also remarkably gentle.

This situation reminds me of other encounters with gentleness in our L'Arche community: a person with a disability softly whispers to themselves; someone gently kisses

a hand upon meeting; a woman relaxes by splashing water in the sink; friends tenderly hold hands; a person's quiet bedtime routine soothes them to sleep; a contented smile connects people from across a room.

These gentle acts are not to be confused with sweetness or cuteness; they come from a place of profound tenderness deep within. A person's gentleness may emerge from an experience of vulnerability, but gentleness also comes from a person's choice (at whatever level) to be loving and kind. In many cases, someone's gentleness reflects their choice to hold experiences of pain with tenderness. The effects of gentleness are not insignificant - gentleness touches hearts and moves people into relationship.

***“choosing gentleness leads us to faithfully walk the path of peace.”***

Experiences of gentleness can open hearts to a more compassionate way of being in the world. Seeing another's gentle reverence invites us to greater communion with each other and with God, while choosing gentleness leads us to faithfully walk the path of peace. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” God comes to us in the meek form of a fragile baby - a baby who radically changes the world.

With the coming of Jesus, Mary sings of the status quo disrupted and the world order turned upside-down. From the mouths of angels and shepherds, the news

of Jesus' birth goes viral. The powers that be (King Herod) are disturbed upon hearing that a new king is born. Throughout his life, Jesus continues to privilege gentleness over aggression even while radically challenging oppression and exposing injustice.



*Stacey & Margaret as angels—2018*

Over the years of L'Arche Christmas Nativities, I have witnessed profound gentleness in an unconditionally loving Mary, a caring and thoughtful Joseph, a warmly welcoming Innkeeper, a content chicken, gracefully dancing angels, an intently watchful shepherd, quiet grinning wisemen and a silent shining star.

**How will the L'Arche Christmas Nativity - its story and its actors - awaken us to a more gentle, peaceful posture this year?**

JOIN US FOR THE RETELLING OF  
 JESUS' BIRTH  
**L'ARCHE WINNIPEG**  
**CHRISTMAS NATIVITY**  
 Monday November 27, 2023  
 St. Boniface Cathedral  
 7PM

THE TRANSCONA BIZ  
 2024 CALENDAR IS HERE!

L'Arche Winnipeg receives 100% of the profit from the calendars we sell - visit the L'Arche Tova Café or our main office to buy yours!

## Being With L'Arche



**Grace Slivinski**  
Community  
Circles

I first came to L'Arche three years ago seeking more life-giving work – I had always had a heart for people and thrived in my past community experiences, but my studies and employment at the time were not filling me with the life that I knew was possible.

My sister had meaningful and healing experiences living in L'Arche as an assistant, and suggested I join the community. I began working respite, and while Covid-19 was a large part of my first L'Arche experiences, I felt so blessed to have work that presented opportunities to build relationships with a diverse group of people.

I applied to be a live-in assistant when a room opened up at Elpida - an all-women's home, in which I had made strong connections while working respite. This was my first time moving out of my childhood home and away from my family, so it was a great gift to find family in my new home Elpida!

***“The vulnerable ways we learned, grew, and loved one another changed my life.”***

Navigating relationships with people of diverse ages, backgrounds, and abilities while living in close quarters during the pandemic was challenging, but the vulnerable ways we learned, grew, and loved one another changed my life. The core members brought us together, feeding my

spirit in a time when life seemed rather empty. It was the little things that brought me so much joy – walks, crafts, spontaneous movie nights, birthdays and celebratory times when we all dressed to the nines even though we couldn't go out.



Elpida's core members - LeeAnn, Gina, Barb, and Stacey, helped me to feel awe and wonder at life's ordinary things in a fresh way. The pure joy that they showed just in our being together was contagious.

***“It is being present to each other that creates connection, joy and a kind of love that both gives and receives...”***

This is what I have always appreciated about L'Arche - the act of simply "Being With." Although we have practical routines of banking, shopping, cooking and cleaning, it is being present to each other that creates connection, joy and a kind of love that both gives and receives. I built wonderful connections as we shared stories from diverse past experiences, were vulnerable with each other, laughed and cried together, and got creative with house activities. I learned many new things from my fellow live-in assistants and they provided me with a window into perspectives different from my own.

My time as a live-in assistant brought me eight new non-biological sisters who I carry with

GIVE THE GIFT OF COMMUNITY THIS

**GIVING  
TUESDAY**

NOVEMBER 28, 2023

me through life's changes. I am now a live-out assistant at Elpida, and although life and staff are always changing, Elpida's ladies continue to teach me to be more present and find joy in the little things. **As L'Arche Winnipeg moves forward into the future, the "being with" one another will always be something that will help us be more attentive to each other, and help us grow in loving and being loved in the present moment, wherever that finds us.**

Updates from the  
**L'ARCHE TOVA CAFÉ**

**OPERATING HOURS**

7:30 AM — 2 PM  
Tuesday — Saturday

**Crafts & Cocktails Market**

Join us November 23rd, 6-10pm at the Club Regent Event Centre! We will be selling our famous cinnamon buns, potato dill bread, and more! Free Admission.



Continuing from front page — community friends as well. The theme of “butterflies” during our Gala Dinner on August 26th aimed to capture the beauty of this transformation process.



Jim and Stacey sharing stories about L'Arche Tova Café

Over 200 people gathered together at the CanadInns Event Centre for a joyful evening of food, friends, stories and dancing. Our storytelling program, led by Community Leader Dominic Opaka and a variety of core members and assistants through the years, shared the story of how our organization has transformed over time. It was deeply meaningful to

be joined by many of the key members of our L'Arche Winnipeg story- including Oblate Sister Cecile Fortier who originally offered L'Arche Winnipeg our first home, past community leaders Shirley Nolan, Dennis Butcher and Jim Lapp. Many guests shared that the highlight of the evening for

them was the dance performance, put on by 20 members of the L'Arche Winnipeg community to Keala Settle's song “This is Me.” “We are bursting through the barricades, reaching for the sun,” sang dancers as they raised their butterfly wings to the sky. “It moved me to tears,” shared homes coordinator Leisa Tschetter.

As we step forward into the next 50 years, we are nourished and guided by the memories of our anniversary events - centred in our founding story, sustained by relationships, love and laughter, and inspired to continue our journey of mutual transformation.

**Let's “do this more often” by continuing to gather and celebrate as a community throughout the next 50 years to come!**



2023 AT A GLANCE	
<b>JANUARY</b>	Evening of Shared Prayer, Community Circle Resumes
<b>FEBRUARY</b>	Valentine's Dance, Ash Wednesday Lenten Retreat
<b>MARCH</b>	Solidarity Music Night
<b>APRIL</b>	Easter Dinner, Elpida gets new kitchen floor
<b>MAY</b>	19th Vickar Automotive Group's Walk with L'Arche is held in person , raising over \$65,000
<b>JUNE</b>	AGM, Solidarity Music Night. Purchased new back-up generator for Dayspring, £ new van for the Ark
<b>JULY</b>	Staycation £ Community BBQ Repaired roofing at Chimo
<b>AUGUST</b>	50th Anniversary Gala £ Thanksgiving Service, Solidarity Music Night. Installed CCTV cameras £ introduced EMA Systems in all homes
<b>OCTOBER</b>	Thanksgiving Dinner, Halloween Dance, Assistant's Prayer Breakfast, Solidarity Music Night, Community Circle expands to Thursdays
<b>NOVEMBER</b>	L'Arche International Night, Christmas Nativity
<b>DECEMBER</b>	Christmas Dinner £ Party, New Year's Eve Party

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*L'Arche Winnipeg Inc. is a non-profit organization. Donations are tax-deductible.*

**Charitable Reg. No 107597692 RR001**

November, 2023

Dear friends,

As we near the Christmas season, we give thanks for the gifts we have received and reflect on the previous year's challenges and opportunities for growth.

For many of us, the holiday season inspires mutual generosity and care, as we show our appreciation for others through quality time, acts of service, affirming words, and physical gifts. Looking back on 2023, we have much to be thankful for: 160 people gathered in person for our 19th Annual 2023 L'Arche Walk, and we celebrated our 50th anniversary with a Gala Dinner and Service of Thanksgiving. As we reflect on the past 50 years of our L'Arche Winnipeg Community, we are overwhelmed with gratitude for the Core Members, Assistants, Volunteers, Staff, and Donors that have sustained us.

While the holidays provide opportunities for gratitude and connection, this season may also produce feelings of loneliness. Whether we are grieving people that we have lost, missing people who are far away, or struggling to meaningfully connect with those in our presence, we are not always able to fully delight in this season of celebration and thankfulness. These experiences of loneliness can leave us doubting our value and questioning where we belong, sparking a yearning for connection and mutual care.

We all deserve to belong in community, and L'Arche Winnipeg exists to cultivate meaningful relationships and intentional community by sharing life together. While we receive government funding, we rely on your support to fully meet the diverse needs of our 25 members living in our six homes and one supported-living apartment. Our commitment to ensuring that all our members are sufficiently supported in every aspect of their lives is only made possible by your compassionate support.

I invite you to give the gift of community this holiday season by donating to L'Arche Winnipeg. As we anticipate the new year, we are looking forward to the next 50 years of our community, planning projects and innovative programs and that will ensure our continued flourishing. We need your help to fund our Community Navigation Program, home renovations, Core Member vacations, and the purchase of vehicles and furniture. Your gifts sustain our ability to facilitate community founded on friendship and generosity, where everyone is celebrated and affirmed for their unique gifts.

A donation cheque can be mailed to us, or you can make a secure online credit card donation through [CanadaHelps.org](https://CanadaHelps.org) - the donation link is also found on our home page at [www.larchewinnipeg.org](http://www.larchewinnipeg.org).

May you experience mutual care and belonging this holiday season,

Dominic Opaka



Community Leader  
L'Arche Winnipeg

