



# L'Arche Lambeth News

SPECIAL 30TH BIRTHDAY EDITION 2007

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## 30 years on— in good shape?

Father David Standley writes:

In 1977 I was discovering L'Arche for the first time in another place. I had just arrived as chaplain at the University of Kent, and I fell into an already arranged programme of student visits to different Christian communities in the vicinity. Our first expedition was to an old Rectory at Barrestone, where I met Geraldine, Bill, Betty, Maggie, the Morgan family, and many more. And who was this Jean Vanier..? I was alarmed and fascinated. I was 40, and until then I don't think I had properly met a person with a learning difficulty. So began my journey with L'Arche.

At that very time Therese, Brian, Thierry and others were beginning L'Arche in London. When I left Canterbury in 1984 I came as an assistant to L'Arche Lambeth and lived in the Sycamore, just two months after the house had opened. Michelle, Toni and John Roffey opened my eyes and tested my

defences.

We believe God is continually trying to open our eyes, and we on our side are consciously or unconsciously looking for God (or perhaps 'meaning' and 'purpose', in secular terms). This mutual search and the relationship that ensues is sometimes called *holiness*.

Now there's a risky word! Most people hate it. Not for me, thank you - leave holiness to others, preferably saints. That's because we tend to think holiness is about behaviour, about goodness. Even 'goody goodness'. But it's an important word and needs rescuing. It's

actually more about God-ness. It's about the presence of God, and awareness of God. God reveals him/herself where we are. For some there is a marriage-shaped holiness, for me a priest-shaped holiness. There is a child-shaped holiness, a death-bed holiness, a cosmic holiness. It comes in all shapes and sizes. No one size fits all. God is there. I wonder if we can talk about a 'L'Arche-shaped holiness...'

I believe that one aspect of living in L'Arche is that God is revealing himself to us through the experience of sharing this kind of life together. God is showing me a deeper

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## Transformations - Therese Vanier

Thirty years ago, number 60 Rosendale Road saw the gradual arrival of Brian, John, Nick, Little Brian, Paul, Doris, Jean, Michelle and Toni. With the help of Sue and many excellent assistants, they "built a house... which... became a home" (remember Doris' favourite song?) Part of our Identity Statement says that we will "make known the gifts of people with learning disabilities revealed through mutually transforming relationships". *Transformed?* Maybe not, but I am a better and more human person because I learned something of courage from John, faithfulness from Brian, patience from Doris, from Nick his immense capacity to love. Little Brian was gentle and —, Paul offered spontaneous friendship and compassion, from Jean I

learned how to live through a time of sadness, Michelle has a deep sense of justice (and injustice!) and Toni reveals that there is more than one world...

In an increasingly fast moving, individualistic, selfish and violent society there will be less and less space for those who live at the level of their hearts and need faithful friends.

The 'making known the gifts of our people' is an important part of our mission - let's enjoy it with them!



## My journey to The Vine - Brian Matthews



Brian and Hugh celebrating Brian's 30 years in The Vine

When my parents asked me 30 years ago if I wanted to live at 60 Rosendale Road, I said "NO!"

The thought made me scared. It was new. I didn't know where the house they were talking about was. I didn't want to live far away from my parents again.

As a small boy, I lived in a community in Scotland. I was very homesick and never saw my parents. There were lots of tears. I had to leave Scotland and I went to live in St Lawrence's so I could be nearer to my parents. They could visit at the weekend. I hated St Lawrence's and it was not good there. There were a lot of tears.

I don't remember how my parents persuaded me to go and visit 60 Rosendale Road for supper. But I went. John Collier was there and Doris and Sue. There was a lot of smiling, a lot of laughing and a lot of good food. Enough food for once. Plenty. So I went to live there. 30 years ago. No more tears.

Agnes Ziebarth helped Brian in remembering these early years

### 30 years on ...

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truth about myself, and about God too. We discover this comes through the patient, vulnerable presence we offer each other in mutually trusting relationships, in facing our limitations, and lowering our defences. It comes gradually, never perfectly, with tears and laughter. We dare to become more open to one another, and thereby more open to God.

A L'Arche-shaped holiness? Whether we are here for a shorter or a longer time, that shape will influence our lives. We take it with us when we go. Mutuality is the key. I feel it when at a Catholic Eucharist, amidst the confusion of our divisions at the sacred moment of Communion, I bless Sylvia, and Sylvia blesses me back.

We are 30 years old. 30 years of journeying together. 30 years of welcoming, and letting go. 30 years of trying to articulate our 'identity and mission'. 30 years of budgeting, birthdays and boogie nights. 30 years of holiness. And many more to come. Thanks be to God.

## Birthday Party at the Palace—a day to remember



*Relaxing Group Leader, Iain, reliving a previous life before L'Arche!*

talented members of our community. We sang together, prayed together, ate together and blessed one another.

Truly a memorable occasion, and what a wonderful backdrop—the beautiful gardens of Lambeth Palace. Many thanks must go to the Archbishop and Mrs Williams for their hospitality.

It was also wonderful to welcome the new Mayor of Lambeth.



*The Archbishop and Betty together during the afternoon*

### Sue and Heinz remember early days

Sue Kobler was invited to speak at the Birthday celebrations at Lambeth palace and spoke so wonderfully of the beginnings of L'Arche Lambeth. Here, she and her husband Heinz have gathered a few of their memories for us to read.

Perhaps what most characterises those early days of L'Arche Lambeth is that it was a time of welcoming. The Vine welcomed John and Brian in July 1977. Being summer, in celebration of this great adventure, we went on holiday ten days later. Driving north, we pitched our small tents in the

Imagine all those who were able to attend L'Arche Lambeth's 30th Birthday celebrations at Lambeth Palace on 1st September will agree that it was a day to remember!

The sun shone, the fantastic South London Jazz Orchestra played and the tea flowed.

Welcoming talks by Therese Vanier, Sue Kobler and new Community Leader Corinne McDonald were followed by a beautiful liturgy acted out by various



*Corinne, Brian, Paul and Richard during the liturgy*

middle of a large field in Yorkshire. Each day brought its surprises, not least Brian leaping into a cold lake to the shout of what sounded like "Jeronimo". (We quickly learnt he could not swim!)  
 Joined by Brian B, Nick, John and Doris, the house's routines and celebrations began to evolve. Jean and Michelle's lively arrival added dance to our already growing competency at singing and making music together.  
 When Heinz joined the community he was struck by the warmth of his welcome. There was always much expectancy when someone new was arriving, and coming from Switzerland Heinz was expected to bring talents found lacking in the house. Immediately presented with three watches purchased that day at the local church sale, he was asked if he could make them work.



*Founder members Brian Matthews and Sue Kobler*

Like any newborn, through daily activities we learnt a lot about our need for interdependence. Not everyone was accustomed to helping with household chores for instance, though they became great opportunities for teamwork and even hilarity.

We remember those early times as challenging, enabling and liberating. Sharing times of joy, of frustration and sorrow, with large doses of good humour, gave us experiences that taught us as much about ourselves as they did about community.

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Find out more at  
[www.larchelambeth.org.uk](http://www.larchelambeth.org.uk)

If you are interested in becoming an assistant:  
Contact Ellie Ware  
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Phone: 020 8655 9622  
Fax: 020 8670 0818

## Come and get involved

We are always looking for people who are interested in living in Community with people with learning disabilities. If you are interested in finding out more about life in L'Arche Lambeth or about our current vacancies we would be very pleased to hear from you. Please contact Ellie Ware on the details given below.

We would also very much welcome any one who would like to offer any time to volunteer with us. We have a wide variety of opportunities requiring different skills and different time commitments. We look forward to hearing from you!

## What is L'Arche?

L'Arche Lambeth is part of an International Federation of communities where people with and without learning disabilities live and work together. Communities offer support and home to learning disabled members and are places where the principles of welcome, respect and relationship are paramount.

L'Arche Lambeth is made up of 5 Community households, a number of people with learning disabilities living independently, 5 workshops and a network of local members, both with and without learning disabilities. We are an ecumenical Christian Community, and we welcome those of other faiths and of none. We are a busy urban Community that seeks to be integrated into our local area. Our life is rooted in the simplicity of shared everyday

activities and in the belief that every human being, regardless of ability, has a deep need for belonging, love, friendship, value, and the opportunity to have responsibilities according to their ability. We believe that the relationships we establish in shared Community life enrich us all.

The People with learning disabilities that make home with us are welcomed to for as long as they choose to live in L'Arche.

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with assistants who commit themselves to Community life; sharing their everyday lives together. Life is rooted in the ordinary tasks of shared life; cooking, cleaning, prayer and having fun. Others live in their own accommodation with support from assistants as needed.

The Workshops offer the opportunity to do quality craft work, which is sold locally and nationally. We make candles, rugs and Stonework and grow plants in our Garden. For those who have chosen a quieter life, the Retirement group provides a way of living more gently. Increasingly we are supporting people in one to one projects. Other Community members are friends to the houses, work as volunteers or take on specific tasks for the Community.