

In his own words

Extracts from the books, letters and talks of Jean Vanier

Visitors are often astonished at the joy they sense at l'Arche. It surprises me too because I know how much suffering some people in our communities are carrying. I wonder then if all joy doesn't somehow spring from suffering and sacrifice. Can those who are rich and live in comfort and security with everything they need, and who refuse to be close to those who are suffering, be truly joyful?
Community and Growth

We must help each person to live more and more clearly and deeply from an inner confidence of being loved by God just as they are.
Community and Growth

Being a philosopher, being a naval officer, I spent a lot of time pretending and hiding. Living with people with disabilities I've touched my own brokenness, my own angers, my own powers of violence, my own capacity to hate. But maybe human wisdom is to discover that we are all broken. We must discover that before we can discover the path of wholeness.
Man Alive, CBC TV 1992

The ideal doesn't exist. The personal equilibrium and harmony people dream of come only after years and years of struggle, and then only as flashes of grace and peace. Peace is the fruit of love and service to others. I'd like to tell the people in communities, "Stop looking for peace. Give yourself where you are. Stop looking at yourselves, look instead at your brothers and sisters in need. Ask how you can better love your

brothers and sisters. Then you will find peace."

Community and Growth

There is always an element of sadness in celebration. We cannot celebrate without alluding to it, because there are people on this earth of ours who are not celebrating, who are despairing, anguished, starving and mourning. That is why all celebration should end with a silence in which we remember before God all those who cannot celebrate and who are in pain today.
Community and Growth

There is something intolerable about pain and suffering when we cannot cure the person. No one wants to be with people in pain, unless they can do something to alleviate the pain. When all is said and done, in l'Arche there are no cures. What people need when all the therapy has been tried is a friend who is faithful, who stands by them, a loving milieu where they are respected as full human beings.

Letter to My Brothers and Sisters in L'Arche

We discover togetherness in community, and that difference is not a threat but a treasure.

Letter to My Brothers and Sisters in L'Arche

The mystery of people with disabilities is that they long for authentic and loving relationships more than for power. They are not obsessed with being well-situated in a group that offers acclaim and



promotion. They are crying out for what matters most: love. And God hears their cry because in some way they respond to the cry of God, which is to give love.
Living Gently in a Violent World

Somebody said to me when John Paul II was in his wheelchair, "I have difficulty looking at him. He should either die or he should resign." I listened to that person and I said, "That's what they say when I am with people with disabilities in restaurants. I hear people say that they should not be alive."

Talk to businessmen, 2005

There is an intimate link between the contemplative spirit and pain. We have a special mission. Our lives are not an escape from pain. It is not for us to run away from the pain of the world but somehow to hold on to it. It is important to hold in our prayer those who are stretched beyond their limits.

Address to the Community at Minster Abbey

We must have long moments under the anesthetic of quiet prayer, because Jesus can teach us certain things only if we are

under an anesthetic. He can show us our poverty, our misery, the gravity of what we have done; only if at the same time he can show us the depths of his merciful love.

Followers of Jesus

As long as we remain locked in our own separate worlds, we cannot address divisions and suffering. We must seek to bring people together. We must visit nursing homes, volunteer at food banks and hospitals, and interest ourselves in unfamiliar traditions of religion.

Life's Big Questions

For many, to be good is to obey parents, teachers, religious structures and so on. In fact, goodness is lived in little ways, loving those around us daringly and with compassion. To be good is to be a small wellspring of life.

Life's Big Questions

A cardinal once said to me, "You in l'Arche are responsible for a Copernican revolution: until now we used to say that we should do good to the poor, but you say that the poor are doing good to you."

The Miracle, The Message, The Story: Jean Vanier and L'Arche