

Jean Vanier's letter to send to the communities

L'Arche-Trosly, Christmas 2004  
New Year 2005



During this Christmas season, so many people throughout the world are in grief, especially those affected by the earthquake and tidal wave in South Asia. An immense tragedy! It is difficult perhaps for us to rejoice whilst so many others are in pain. At the same time all this has created a wonderful movement of solidarity! But do we need such disasters in order for the world to wake up and for richer countries to share with poorer ones? This tsunami has shaken the world and reminds us of the other disaster in all our countries: the ever-widening gap between those who have and those who have not.

Christmas: the celebration of God who comes to visit us in the weakness and vulnerability of a child; God who comes to *be with* us, to share our joys and pain, so that we too can share our lives together as brothers and sisters in humanity. God comes to live *a relationship* of trust which awakens our hearts and *transforms* us into men and women of compassion. We become *a sign* of hope in the world.

The Word became flesh so that we could make the passage from being centred on ourselves to being centered on others, humbly but truthfully. It is not easy to love, to let down the barriers that close us up in ourselves and to reach out to others. As I grow older, I become more and more aware of my own fears and blockages, my difficulties in relationships. There is still a struggle in me between the desire to live simple relationships of communion with others and the need for power, to control others. And I realise that I am not going to change and acquire the inner freedom to love through my own efforts; my heart of stone needs to be transformed through the love of God, into a heart of flesh, a vulnerable heart, open to others.

I sense more and more how much L'Arche and Faith and Light are a treasure that God has entrusted to us. After reading the first year report of "Identity and Mission", David Ford, a theologian and friend of L'Arche, told me and Christine McGrievy: "L'Arche is not only born of God and guided by God; L'Arche is the glory of God!" I like to think of each one of our communities also as the joy of God. Didn't Jesus, quivering with joy in the Holy Spirit, proclaim: "I bless You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever, and revealing them to little ones". (Luke 10:21) God's joy is not only because we welcome those who are often marginalised in our societies but also because our communities are places where they can live and grow in a personal relationship with God.

Yes, God became flesh, revealed himself, gave himself, as a friend to the weak and the poor, those who are not caught up in the desire for importance or for doing "big things". Don't we all have to become like little children in order to enter into the

Kingdom of Love? Life in our communities can be a source of transformation only if we let ourselves *be* transformed. To become little, like a child, is not a question of sentimentality, of being sipid or of pretending to be incapable of doing anything of value. It is an awareness that by ourselves we are unable to become truly free. It is the audacity to believe that if we let God live and work in us, we can do beautiful things.

L'Arche and Faith and Light are a sign and a paradox. We are discovering more and more that those rejected by society because of their weakness and apparent uselessness, are a presence of God. If we welcome them, they gradually lead us out of the world of competition and the need to do big things, into a world of communion of hearts, a simple life of joy, doing little things with love. They become a path to peace.

I want to thank each one for your Christmas greetings and for your concern and prayers for my health. These last four weeks have been filled with doctor's appointments, a short stay in the hospital, rest and walks. I was sorry I had to cancel my trip to Honduras and miss seeing our people there. At my last appointment the doctor told me "Continue to live and to travel! There is no danger." I still have a heart that beats too much due to my arhythmia. I have to be careful and slow down. But the cardiologist is taking good care of me and teaching me how to live with it. Isn't that our spirituality, learning to live with our limits and weaknesses and to give thanks? So, as planned, after Christmas I will be giving a retreat in the Foyer de Charité de Tressaint (in Brittany) and on January 7<sup>th</sup> I will leave for Burkina Faso and a time of formation with delegates from all our communities in Africa.

During this Christmas season, I give thanks for each one of our communities of L'Arche and Faith and Light and for our friends. Let us be in solidarity with the communities close to the disaster areas and with all those communities which live day after day in vulnerable and insecure situations. Our way of living peace is small and humble, living and sharing with those who are weak and humble.

May this Christmas be truly a celebration of love and sharing for each one of us. May the New Year be a time of transformation for each one and for each of our communities and a time of consolation for those who are suffering.

Love,

Jean