



**L'ARCHE®**  
GREATER  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

# HOME matters

BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF FAITH  
AND LIFELONG HOMES WITH PEOPLE  
WHO HAVE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

35 YEARS  
OF  
*Belonging*

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L'Arche Greater Washington, DC accepts applications on a rolling basis for assistants in Washington, DC and Arlington, VA. We're also looking for volunteers!

If you're interested in these opportunities, having dinner, or praying with us and more, check out:

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## FIND US ON:



## Our Courageous Journey

By Luke Francis Smith, Community Leader & Executive Director

As I reflect upon our 35th anniversary, I am reminded of something significant that was happening at the time we were founded. Around the world, in the early 1980s, L'Arche Communities were naming and claiming the reality that it is our Mutual Relationships at the heart of who we are as L'Arche.

I see this theme as ever-deepening, even today, and as a momentum to carry us forward. As I reflect on our founding as The Community of the Ark, I recognize through the leadership and sacrifice of Dottie, Kathy, Michael, Dennis, Mo, Gene, Conrad, Nathan, Elizabeth, Glen, Eileen, Barbara, Hope, Harold, Francoise, Linda, Walton, Calvin, Dorothy, John, Charles, and countless others, our L'Arche GWDC has become a home where we are bound together.

Bound through sharing our lives together; in recognizing and accepting our need for celebration and forgiveness. Bound through sharing our stories, and through making new stories together. Those stories created and shared around our tables, in hospitals, at grocery stores and CVS visits, during our drives to work, while slowing down on a meaningful penny walk, and during travels for faraway and nearby vacations.

I am mindful of the words of Jean Vanier in *Becoming Human*:

***"It is the heart that helps us to discover the common humanity that links us all."***

As we on our Ark continue on this journey of the heart, I grow increasingly excited for where our mutuality will take our story, who we will encounter and how we, as a community, will continue to gently, tirelessly, and joyfully share and best bring L'Arche to Greater Washington D.C.

I give thanks for the heart-filled leadership of core family members, that has sustained, encouraged, and called L'Arche GWDC to become who we are today. I celebrate the spirit of welcome that has enabled so many to call L'Arche GWDC home, and that has impacted our part of the world to become a more human society. I hope that we continue to be led by people with intellectual disabilities, to learn from them as teachers of the heart, so that we might all respect and honor the gift of each other's unique and sacred value.



Washington Post,  
1985

The Ark community in Adams-Morgan includes, from left, Maurice Higgs, resident; Kerrie Tyler, volunteer; Kathy Bruner, director; Waltico Schofield, resident; Kevin Bruner, worker; and Glen Houser, resident.

## *'Ark' Provides Spiritual Haven*

# *The Start of L'Arche in Washington, D.C.*

### **Amid the hopefulness of looking forward, it is also important to appreciate beginnings.**

While L'Arche GWDC was opened in the fall of 1983, first called The Community of the Ark while becoming an official L'Arche community, seeds of L'Arche in D.C. were planted six years earlier during Jean Vanier's visit to Georgetown University in late 1977. Inspired by Vanier, an exploratory planning group sprang into action. (If you had the pleasure of knowing Dottie Bockstiegel, who shaped so much of L'Arche GWDC, you will surely believe the word "sprang.")

Simultaneously, other winds of change were stirring in D.C. Opened in 1925, the District operated an institution for people with intellectual and physical disabilities known as Forest Haven. Housing sometimes over a thousand residents at once, Forest Haven became known in the 1960s for a very poor standard of medical and professional care. The facility was understaffed and underfunded, causing substandard living conditions and sometimes abuse for those who lived there. As a result of a lawsuit citing the unsafe setting, in 1978, Forest Haven was ordered to close and find homes for its many hundreds of residents. While an era of outdated thought on supporting intellectual disability was being ushered out, L'Arche GWDC and the ideals it held were ramping up.

However, the road to L'Arche in D.C. did not come paved, or even with a map. After the planning group decided not to found near Georgetown, L'Arche was led to the Adams Morgan neighborhood of D.C. Foundational member and former-Community Leader Dennis Calderone notes this choice "seemed much more to reflect L'Arche. Adams Morgan was ... alive with all the sights and sounds of cultural diversity one could imagine." This variety is exactly how Dennis and others wanted L'Arche represented in our nation's capital, and a small house on Ontario Road became the first physical manifestation of L'Arche GWDC.

Renovations to prepare Ontario House for welcoming residents began, while supporters rallied to secure funding. By this time, Forest Haven was in the process of closing, and after many conversations with D.C. officials regarding licensing and funding agreements, L'Arche decided to focus on first welcoming individuals from Forest Haven.

### **In the words of Dennis Calderone:**

In September 1983, our house had been finished and licensed and we were ready. We wanted to start slow, so the government gave us a contract for two people from Forest Haven, Eugene Sampson and Glen Houser. We began the process of welcoming the two men. Kathy Bruner and I met them at Forest Haven and told them who we were, and asked if they'd like to come see our house, have dinner, and see if they would like to stay. This visit would be followed by a weekend visit, then a week, and a probationary time to see if they still wanted to stay. Giving the men a choice was a strange idea to the government people; to them, you signed a contract, you pick them up, and that's it. Later, when we asked them if they would like to stay, Eugene (Gene) smiled the biggest smile and said "yes." When we pressed him for why, thinking of the many ways we had prepared, the dinners, and the outings, he said it was because of the dog we had! Of course, how could we compete with a big golden retriever, as they didn't have pets at Forest Haven.

We were ready for our grand opening to be November 18 when Glen and Gene would pack their belongings into our beat-up station wagon and move in. But in the meantime on October 6, we got a desperate call from DHS (Department of Human Services). A man from the community who worked at the ARC needed an emergency place to stay; it would only be a few days until they could find something permanent. So, we welcomed Michael Schaff. A few days turned into a few weeks which turned into forever.

Six Octobers after Vanier's visit, L'Arche now lived in Washington, D.C.

Many obstacles were surmounted, ideas failed and ideas flourished, and ultimately, with the support of other L'Arche communities, The Church of The Saviour community, and the dedication of countless heads, hands, and hearts, L'Arche GWDC welcomed its first core members in late 1983. Since, L'Arche has grown to four homes in the D.C. metro area – Euclid House (est 1988), Highland House (est 2006), and 6th Street (est 2010) – and been home to over 20 core members and dozens of community members.

**“Giving the men a choice was a strange idea to the government people; to them, you signed a contract, you pick them up, and that's it. Later, when we asked them if they would like to stay, Eugene (Gene) smiled the biggest smile and said “yes.” When we pressed him for why, thinking of the many ways we had prepared, the dinners, and the outings, he said it was because of the dog we had!**



*Top: Dennis, Gene, Mike, Glen, and others in 1983*

*Bottom: Gene, Glen, Michael, and Dolores*



## *Several foundational L'Arche members have shared memories of L'Arche's early days; thank you for keeping L'Arche history alive!*

### **Dolores Wilson, live-in assistant upon opening of Ontario House in 1983:**

Dennis Calderone was preparing the way for L'Arche in 1982 and asked my help in preparing the way. I gave a talk at Potters House, made connections with parents and friends and co-workers at the Pastoral Center, where I was working at the time. I was so excited and honored to be asked to help in any way I could. However, I was overwhelmed when the Board of Directors asked me to live at the house for the first year. I needed to keep my position at the Pastoral Center, which was to open an office for Persons with Disabilities. Believe me, it was an exciting year!

We were getting (the house) ready for the two men, our first residents, Gene and Glen. Both men were from Forest Haven, the institution belonging to the District of Columbia. I visited it several times and saw and felt the sadness that permeated the environment where the residents lived their lives. It was a happy day of welcome for Gene and Glen when they arrived. They loved the house, their bedrooms and the food, etc. Dennis and Kathy worked hard to find programs for both men to attend during the day that suited their needs.

My favorite story was when Kathy came to me to ask me to take the men to buy new suits for EASTER. Who, me? I never had sisters or brothers and knew nothing about a men's store for their Easter outfits. We all looked for favorite colors for each one and what sizes could they be, etc. The salesman was very helpful and patient. It took about two hours and we headed home to show Dennis and Kathy the new outfits.

On Easter Sunday, the four of us attended Church in our new duds. When we came home, we posed on the front top steps of Ontario House for a picture. My copy of the picture has been on the window sill in my office for 35 years. It is a bit faded by now but remains a great memory.



Mo and Barbara in 2004

### **Barbara Ryan, most recently Director of Healthcare Coordination and Training:**

When I came to L'Arche, on January 1, 1998, we were two houses - Ontario (in its former, smaller state) and Euclid. Our "offices" were in the basement of Ontario, which I always enjoyed, because I got to see the core people daily and wander upstairs for coffee, conversation, lunch (and some work....)) And of course Milton the cat. Being at L'Arche for so long - 17 years - I certainly had the long view of what life at L'Arche means in the lives of all who came. For the core people - who come and generally stay - I saw growth in independence, and self-advocacy, in sharing and living together and in expressing wants and needs in positive ways. And I saw people who were finally able to ask for and get what they needed in life. For the assistants - always a shorter-term view - I also saw lives changed. As Vanier would tell us, of course, we are all broken, and it is sharing life together that mends and heals, and makes us stronger in the broken places.

I've always been touched by and taught by the families. I often felt how courageous it was for families to entrust their loved ones to L'Arche - and to the care of people who were sometimes young enough to be their own sons and daughters... I remember thinking often, when discouraged or a bit overwhelmed by the bureaucracy, that if it weren't for the community, I couldn't continue. It was that magical and mystical and sacred body that touched my life for 17 years - and still remains close to my heart.

### John Cook, former Community Leader of L'Arche GWDC:

The founding vision for L'Arche Greater Washington, D.C., included relationship with The Church of the Saviour ("COS") because of COS's faith practices and culture. COS was a Community in which L'Arche founder Jean Vanier found inspiration, and as did Henri Nouwen. When L'Arche GWDC began in 1983, COS consisted of nine small, ecumenical Christian communities focused on radical discipleship and mission in what was then the poor and crime-ridden north Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington, D.C. COS owned the house on Ontario Road and leased it at cost to L'Arche for its first home. COS eventually donated the home to L'Arche as a major contribution to L'Arche's first capital campaign. Many of the people involved in starting L'Arche were part of COS in 1983, including Dottie Bockstiegel, its first three Community Leaders 1983-2016: Kathy Bruner, Dennis Calderone, John Cook), and many of the early Assistants. All of the founding Core Family Members (Michael Schaff, Glen Houser, Eugene Sampson, Nathaniel Taylor, Maurice Higgs) attended COS after coming to L'Arche.

True to its vision, L'Arche GWDC integrated many of COS's faith practices. COS had learned that keeping communities small can increase intimacy, the need for the community to reach outward, and leadership growth. L'Arche experienced those benefits of small size in its 2-home Adams Morgan community. When L'Arche decided to grow, it created a new 2-home community in Arlington, Virginia, rather than open more homes in Adams Morgan. L'Arche GWDC also adopted from COS the practices of naming people's gifts and of people telling their "sacred stories" to the community (COS called them "spiritual autobiographies"). Like COS, L'Arche learned that telling sacred stories increases a sense of mutual love, understanding, and belonging. Naming each person's gifts emboldens the person in exercising them, and alerts the community to receiving the gifts. COS co-founder Gordon Cosby said that "each person leads the community at the point of her or his gift," and L'Arche GWDC learned to live that truth.



**"L'Arche learned that telling sacred stories increases a sense of mutual love, understanding, and belonging. Naming each person's gifts emboldens the person in exercising them, and alerts the community to receiving the gifts."**

*John, Jean Vanier, and Dottie in 2002*

### Ivo Spalatin, former President of the Board and L'Arche Board Member:

Inspired by Vanier, and encouraged by Kathy Bruner and Dennis Calderone, I became a member of the original Board of Directors of L'Arche, serving as President for 12 years, from 1983-1995. At our First Anniversary celebration in 1984, with special guests Sargent Shriver and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, we were recognized for the first major grant from the Kennedy Foundation.

During my time on the Board, I witnessed the giving to and sharing of life with men and women who had little hope before they joined L'Arche. For example, I remember Michael who ... came to our Ontario Road home looking distraught, forlorn, and anxious. Shortly after living in the community, however, he shined with a smile and engaged all of us with animated insights into the happenings of the Adams Morgan neighborhood. Every time he saw me he would ask about my 4 children and enthusiastically tell me their birthdays!



# 35 YEARS OF Belonging



1997 – Hanging Out With Friends  
from Bethlehem House



1983 – Leaving DC for  
Thanksgiving in Erie



1995 – Community Retreat



1987 – Eugene, Tom, Patty, Johnny,  
Michael, Maurice, Glen, Dottie



1987 – Mo and Dottie



1997 – DC Community Members



1999 – Adams Morgan Days





2002 – Ontario House Renovations



Don and Elizabeth  
in the snow



2005 – Highland Renovations



2002 – Eileen and  
Jean Vanier



2006 – Fritz and John Cook Dancing



2003 – Art Show at Reed Smith



2004 – Regional Gathering



2004 – Debora at  
Regional Gathering





2010 – 6th Street Opens



2008 – DC Core Members



2009 – Help the Homeless Walkathon



2010 – 6th Street Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



2014 – Halloween Party



2011 – VA Group Picture





2006 – Fritz, Eduardo, Linda, and Highland Assistants



2013 – Celebration and Blessing Song



2011 – Eric and Caitlin



2013 – Dottie and Bob at Solidarity Night



2010 – Help the Homeless Walkathon



2014 – 6th Street House Vacation



2010 – Eileen at the Nationals Game





2018 – After Dinner Prayer



2015 – Hope, Mo, and Michael at Confirmed Membership Celebration



2016 – Kelly Comes to L'Arche



2015 – Walton and Linda



2017 – John Cook's Retirement Celebration



2017 – Euclid Apartment Blessing



2018 – Bruce's 60th Birthday



2017 – Arlington County Fair



# Michael's Reflections on 35 years in L'Arche

By Megan Hrdlicka

Michael Schaff, who lives in L'Arche at Ontario Road, has seen it all. Literally. In the 35 year history of L'Arche Greater Washington, D.C. (GWDC), Michael has been there every day to witness the life of L'Arche. Even more amazingly, he most likely remembers many of those days well enough to give you the complete run-down.

One of Michael's gifts include a sharp and detailed memory, in which he holds the past 35 years of changes, adventures, ups and downs, and growth of the L'Arche GWDC community. He remembers moving into Ontario House in 1983, where he has lived since, with a small group of people. He remembers when long-time friend, Maurice (Mo) Higgs, joined L'Arche in 1985, as well as when he helped housemates prepare to grow into Euclid house in 1988.

As Michael patiently answers my questions about how the past has become the present, several themes begin to surface. Michael makes sure to emphasize his ability to do the things he wants and be his own person at L'Arche. Through his enjoyment of being "stubborn" and going on vacations of his choosing, our conversation regularly comes back to the ways L'Arche has enabled him to "be more of myself." Gifts often taken for granted in our world, Michael does not overlook the value of ongoing choice and support that is part of his life at L'Arche. Our conversation continues, and Michael reflects with a sense of love and reverence for the history of his community that he holds so close to his heart and shares so openly. He explains the different jobs he has held over the years, the friends that have come and gone, the challenges of losing dear housemates as time has passed. When asked what has changed within L'Arche over the years, Michael responds, "everything!" without hesitation, but quickly notes his appreciation for the consistency in his long-term, core member housemates, and shares with me how he has (begrudgingly) learned to adapt to change.

It becomes very clear that Michael cares deeply about his relationships with others, both within L'Arche and without. A key part of his day is his trip to McDonald's for a coffee, which he points out he has done every possible day during the 35 years he's lived in Adams Morgan with L'Arche. Over his coffee, he catches up with neighbors, meets new friends, and shares stories of L'Arche with others. Through his walks and these visits, the community knows Michael, and thereby, gets to know L'Arche.

Back at home, he teaches his housemates about Ontario House, the background of L'Arche GWDC, the history of D.C., and perhaps most interestingly to Michael, lots and lots of information about America's past presidents.

Michael honors 35 years of L'Arche not only on the momentous occasion, but through his actions every day. As an ambassador from McDonald's to 8th Day, from Ontario House to Jubilee Church, he generously shares his wealth of knowledge to help others piece together the past of L'Arche growth and see the brighter, fuller picture of home that Michael sees.

**MICHAEL SUMS UP HIS GOAL FOR THE FUTURE OF L'ARCHE SUCCINCTLY, SHARING HIS HOPE FOR HIMSELF AND OTHERS AT L'ARCHE AS:**

**"WE WILL DO WHAT WE WANT TO DO."**

As our conversations concludes, Michael sums up his goal for the future of L'Arche succinctly, sharing his hope for himself and others at L'Arche as: "we will do what we want to do." This phrase, which could be (mis)interpreted as an off-hand comment, is anything but — in fact, Michael's hopes capture the mission, growth, heart, and accomplishments of L'Arche GWDC in one fell swoop. And with that, here's to 35 more years of Michael and others doing what they want to do at home in L'Arche.



Michael and Mo



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## *A Poem by Dottie Bockstiegel*

It's hard to think since we began that thirty years (now thirty-five!) have past.

The dream we had to create L'Arche as something that would last

Has now become a reality and we can often see

Reflections of a vision of how we were meant to be.

Ontario was first in line in 1983.

For many folks it soon became a special place to be.

In '89 the Euclid house began to show its face.

And those who came to fill this home found it a lovely place.

We wondered where we would go next, what new place would there be?

Perhaps Virginia, Maryland or just stay in DC

Virginia seemed to welcome us and so we went that way.

And after learning its new ways we looked for where to stay.

We found a home in Arlington, a place on Highland St.

And finally our Sixth Street home would make our group complete.

To show that all are valued is a dream for which we pine

And to reflect the love of God and make our own light shine.

For all the ways we've come together, we thank you God.