

How started Faith and Sharing, Diocese of Valleyfield



*By Louise Larivière
(in 1978, she was named Louise Lefebvre)*

Our diocese had gathered in our cathedral Sainte-Cécile in 1978 for a range of activities, movements, groups, religious communities which were part of it. To broaden our vision of what might interest us in the Church, there were several booths associated with the different participants. For my part, I met Sister Victorine Grand in the booth of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. She introduced me to Jean Vanier by playing one of his tapes. I had the bug, love at first sight, call it what you like.

My brother Pierre-Paul, the eldest of our family, was a person with a severe intellectual disability and could not speak. Jean Vanier had touched in me all the fibers of my heart because he said that the disabled person had a gift, a unique value. It was for me a great discovery that answered my questioning about the suffering facing my brother. Finally I discovered an answer.

Sister Victorine invited me with my mother to meet Father Jean-Marie Côté and Betty Renaud in Montreal. They were preparing a pilgrimage to Rome for Faith and Light. I was deeply impressed by those people who were leading with faith in this project without money. Then I was invited to a meeting by Father Jean-Marie.



At the first communion of Pierre-Paul,
1997

I think it was in Chicoutimi, in this part of the country, and Jean Vanier was there. Without knowing what it was, in all my being I felt that something was happening.

Subsequently I talked about Jean Vanier to everyone, enough to tire many people. It began to interest people in connection with people with disabilities. Lucienne Goyette and I began praying to set up a Faith and Sharing group in Valleyfield, and then the light was on us. Denise Latour and Father Hubert Julien joined us. We prepared the first meeting with this team on September 22, 1978 and the first meeting of the group was on Friday, September 29, 1978. We were 24 participants. Pope John Paul I died at that time.



Louise, Denise and her mother, about
1978

At the Thanksgiving Day that followed, Denise and I went to the 10th anniversary of Faith and Sharing in Toronto. When I came back, Father Jean-Marie said to me, "It is you who will be in charge of the Valleyfield group" and I accepted. For 8 years we had meetings once a month. Week-long retreats were organized, and then there were retreats of a few days in our city. We were always in touch with the Faith and Sharing groups of Quebec and with the North American meetings, where we were invited to participate.

Bishop Robert Lebel had asked me to communicate with Jean Vanier throughout these 8 years, to invite him to come and preach a retreat in our diocese. He came to Rigaud Sanctuary for a short time before going to animate a retreat in Sherbrooke in 1985. In 1986, a successor to continue the responsibility of our group did not take place. I had 3 children then. We were 6 years without activities. I continued

to receive invitations to attend some meetings elsewhere. During my participation in one of these meetings, I asked Jean Vanier if he would come to a Valleyfield retreat. He told me that if there was no Faith and Sharing group, he would not come. So I called Bishop Lebel, told him Jean's answer and told him that I was going to try to restart Faith and Sharing, but that I would not be the coordinator. It was Sister Claire Paquette (SSNJM), who taught me in Valleyfield, who accepted the charge.

After discovering Jean Vanier, there was later a Faith and Light group for a few years and then a group interested in a project of L'Arche that lasted 6 years. The project of L'Arche was not realized, but out of it was born the desire for respite for people with intellectual disabilities. Carol Haineault, who has since been in Valleyfield, did this.

It's been 40 years in 2018 since Faith and Sharing started. I wish it to continue to sow the Spirit of love that touches the heart of the poor in each of us. Bravo and congratulations to those who have allowed and still allow today these meetings. Blessed of the hand of our God, who makes himself poor with us all. 💜



Jean, Denise and Louise, about 1992



Celebration of Christmas with Céline Brisson, Roger Montpetit, Robert Laparé, Pascal Daigle, Carol Haineault and others



Gilles Desroches, Julie Pregent and André Lafleur in 2009