Faith and Sharing

Heart - to - Heart

North American Bulletin

April 2018
Volume 44, no. 2

Theme of this bulletin:

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Faith and Sharing:
The beginnings of Faith and Sharing in my region/community

Faith and Sharing: a 50th, a Jubilee

By Marc Rioux,
North American Spiritual Guide

Faith and Sharing 50th 1968 – 2018

Jesus, after his baptism, spent the time needed in the desert to "live a retreat of vocational discernment", then decided to return to Nazareth where he had been raised. As usual, on the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue of his native village. He got up to read. He read this passage from Isaiah:

> *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year (*Jubilee) *of the Lord." He began to tell them, "**Today**, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* Lk 4:18-19.21

Verse 19 of this text recalls the Lord's request to Moses to celebrate a year of Jubilee every 50 years (Lev 25:10). This is the year when the debts of the poor are canceled, the slaves are freed and the land is returned to its original owners...

Faith and Sharing has been inspired for 50 years (1968-2018) by the witness of life and the preaching of Jean Vanier, who calls us to live the radical message of Jesus by making us the neighbor of the marginalized, the destitute, the left-behind,...

"*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*" at my baptism... One day each of us freely decided to try to follow Jesus and to announce the Good News, by recognizing our fragility and making us poor with the poor according to the heart of God.

In this fiftieth (Jubilee) year, we are invited to remember, with a heart full of gratitude, what we have experienced during these years of grace granted by the Lord.

One of the ways to remember will be to share, in the October 2018 bulletin, short personal testimonials that will surely highlight how Faith and Sharing has been, for hundreds of people, a place of growth in the faith of the God of Jesus and a place of commitment and solidarity with our more deprived sisters and brothers.

The importance of sharing our personal and community experiences with Faith and Sharing as a testimony cannot be underestimated. Celebrate the 50th and feast, as Jean Vanier writes, remembering the past, celebrating the present and keeping an open eye on the future.

"The feast is a time of thanksgiving in which we thank God for a historic event in which his loving power has manifested itself in regard to humanity, the people, or the community; it is also a reminder that he is always there, present, watching over his people and the community as a Father who loves his children. The feast is the celebration not only of a past action but of a present reality ". Jean Vanier

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Themes of upcoming issues

October 2018 (dead line: September 15, 2018): **The fruits of Faith and Sharing**

The beginnings: Marylake

Extract from the website of Faith and Sharing Quebec:

Faith and Sharing comes from a retreat led by Jean Vanier in 1968 in Marylake, Ontario. Invited by the Archbishop of Toronto to preach a retreat to priests, Jean Vanier agreed on the condition that it be open to other people. He insisted that we join the poorest, the most marginal, those who often do not have the chance to live these days of spiritual renewal.

Marylake, 1968

Marylake, 1969

Faith and Sharing – Ottawa, its history

Isabelle Frappier in 2000

By Isabelle Frappier

In 1968 Jean Vanier animated the first retreat in Toronto that gave this momentum that we know. In 1969, at the archbishop of Ottawa Aurèle Plourde's request, Jean Vanier preached the first retreat in French.

Louis Raby, died in 1975

What were the fruits of this 1969 retreat? That was the beginning of Faith and Sharing in Ottawa. A committee was formed of six people including Louis Raby o.m.i (he himself animated many retreats for the Ottawa group). It was the beginning of the prayer group. From 1970 until 1995, annual retreats were organized. The retreats were offered to everyone ("open retreat") starting in 1984.

In 1972, members helped the installation of L'Arche Alleluia in Ottawa.

In 1981, the members offered support to St-Vincent Hospital patients for the pilgrimage to Lourdes, France, organized by Jean Vanier.

Faith and Sharing – Ottawa touched hundreds of lives from all walks of life during all these years.

Jean-Marie Côté, Marc Rioux, Claire Leblanc, Gertrude Leclerc and Jacqueline Leblanc in 1988

In 1995, the activities ceased. The year 1994 saw the last annual retreat organized by the group.

What went on between 1995 and 2016?

Some members of Faith and Sharing got involved in the family pastoral at St-Charles parish, the monthly meetings and the annual retreats. That is how Robert and Isabelle got acquainted with Faith and Sharing by attending regional and North American retreats and visiting other Faith and Sharing Communities. Isabelle has been on the North American committee for seven years.

Madeleine Séguin

Following the North American French-speaking retreat of June 2016 in Quebec City, a new group was formed and started meeting and praying in Ottawa in September 2016. Since then, the small group meet twice a month to meditate the Word of God and pray together. I have a feeling that we are going back to the roots of what Faith and Sharing was at the very beginning.

This 2016 7-day retreat in Quebec City bore fruits and graces that we can't begin to imagine. Here we are two years after this event: *La Maison La Charité* was founded (See the article *Another Fruit of Faith and Sharing* in the Heart-to-Heart bulletin of October 2017, pages 10-11) and members still meet to pray the same way as the founders did.

What will be Faith and Sharing Ottawa in the next few years? No one can predict, whatever happens will be God's will.

At *La Maison La Charité*, 2017

History of Faith and Sharing - Montreal

Pierre Desroches 1992

By Pierre Desroches

Sr. Yolande Brodeur, 2005

Following one of Marylake's first retreats, people who participated in it were at the origin of Faith and Sharing-Montreal: Yolande Brodeur c.n.d, Jean-Marie Côté cssr and a few others. When the retreat was over, people asked Jean to be able to renew the experience, but he was already well taken with the development of L'Arche and Faith and Light and invited them to do it themselves. It was the birth of Faith and Sharing.

A small group started in Montreal and I believe that the first retreat took place at Sainte-Cunégonde parish in the Saint-Henri neighborhood, at the invitation of the pastor who was Guy Bouillé, himself present at Marylake.

Jean-Eudes Bourque, 2011

Jean-Eudes Bourque, then at the Foyer de Charité in Pointe-aux-Trembles, participated in this event and his life was greatly changed. At the beginning, Sister Yolande Brodeur came from Quebec, I think every two weeks, and the little cell held a prayer meeting in the manner of Faith and Sharing, at the residence of the Redemptorists in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. The Redemptorist community was very involved in the early days of Faith and Sharing-Montreal.

The first retreats were spent in Val-Morin where I personally never went. There were many couples involved including Betty Renaud and

her husband Phil. Betty is the founder of Faith and Light for the Montreal area. The first retreats were held in a closed environment during the summer period. I had my first retreat in Saint-Côme in the summer of 1978. I was a seminarian at the parish of Saint-Alphonse d'Youville and was under the responsibility of the Redemptorists.

I was already involved in the Victor-Doré school, a special school of the school board for physically handicapped children. When I registered for the retreat, I received Jean-Marie Côté's phonecall to ask if I would agree to preach it with him. He was to preach it with his colleague Vincent Larouche, but he had to leave before the retreat for his new appointment in Haiti. So I was with Jean-Marie the preacher for that year. At the end of the retreat Jean-Marie confirmed me as a preacher by inviting me not to neglect this gift received from God.

Jean-Marie Côté, 1978

Gilles Dufour, 2011

My presence at the Victor-Doré school encouraged the arrival of my students in the Faith and Sharing group. Many have remained very loyal to Faith and Sharing and Gilles Dufour is still a very active member of the Montreal group.

For a few years, closed retreats continued, but an imbalance in the number of people with disabilities and seeking care forced us to revisit the formula. This was the moment when we started the popular retreats at Saint-Sacrement parish in Montreal. There, every summer, with the participation of parish volunteers and the participation of Faith and Sharing we could meet - more than one hundred people in communion with homeless people, to live and celebrate the Feast of Faith and Sharing.

Stéphane Martin and Éric Parizeau 2004

At Notre-Dame-des-Neiges parish, 2011

Marc Rioux, Rita Gagné, Angèle Gagné, Jacques Pelletier, Mary Munroe, Jana Letourneau, Claude Dussault my son, Stéphane Martin and many others were friends, Brothers and Sisters of Faith and Sharing-Montreal.

Today, the small community continues at Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Parish and we remain attentive to where God leads us.

Genesis of a Faith and Sharing Community at the diocese of Quebec

Marc Rioux, 1990

By Marc Rioux

Introduction

Faith and Sharing was initiated in North America at the end of the 1960s, after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), this great assembly of all hopes that wanted to open the Church to the world and its modernity, following a completely new type of spiritual retreats preached by a layman, Jean Vanier, a man of prayer and action who has the constant concern to live and relay the message of the Good News of the Lord Jesus. Jean announced a new Word whose source was the Bible and his life experience very concrete, including at “L’Arche", which he founded with Raphael and Philippe in 1964.

The Word thus proclaimed, which made Jesus completely alive, became the Word of God and of Life. Following this experience of the first retreats, many testified that they were deeply moved, converted.

> *"The history of a community is important, it must be said and reiterated, inscribed and repeated. We forget so quickly what God has done! It must be remembered in time and out of season that God is at the origin of everything, and that He is the one who has watched over the community with love*.” Jean Vanier

Genesis

1- In the beginning, in the province of Quebec, as elsewhere in North America, it was only a question of organizing and living closed retreats where Jean and others proclaimed the Word. We went from diocese to diocese and every time we invited people from other dioceses. We did not talk about the Faith and Sharing Community yet. I would say that it was not even planned because it was a question of organizing and living retreats of this very special type, but I remember that it was often said: "Faith and Sharing is a way of life, an art of living in everyday life". Jean always insisted on bringing priests, religious and lay people from all walks of life in equal number, if possible. That's what I lived, with about a hundred people both in Mont-Roland north of Montreal in 1970 and at Mont-Saint-Sacrement school in Valcartier, north of Quebec City in 1971.

As Jean had done at the end of the very first retreats, in Mont-Rolland, the first in Quebec, he asked retreatants from various dioceses to form, on their return home, a team that would pray to Jesus to discern whether He wanted a retreat in the following years.

Thus, from one year to the next, prayer teams from different dioceses who, according to Jean's wishes, obtained the consent or support of their bishop, prepared and animated at home retreats that will be called "Faith and Sharing". Jean, refusing any cult of personality, did not want them to be called "Vanier Retreats". I remember hearing him point out the difference between the guru who is followed by his disciples and the Christian who invites to follow Jesus.

2- Subsequently, while continuing to invite people from all walks of life, all social conditions and all ages, the various teams of preparation and animation of retreats have made sure to make a privileged place for more people who are fragile, injured in life, disadvantaged or disabled.

3- Then, during a weekend spent in an Outdoor Center in February 1972, Jean suggested that we live a future retreat in the Lower Town. This wish was shared and warmly welcomed by religious and lay people already working in the underprivileged neighborhoods of Greater Quebec and by the various pastoral zone councils (St-Sauveur, St-Roch, Limoilou...) to whom the project was presented. The teams of sharing and spontaneous prayer also supported the coordination team of this first retreat in a working-class district of the city. There were both interns and commuters. For the interns, mattresses were placed on the floor of the recreation rooms of two elementary schools of Saint-Malo. In the women's room, night tables were added between each mattress. As for the commuters, they went to sleep at home or with friends. From day to day, the number of participants in this retreat increased. As for the meals, they were organized and served by nuns and lay volunteers in the room of a convent in the Saint-Sauveur district.

4- In 1973, the retreat took place at the Hôpital Général de Québec, whose goal at the founding in 1692 was to provide care to the poor and the elderly.

In the morning, several gathered as a team of sharing the Word and spontaneous prayer, others preferred to meditate alone.

In the afternoon, Jean gave talks at the auditorium. The sick and elderly in the hospital could listen to the Word in their room or in a small hall through an intercom system. In the evening, Jean was speaking in the open air in front of the hospital, where hundreds of people were gathering, more numerous from one evening to the next.

It was towards the end of this retreat that we celebrated for the first time a “Feast of Life”. More than 2,000 people from Greater Quebec and elsewhere converged on the evening to the Municipal Stadium to express, with the retreatants, their gratitude to the Lord of life by games, songs, testimonies including that of Janine Sutto, actress Quebecker, mother of Catherine Deyglun, who has trisomy 21. A Eucharistic celebration and a big fireworks ended the Feast.

Louise Bergeron and Maurice Thériault

It happened to me one day, thinking back to this retreat, I realized: it took a team of crazy or daring supporters of the cause of Jesus to dream this project and realize it. Inviting hundreds of people from various dioceses to listen to the Word of God in and in front of

the General Hospital, at the same time as 75 others, including several teenagers, gathered at Maison Jésus-Ouvrier for a closed retreat that Fernand Lacroix cjm, the bishop of Edmundston, animated. Imagine, the organization, the talks, and in addition, a Feast of Life at the municipal stadium. All this by volunteers. All of this, for free, as one crowd once did, who was fed on the five barley breads and two fishes that a child had (Jn 6: 9). With "anawim" (poor according to the beatitudes), God can do a lot.

Jean Garneau of Quebec created this logo for this first Feast of Life:

I believe in life

At the heart of this heart, symbol of love, formed by two stylized people who meet and share, a white cross, sign of the faith of Christians to the risen Christ.

This logo, without "I believe in life", became the official emblem of the North American Faith and Sharing Community.

During this retreat, exceptionally for eight days, in various part of Greater Quebec, there were seventeen Katimavik (a small "unstructured" room, furnished and decorated very simply, even bare... a desert where flows a spring of living water...) where people could go to sit, gather with Jesus to listen to Him and stay with Him day and night.

It was during this same retreat that the project of a first L'Arche home in Quebec was initiated. This became the “L’Arche Le Printemps” in St-Malachie in the Bellechasse region.

New evangelization

It happens that we often hear an extract of the Word of God but that we do not really listen and assimilate it. One day, I listened and I, like many others, was disturbed by this Jesus who, seeing people helpless and slaughtered, was compassionate towards them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mt 9:36). Did not this man Jesus, himself, first touched, and moved by what the Lord had said to Moses: "I saw, yes, I saw the misery of my people who are in Egypt, and I heard their cries under the blows of the overseers. Yes, I know his sufferings... I went down to deliver him... Now so, go! I am sending you...” Ex 3:7-10

This story of the genesis of the Faith and Sharing community in Quebec City shows us that, as a living organism, it has been able to adapt from year to year in order to live more deeply the spoken Word. It will do more afterwards. It will produce, with the inspiration of the Spirit of Jesus, fruits, to the extent that its members will feed on the Word of God and will be close to the wounded of the life, the marginalized and the impoverished... and, hearing their cry, they will understand better the Good News of Jesus who always calls to follow him and who sends...

At the parish retreat of Saint-Prosper de Beauce, 2002

The origins of Faith and Sharing in Sherbrooke

Two separate prayer groups came together to form Faith and Sharing in Sherbrooke. Here is the story of each group.

Denise and Gilles Croteau, 2011

By Denise Croteau

In 1971, following a retreat of Jean Vanier at Val Morin, people begin a prayer group in the spirit of this retreat: Lise St-Arnaud, Denise and Gilles Croteau, Sr. Yolande Brodeur, Yvonne Croteau, Michel-André Chénard and some others. Their meetings were weekly. There were some people with physical or intellectual disabilities. Meetings took place at the Sisters of Mercy, at Michel-André Chénard home, at “Mont Notre-Dame”, at the parish “Perpétuel-Secours”, and recollections at the Poor Clares of Lennoxville and at our cottage.

I went to the annual retreats in Val Morin, for about 10 years, preached by Jean Vanier, then by Father Jean-Marie Côté. Returning from the retreats, I was stimulated. It made me live. Faith and Sharing was pleasant, motivating. I learned to pray, a prayer shared with others. I have had great friendships, which I do not forget.

Yvon Bilodeau and Janvier Caron, about 1982

By Yvon Bilodeau, priest

In January 1973, during the week of prayer for Christian Unity, a small group of people gathered at the “Christ-Roi” parish of Sherbrooke at the invitation of two priests of the pastoral team, Guy Labrecque and Yvon Bilodeau . The purpose was precisely to pray for the unity of Christians.

The following week, the two pastors, after consulting the people, decided to continue the prayer meetings. Young people and adults (about a dozen) met up. The prayer formula was simple, inspired by the retreats of Jean Vanier, to which some participated.

Then the meeting place moved to the residence of the Daughters of Charity of the Sacred Heart, Wellington Street South. The prayer group, which had no name, was growing and continued to meet every week. In the year that followed, the meetings were held at the Youville Hospital, where Brother Jean Beloin, who had just arrived from Africa, became a member of the group.

In August 1975, several members took part in the Faith and Sharing Retreat in Quebec City. It became obvious then for them that they belonged to the same spiritual family. The group now had a name: Faith and Sharing.

Links continued to be forged with the Quebec and New Brunswick retreatants. Finally, a Faith and Sharing retreat was organized in the Sherbrooke area. Then in Lennoxville, St-Ferdinand of Halifax, Waterville and Bromptonville, in addition to the monthly meetings held at the Sherbrooke Seminary. Since then, these meetings and retreats have continued to take place.

1985 Retreat

Claude Gendron, 2004

In Montreal for the visit of the Holy Father, 1984

At the hospital, pray around Claudette Tremblay, about 2002

Sharing team at "Camp Bel-Air", 1994

The love at Faith and Sharing since its beginnings

At "Séminaire de Sherbrooke", about 1990

Mgr Gérard Cambron
and Lise Morin, 2004

By: Lise Morin, Sherbrooke

Greetings,

"*Love one another as I have loved you*." Jn 15:12

The Word of God inspired the Faith and Sharing Sherbrooke Community, more than forty-five years ago. Indeed, Christ passed through the heart of Jean Vanier whose message of loving the little ones joined the fertility of various beautiful other souls. By their inspiration to offer a place to anyone who recognizes his "poverty", Faith and Sharing was born.

Faith and Sharing is therefore a mission to which the Lord has called us. Let us thank people for their "yes" to build community to welcome brothers and sisters. These pioneers, in simplicity and trust, believed that every person deserved an undoubted dignity. To elevate every human being from their wounds, poverty and fragility, dressing them in various ways, such was their prayer.

The essence of our beautiful community is love. Without prejudice, we invite our neighbor to reveal his sacred history. The doors of Faith and Sharing are always open to discover the gifts that spring from the heart. This sharing enriches our faith.

As we grow older, we put our hope in God so that he guides our steps for the continuity of Faith and Sharing. In what aspects will we be signs of the Gospel for each other? Let us be attentive to the breath of the Holy Spirit in our service garden.

Faith and Sharing is an important drop of life created by love for love.

Let's Celebrate Jesus

Cleveland

Jesus and Fr. Jim O'Donnell, 2012

By Fr. Jim O'Donnell

August 12, 1972 marked the beginning of a week in Cleveland, Ohio called "Let's Celebrate Jesus."

A year previous to that week in 1972, Jean Vanier asked our core group of Faith and Sharing to plan a seven day retreat to be held in the seven poorest areas of Cleveland. It was a daunting challenge! Totally unlike other retreats of Faith and Sharing we had no GPS, no compass to guide us as this retreat would not be conducted in the usual Faith and Sharing format. And not one of us on the planning team lived in any of the truly poorest areas of Cleveland. Embracing this challenge, one of our team members studied the city of Cleveland and put us on track to the seven poorest neighborhoods.

As I look back to those seven areas of our city today, I realize they are the ones where the most revitalization has occurred. Thousands of new homes have been built by Habitat for Humanity. Food centers have been established in all seven areas and facilities for the homeless are now available.

Fr. Bill Clarke
1981

This first Cleveland Faith and Sharing retreat had two dimensions. Each day began in quiet time before the Blessed Sacrament. Afterwards Father Bill Clarke animated and announced the Word of God to a small group of retreatants while Jean Vanier visited local jails, and poor nursing homes throughout the seven targeted neighborhoods.

The menu for the week was peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for every meal. Yes you understood me correctly! With every meal we were treated to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches which had been made in advance and frozen by many volunteers throughout the city.

On the very first evening while Jean was speaking, a person was killed nearby. We began our evening with African American Spirituals led by Willie Mae Wright, a Pentecostal preacher who became a shepherd and guide as we travelled through the neighborhoods. After Jean shared the Word of God, we would close the evening in silent prayer.

As the week progressed we could sense a hopefulness in the midst of great sufferings and poverty. We witnessed a resilience in the people as they prayed, sang, danced and shared their lives with us.

People who had no hope discovered hope.

People who suffered greatly discovered compassion.

There are many fruits that grew out of Let's Celebrate Jesus week. Our Cleveland L'Arche community was established in Hough, one of the first neighborhood sites we visited during "Celebrate Jesus" week. The founding of the Little Brothers and

Sisters of the Eucharist in the Central Neighborhood was yet another fruit of the retreat. It is there in Central where Maggie and I spent the next forty years in a ministry of prayer and presence. Both of us spent many hours in the juvenile detention center, the jail and prisons, visiting the lonely and embracing the families and children by living a ministry of presence in the neighborhood. Faith and Sharing has been a gift and treasure that nurtured us as we lived out a vocation to set up our tent among the least and most marginalized of peoples.

Sr. Maggie and Fr. Jim, 2012

As I reflect back over these forty-five years, I am deeply humbled and grateful for all the lives that have been touched. The many children who came through our doors during those years, now return to us as adults to bless us with their spouses and children. We were able to bless our people and now it is our people who bless us.

Let us give thanks together as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the beginnings of Faith and Sharing in North America. Let us celebrate its fruitfulness and blessings. Let's Celebrate Jesus!

Atlantic Canada Remembers…

By Marilyn Moore, Yarmouth, NS

In the early to mid 1970's Faith and Sharing began in the Atlantic provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. After the Marylake retreat in 1968 several priests and lay people carried Jean Vanier's message back to their faith communities. F. George Leach, SJ, living in Ontario at the time, came to Nova Scotia at different times and animated retreats in Halifax, Antigonish and Yarmouth. Small faith-sharing groups emerged from the retreats. Then we were blessed to have Jean Vanier come to Halifax, Antigonish and New Brunswick. Soon these faith-sharing groups began preparing annual Faith and Sharing retreats. In the beginning there would be one annual retreat for all three dioceses in NS – Yarmouth, Halifax and Antigonish. The retreats had to be held in universities to accommodate the large numbers attending – it was not unusual to have over 200 retreatants! At the same time retreats were also being held in New Brunswick. Archbishop Chiasson from the Diocese of Moncton and Bishop Lacroix from the Edmunston diocese animated retreats and from these retreats small Faith and Sharing groups began.

Father George Leach

The following are some reflections from people who attended some of these first retreats in the Atlantic region:

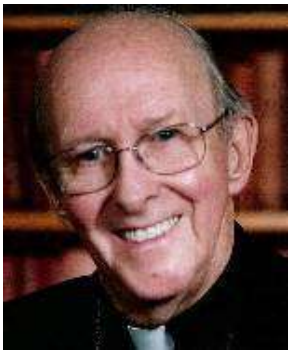
Martin's Point, A Mountain Top Experience - *Donna Legere, Halifax*

Like most of our experiences that happened a long time ago, the mind fills in what it forgets and if others wrote up this experience you might ask were they at the same event. Of course the joy of Martin's Point makes no sense without the retreat that started it all, so let me begin here.

In the summer of 1974 Jean Vanier came to Halifax to give a preached retreat. I was not on the retreat team nor did I know much about it. Someone said he was coming and that I should go. I was not a "line-in retreatant" but merely came for the talks like hundreds of others, but somehow I got pulled into it all and became friends with the team. Jean Vanier spoke to the core of my being and I was hooked! The team was on fire and I wanted to be connected to it all. When the retreat was over, we began to meet weekly at St. Patrick's Rectory for prayer, discussion and plans. Out of it all, came the retreat at Martin's Point and many more retreats and Faith and Sharing small groups.

Martin's Point was a summer place owned by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. It was a beautiful piece of property on the South Shore near Mahone Bay with a main house and a number of cabins. It was the beginning of Faith and Sharing retreats in the Halifax diocese.

There were some thirty retreatants, three priests (Fr. Basil Carew, Fr. Harvey Seasons, SJ and Fr. George Leach, SJ) and Bishop James Hayes – imagine that! The retreat was animated by Fr. George Leach and a young handicapped woman, a friend of Fr. George's. She could speak with only the use of two fingers and believe me getting her around in her wheelchair was a challenge. That being said, Dixie McMaster from Antigonish was an even bigger challenge – she was in a bed. I cannot remember that young woman's name but I can still see the smile on her face – it was so infectious and there was always someone by Dixie's bed treating her like the royalty she was. The retreat was filled with so much spirit and laughter – no challenge seemed too great. Our accommodations were basic but nothing about our retreat was – we were like the early Church – we shared everything in common and when something went wrong those who had less showed us how to fix it. We took turns making meals and cleaning up, we pushed the wheel chair and gathered around Dixie's bed, we prayed and shared. Our inside space was small but the camp grounds were beautiful and we swam, walked, talked and sang around an open fire.


Bishop James Hayes

On the day Bishop Hayes arrived it was obvious to the three priests that he was not in a good mood, but not wanting to ask him what it was, things got tense. We were gathered in a circle outside ready to celebrate Eucharist with the Bishop as presider, when one of the ladies stood up and loud and clear said: "wait a minute, wait a minute!" She went right up to the Bishop and put her arm on his shoulder and said: "Bishop, what is wrong; you are so sad." The tears came to his eyes and he said: "a friend of mine died." She gave him a hug and turned to the rest of us and said: "Did you hear that?" She told him it was all right and that we'd pray for him and his friend. She told him she would take good care of him - and she did – then said "Now let's have Mass". What a lesson we all learned that day.

Martin's Point was such a powerful retreat for us all – we wanted to stay there forever but it was only a beginning. I remember the lonely empty feeling I had when I got home from Martin's Point. After a few hours I called up one of the group and said: "Do you miss me?" She laughed and in no time we had a few others gathered for supper. We knew right there and then that this was just the start of something good.

Everyone on that retreat stayed involved in some way for many years and I am sure those of us still on this side of life remember those days with great gratitude for they were a mountain top experience for sure and only the beginning.

Doris Paisley, Kentville writes:

"The first time I went to a Faith and Sharing retreat, it was held at Acadia University in Wolfville, NS. I knew there were people who had physical and intellectual disabilities, but never had I seen so many in one place. It was wonder and love at first sight. I attended Faith and Sharing retreat in Wolfville, Halifax, Antigonish and Yarmouth. The people attending from Kentville –Wolfville area began to meet monthly at the Evergreen Nursing Home in Wolfville. We continued meeting there for many years and the residents always looked forward to our gatherings. Since my first retreat I have been a part of L'Arche Homefires – volunteering in any way I can. Faith and Sharing has been a large part of my life since that first retreat."

Sr. Evangeline Poirier, Hospitallers, Villa St. Joseph Nursing Home Yarmouth remembers going to a Faith and Sharing retreat sometime between 1975 – 1980 animated by Archbishop Chiasson. At the time she was living in Tracadie, NB. She says when she closes her eyes she can see and hear Archbishop Chiasson's quote that he used for his talk, 1 John 1:1: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life..." After the retreat she became a part of a small faith-sharing group in Tracadie where she lived for several years. Later she was transferred to Villa St. Joseph in Yarmouth, NS.

Father Pat O'Meara, Yarmouth shares:

I remember at one of the first Faith and Sharing retreats that I attended in the 80's being impressed with one of the animator's comments. The animator encouraged everyone not to use his or her illness or disability to over-power others by making them feel guilty.

Donna Newell, Yarmouth shares the following:

I had the privilege of attending the first Faith and Sharing retreat in Yarmouth in 1974 or 1975 which was animated by Fr. George Leach, SJ and I never looked back! I felt very much at home there and for me it truly was the gospel coming alive. I was so amazed how everyone was so willing to help each other. It was pure love. I think Faith and Sharing is the best kept secret in the Church!

The first Faith and Sharing retreat held in Antigonish, NS was in 1974. Bishop Lacroix and Sister Cazthérine McLellan animated the retreat. Dixie McMaster attended that first retreat – Dixie was confined to a hospital bed and was an inspiration to all those attending. She was like a magnet – everyone gathered around her. After the retreat a small Faith and Sharing group gathered at her house for many years, and at the same time other meetings were held there which became the start of the founding of L'Arche Antigonish. Today one of the L'Arche Antigonish homes is named "Dixie House" in her memory.

Faith and Sharing early days on Vancouver Island

By Claire Donovan

Bishop Remi De Roo was interviewed recently about his involvement with the beginnings of Faith and Sharing on Vancouver Island. As a Vatican Council Father, Bishop Remi De Roo actively participated in all 4 sessions of the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965. He shared, “at these sessions there was a deepened renewal sense of the mystery of the Church. It was recognized that all of the baptized faithful are members of the body of Jesus, have the gift of their baptismal royal priesthood, and are called to perfection regardless of age, colour, creed, or social standing”.

When he returned from these sessions, he was interested in promoting this new understanding here on Vancouver Island. He became interested to learn about Jean Vanier and the L’Arche communities that he was forming. Remi remembered, “I was impressed by Jean Vanier at a large gathering I attended in Winnipeg. The Archbishop of Winnipeg had not been made aware of the gathering ahead of time and Jean Vanier wanted to wait for him to arrive. In this way, Jean showed a sense of the communion with the whole Church and that gave me an immediate trust in what he was doing. So when I heard of people who wanted to invite Jean to come to Vancouver Island, I encouraged them to pursue it, sensing this was a prophetic initiative, inspired by the Holy Spirit.”

The first Faith and Sharing retreat on Vancouver Island was held in Duncan in 1974. Momentum grew and in 1983 Jean Vanier led a large Faith and Sharing retreat at the University of Victoria with the theme “Opening our hearts to the Poor”.

Bishop Remi has made himself available as much as possible to be present at our retreats over the last 44 years, often leading a worship service. He animated our retreat in 1994 alongside the Anglican bishop Barry Jenks and the United Church leader Reverend Lance Woods, speaking on the theme ‘One in Spirit’. In 2008, by then retired, he animated our retreat again, on the theme ‘Our journey with Jesus to the cross, a sign of hope’.

Bishop Remi also shared his observations that “in L’Arche and Faith and Sharing, there are people with disabilities and those who are hurting. The experience of suffering makes them sensitive to the mystery of the suffering of Jesus and the mystery of the cross. As St Paul stated, when he was weak, he was strong through the power of God. The members of Faith and Sharing are living the Beatitudes - the Sermon of the Mount, in a special way and at a deeper level than most people - Faith and Sharing."

To read a short history of Faith & Sharing on Vancouver Island, see Heart-to-Heart bulletin of April 2017, p. 3-4

The Beginnings… from Windsor to Detroit

Roots leading up to first Faith & Sharing Retreat in Detroit in 1976

By Fr Larry Kaiser
Senior priest of the Archdiocese of Detroit

I arrived at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Guelph Ontario on October 1 1971, looking forward to making a 30 day retreat.

In early June, I had packed all my belongings from a parish where I served as associate pastor for two years, my sixth and seventh in priestly ministry. I didn't know where God was leading me, whether to continue in ministry or change course. A priest friend recommended I attend a six week House of Prayer for priests in Lake Orion Michigan. With God's grace, new friendships developed in August and September. When an Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) sister from Monroe Michigan encouraged me to make a 30 day Jesuit retreat in Guelph, I was ready to respond "Yes" to the invitation. It was in the middle of October that my spiritual director on that retreat, Fr George Leach, took several retreatants to Toronto to hear Mother Teresa and Jean Vanier. That night I first heard about a Faith & Sharing Retreat from Jean Vanier. The seed was planted.

Four years later, in the summer of 1975, when I heard that Fr George Leach was animating a five day Faith & Sharing retreat in August at Assumption College in Windsor Ontario, I felt a strong pull from within (no doubt the Holy Spirit) to attend. There were several IHM sisters who also attended the retreat. At the end of the retreat, Fr Leach encouraged retreatants to bring the Faith & Sharing retreat (begun by Jean Vanier in 1968) to their locale.

The IHM sisters invited me to meet with them for dinner and a planning session at their house in September 1975. The focus of planning was: how and where to introduce the Faith & Sharing retreat to Detroit.

As a result of our many meetings, the first Detroit retreat was held at Sacred Heart Seminary in 1976. Then came the question: who would be willing to lead a committee to plan the second, the third, etc. retreats? I was asked to help discern some leaders.

As an associate priest at a nearby parish, I came to know some spirit-filled parishioners, Grace & Harry Gomula. I was thinking about whom to approach as possible leaders when I came across Grace and Harry in a local park. They were quick to say "yes" to my invitation (really the Holy Spirit's!) to lead Faith & Sharing in Detroit. They gathered local lay people and began planning the 1977 Detroit retreat!

The rest is history…. up to the present day. Blessed be God!

Fr. Larry Kaiser, Grace Gomula, Rita Oleksiak, Harry Gomula

To read a short history of Faith & Sharing in Detroit, see Heart-to-Heart bulletin of April 2017, p. 2-3

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.

At the first communion of Pierre-Paul, 1997

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. 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.

Louise, Denise and her mother, about 1978

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.

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.

Jean, Denise and Louise, about 1992

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 activites. 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.

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

Faith and Sharing, Jacksonville, Florida

By Sr. Rita Baum

In 1980-81, after trying two different forms of retreat "for people with disabilities", I made retreat in Detroit to learn about the retreat called "Faith and Sharing". I was inspired by the inclusion of young, old, married, single, and people with disabilities, all together on retreat at a beautiful facility, a seminary. I doubted we could do this in our Diocese of St. Augustine, where we had no seminary or catholic college, just a camp with bunk beds and no air conditioning, but the Detroit Animator, George Leach, SJ, assured me that "poor and simple" is good. He also connected us with Fr. George Strohmeyer as a potential Animator.

Our first Faith and Sharing, Summer of 1982, was blessed by Bishop John Snyder participating full time as a retreatant, Fr. George Strohmeyer as Animator accompanied by about ten Core Members from L'Arche Erie.and a good cross section of people from the Diocese. Even in the simple camp environment (with parishes coming in to provide meals) we created a Katimavik for ongoing meditation; and the same spirit of F&S as was experienced in Detroit.

For some years local priests and laypersons were invited to animate. Then Sr. Maureen Kelley OP and Fr. Ron Camarda felt called to continue this as a dedicated annual ministry.

Facilities have grown to include a next-door retreat center, separate Chapel, air conditioning in the cabins and an aquatic center.

Our 2018 retreat, May 20-24, still has openings and members from other Communities would be very welcome. Contact Rita Baum SSJ, at rbaumssj@yahoo.com or 904-826-7365.

Retreat 2011

The beginnings of Faith and Sharing in Rouyn-Noranda

By Carmel Thériault

I had just experienced a relationship separation. In the summer, while my two young children were with their father, I went to retreats in Val Morin, animated by Jean Vanier, and others. It made me feel good.

From 1977, I travelled from Rouyn to Montreal for Faith and Sharing meetings. It was with Mary Munroe, Sister Yolande Brodeur, Father Jean-Marie Côté, Pierre Desroches. It did not bother me to drive 7 or 8 hours for that.

Jean Vanier came for a retreat in Rouyn in 1982. Then, with Fernand Larouche, who was a priest then, we organized prayer meetings in Rouyn. In the parish, I introduced Faith and Sharing, a meeting on the first Monday of the month. Also, there were family retreats in the summer at Camp Fatima, which belonged to the diocese, for 25 years. The lectures were recorded by Hugues Turcotte. There were participants of all ages.

Brother Antonio Robineault

At the parish of Granada where I work, with Sr. Rose Robert, we met to pray one Saturday a month. As well at this time, I was bringing people from my area to Jean Vanier's retreats in Montreal, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Quebec, Aylmer... From time to time, we would visit the Timmins group, whose coordinator was Brother Antonio Robineault.

As I reflect, I notice that Faith and Sharing, and the language of Jean Vanier, is what Pope Francis says today. We share what the Word of God tells us. As much as I can, I do it in our parish. I try to include the Word of God and prayer in committee meetings; the Lord then takes care of us. We are lights in today's church: the Word is for everyone.

Regional meeting, *Camp Bel-Air* (near Sherbrooke), 1998

The beginnings of Faith and Sharing in Chicoutimi

Information collected by Jean Roy

It was in 1987 that Faith and Sharing Chicoutimi began its activities thanks, among others, to the following people:

Fr. Georges Tremblay, Sr. Gisèle Nadeau, Sr. Idola Morin, Lorette Gagnon, Estelle Bolduc

Jean Beloin and Jacqueline Noel, from Sherbrooke, remember going to Chicoutimi to share the spirit of Faith and Sharing and how its key elements.

In 1989, there was the great popular retreat preached by Jean Vanier and Sister Rita Gagné. About 1,300 people took part in CEGEP of Chicoutimi. The success of the retreat was ensured by the commitment of volunteers who organized accommodation, food, sharing in small teams, adoration at the Katimavik, talks, feast of the life, etc...

Subsequently, the group organized monthly meetings and retreats.

In 2009, the group ceased its activities.

Photos taken around 2008-2009

History of Faith and Sharing, Talbot Detention in Sherbrooke

By Lina Lagacé and Jana Létourneau

The idea of forming a Faith and Sharing group in prison came after a visit to the prison in Montreal. Since the Talbot prison in Sherbrooke had just opened, some people had the idea that it was a good way to meet the needs of the community.

Stéphane Bonin and Christine Baillargeon

In 1991 or 1992, Stéphane Bonin and Louis Beaudoin founded a group of *Emotions Anonymous* and this group was allowed to go to the prison to meet. It was later that Stéphane asked to go to Sector H-2, where the detainees were isolated from the others for their protection; they were therefore the "excluded" and the most poor of the prison. With Christine Baillargeon and Jana Létourneau, he formed the Faith and Sharing committee, probably in 1992 or 1993. This group animated a meeting every month until March 1995.

In April 1995, the group was reorganized. Stéphane asked Lina Lagacé to replace him. Sister Doris Charland m.n.d.a. and some volunteers already involved in other areas of the prison participated in the meetings. Jana Létourneau came back to help out from September to December.

In January 1996, Danielle Maréchal joined the group and did animation. In September 1996, Jacques Nadeau gave a testimony and subsequently he came regularly to meetings. Subsequently, Sylvie Rousseau became part of the team.

Faith and Sharing always maintained good contact with the detainees: simple and warm. There was a theme at each meeting, always related to the experiences of the inmates. Procedure: presentation of the theme, reflection in small groups, and often summarized in broad outline to the big group, song to preceed the reflection, reading of the Word of God, homily by the chaplain, Eucharist, snack and spontaneous meeting between the team and inmates.

We kept the learning acquired at Faith and Sharing: make room for each person, do not judge, listen to the person, see the beautiful and the good of each, allow each person present to feel part of the group, respect each person's beliefs, do not impose anything, do not discuss the opinion of another, etc. This allowed the guys to talk about their feelings, to share deeply, to fraternize for a few hours.

The group stopped having meetings around 2009, but a few people involved continue to visit detainees on a personal basis.

A word from the New English Speaking Coordinator

By Claire Donovan

When Maggie asked me to consider the role of English speaking coordinator to the Federation, my first thought was "why not?" But another voice said "not so fast. Is this what God is calling you to?" I know I can respond to pressure and end up feeling the weight of responsibility and need without the joy and ease of God's call.

So I reflected and asked my community to pray for me during my discernment. I have the gifts of time and health. I have a heart for Faith and Sharing having received so much over the years and I know how it feeds so many others. I received many nods of support and encouragement and began feeling energized. That's always a good sign in my experience. I said "yes".

I have now connected with most of the leaders from the six English speaking communities across North America. We are spread from the far East of Canada and the United States in Nova Scotia and Florida, to the West coast where I am on Vancouver Island. Other communities are active in Toronto where the whole thing started and in Detroit and Cleveland. I was touched by the steadfast dedication of those I spoke to, gently fanning a flickering flame, keeping the gift of Faith and Sharing alive. The Federation also has 6 French speaking communities, mostly in Quebec. Many of our communities have members who've been involved for over 40 years and still feel a deep love for the gift that Jean Vanier birthed in that first retreat in 1968. There's a sense that we keep on because what we create is needed in our world and communities. It is from God. It is fragile, always life giving and full of grace. It encourages me in our polarized world that our Federation unites Canada and the United States, English and French speakers.

Many have a deep desire to do something special this year to recognize our 50th anniversary. For some just coming together for a day will take all their resources. Others are planning longer retreats. We can pray for each other and hold each others' intentions and needs as we plan and when we gather.

As always in this work, I feel blessed, wonderment and humility.

50 years of blessing!

Jean Roy, 2004

By Jean Roy
French-speaking North American coordinator

Faith and Sharing 50th 1968 – 2018

Yes, I have returned to service as North American Coordinator. At the end of 2017, I realized that for me, it was important to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Faith and Sharing, which brought me so much! So, I'm back... And it's a pleasure for me to team up with Marc Rioux, Isabelle Frappier, and now Claire Donovan.

This 50th will not be celebrated by a big gathering. The North American committee will support the "decentralized" activities brought by local communities and individuals, in simplicity. Here are some activities that make their way: French speaking groups are preparing for "twinning" visits. English speaking groups will consider a common prayer time, three groups having their retreats at the same time in August. It was suggested that greeting cards be sent between communities. All activities are posted on the web page: https://faithandsharing.net/the50th.html

In 2018, the two issues of the Heart-to-Heart newsletter address the theme of the 50th. This April newsletter recalls the beginnings of each community or region. It is good to see many of the "elders" recount their memories. For the October newsletter, the theme will be: "*The Fruits of Faith and Sharing*". An invitation is made to all members of Faith and Sharing, old or new. Everyone can express what Faith and Sharing brings or has brought them, what it has changed in their lives, and express their gratitude.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this newsletter, thank you to everyone involved in the activities. May our hearts give thanks for the blessings that Faith and Sharing, inspired by the Spirit, have given in these 50 years!

Sherbrooke, 2011 : Raymond Duquette, Jean Roy, Jaqueline Noël, Lise Morin, Denise and Gilles Croteau, Jean Beloin

Heart to Heart with Jean Vanier

A word from Jean Vanier

November 20, 2017

Dear Friends of Faith and Sharing,

50 years ! Faithfulness to the Holy Spirit and the poor. I rejoice with you all and especially the fidelity of Jesus who was at the heart of so many retreats for 50 years. Thank you to Jesus, thank you to each of you.

I embrace you. May you remain deeply united during all the meetings and retreats.

Peace, *Jean*

North American Faith and Sharing communities - 6 English speaking, 6 French speaking

2018 Retreats

Location	Dates	Theme	Animator	Person to contact	Remarks
L'Oasis de la Charité **Rouyn-Noranda** (Qc)	**April 13 – 14**	Under a loving look	Fr. Gilles Chauvin	Gisèle & Émilien Labelle 819-762-2515 Guylaine Boisvert 819-764-4660 guylaine.boisvert@hotmail.com	Open retreat Bring your lunch
Camp St. John **Jacksonville** (Florida)	**May 20 – 24**		Fr. Ron Camarda Sr. Maureen Kelley	Rebecca Aleman 904-230-7447 raleman@ccbjax.org http://campiamspecial.com/faith-sharing/	
N.-D.-des-Neiges Church **Montréal** (Qc)	**July 10 – 12** 9:30 am – 4 pm	"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" 2 Cor. 12:9		Max Saint Louis 514-735-5884 maxstlouis15@gmail.com	Open retreat Bring your lunch
Ursuline College in Pepper Pike, near **Cleveland** (Ohio)	**July 19 – 22**	God of the Hungry	Sr. Patricia Dowling, CSJ	Rose Weigl, 440-785-6074 rweigl@roadrunner.com	With children and youth programs
St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center **Detroit** (Michigan)	**August 4** 10 am - 6 pm	Called by Name; Gifted for the Journey	Mrs. Faith Offman	Pat Mueller: 248-661-9041 paulmueller1@juno.com Vivian Spence: viviespence@hotmail.com	Day of Reflection
Bethlehem Retreat Center **Nanaimo** (BC)	**August 12 – 17**	Your Presence is the gift	Maria Garvey from Belfast, Ireland	Claire Donovan 250-898-8322 merryfish@shaw.ca	With children and youth programs
Marylake **Toronto** (Ontario)	**August 12 – 16**		Fr. George Strohmeyer	Monica Donovan 416-425-9944 Patrick Treacy 519-962-2482 patrickthink@yahoo.com	
St. Ambrose Parish Centre **Yarmouth** (NS)	**August 16 – 19**	Thanksgiving, Faith and Sharing 50 years	Fr. Pat O'Meara	Marilyn Moore 902-881-2107 marilyn_moore@eastlink.ca	Open retreat
Ste-Angèle of St-Malo Church **Quebec** (Qc)	**August 20 – 22**	To be well in solitude	Fr. Pierre-René Côté Hélène Anctil	Jean-Claude Lizotte 418-831-0125 jclizotte@gmail.com www.foietpartage.org	Open retreat Bring your lunch
Salle des Oeuvres **Valleyfield** (Qc)	**September 20**	40th anniversary of Faith and Sharing Valleyfield		Julie Prégent 450-373-1956 pregent.julie@bell.net	1 day retreat Shared meal