

## *Heart - to - Heart*

---

North American Bulletin

October 2009  
Volume 36, no. 1

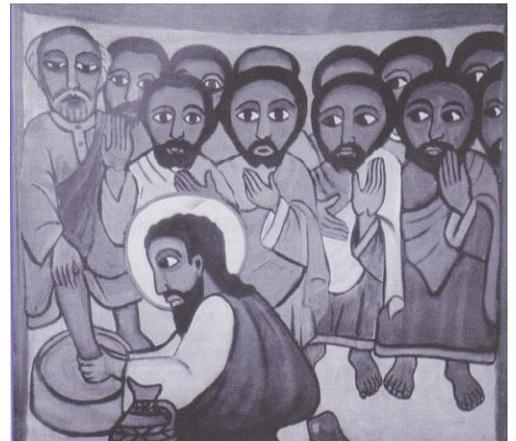
---

*Theme: Washing of feet*

### **The Washing of Feet**

The washing of feet is one Scripture text that touches me greatly and I thank Faith and Sharing for allowing me to participate in the washing of feet on different occasions. I assure you that the first time I was in a situation to live that experience, I was all distraught inside. I was tempted to flee, to hide myself in a very secret corner and to cry abundantly. To stay or to leave? Anyway, I felt myself trapped and then saw the walls of pride rise all around me.

As I read the text one more time, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and asking them to wash each other's feet, I try to imagine that meal! Jesus kneels down in front of me and washes and dries my feet! It is certain that I would have had the same reaction as Peter and even worse most probably. Lord, why are you doing this? This is pure nonsense. And I cannot accept such a gesture. Nothing doing! **I can wash my own feet alone.** More than that. Sit down, Lord, and I will wash your feet.



However...

Among all the most difficult trials of my life, there are those when I had to admit my utter weakness to solve the problems that beset me and that I needed help. So, I had to accept requesting help and thereafter try to accept receiving what I needed. What an unexpected message on unselfish giving! A wonderful and beautiful lesson on life. I am grateful today for having lived those experiences that really opened my eyes and also my mind, showing me both sides of the coin: the person who gives and the person who receives. Both are indispensable to really making the gift a true gift.

I will be brief on the subject, but today I notice a certain constancy: "Most people prefer to give than to receive." Be careful though!! I see us before God and becoming deeply amazed, disturbed or upset before such gratuity and love. It is possible also that we burst into tears. I know that I will stand before God with dirty feet and empty hands, but I still believe that in spite of all my shortcomings, He will shower me with love, joy and eternal happiness.

I often tease a friend of mine who always has some uneasiness and great difficulty to accept the smallest gift by telling her: "I wonder how you will be able to accept the free gift of Paradise and

I worry whether you will be able to say yes without putting up an argument and especially without paying for it.”

In the meantime...

As much as possible, I walk with the shoes known as “cros”. Dust and all kind of dirt have easy access to my feet. This summer, for the first time, I have made a small garden and I would easily dirty my hands and feet each time I worked in it. In spite of taking all the necessary precautions, I dirtied myself each time. And so it goes with my life... As Saint Paul says in his epistle to the Romans, chapter 7, verse 19: “I do not do the good that I should do and I do the evil that I don’t want.”

Each time that I meditate on the washing of feet, another thought comes to my mind and heart: “A man is tall only when he kneels.” I do not know the author of that quotation, but I know the ONE he is talking about... This I know for sure: that I realize that without HIM, we can do nothing. God rushes to kneel before humanity to wash all that has been stained.

“What kind of God is he to love us in such a way?”

Nevertheless...

I finish here by sharing with you what I have in my heart: “You are like a child who has played in the sand during a sunny afternoon, and who is dirty from head to toes, but he enters anyway into the house. His father or his mother will give him a good shampoo and a good soapy bath; then they will give him nice and very neat pajamas before putting him to bed...” Personally, I cannot help but to be amazed before such happiness!

And to finish, why not a lullaby?

Jesus, love me!  
Jesus, fulfill me!  
Because you are all tenderness!  
Because you are total forgiveness!  
Jesus, wash me!  
Jesus, dry me!  
Because you are Love!  
Infinite Love!



Andrée Vigneault  
Chicoutimi

### Heart-to-Heart

#### Subscription :

1 year: \$ 3.00

2 years : \$ 5.00

3 years : \$ 6.00

Supporter : \$ 5.00 per year

#### 2 issues per year :

End of October and End of April

Next dead line :

**September 15, 2010**

Aussi disponible en français

Bulletin Foi et Partage

2295, Galt West

Sherbrooke (Québec)

J1K 1K7 (819) 563-7609

jea\_r@videotron.ca

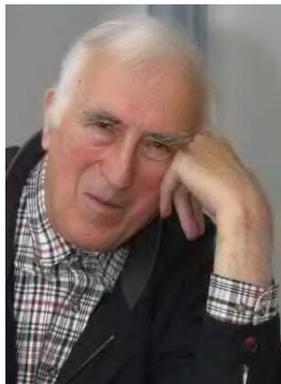
### Themes of upcoming issues

April 2010 (dead line: March 15, 2010):

**Small Group Sharing**

October 2010 (dead line: Sept. 15, 2010):

**Where do you find Hope in Faith and Sharing?**



## **The significance of the washing of feet**

During his last meal with his disciples, Jesus starts washing their feet. Peter looks at him, "You? Wash my feet?" Peter has a sense of hierarchy. There are people at the top and people at the bottom. He has a sense of what all our societies are about -- the vision of a pyramid. There are a few people at the top, and an immense number right at the bottom. Those at the bottom are the useless ones -- people with disabilities, people maybe who are mentally sick, people out of work, immigrants. Peter doesn't want to have his feet washed because it is not in the order of things -- it is not according to the culture. So the attitude of Peter is a normal and natural reaction.

What is more surprising is the reaction of Jesus. "If I cannot wash your feet, you shall have no more part with me. The Kingdom will no longer be part of your heritage. You are no longer my disciple." These are very strong words. Sometimes it is difficult for us to take them seriously.

Peter panics. "Well then, not only my feet, my head and my hands!" (...) Jesus says, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You called me Lord and Master ... so I am. So if I have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet."

Why does Jesus wash our feet? And why does he ask us to wash each other's feet?

There are three meanings behind the washing of feet: a sign for expressing love, a way to teach how to exercise authority and a way to transform the pyramid into a Body.

### **The washing of feet as a sign of love**

I think I discovered that a little bit living in L'Arche. We had welcomed Eric who had lived for 12 years in the psychiatric hospital. He was blind, he was deaf, he couldn't walk, and he couldn't feed himself. He was a man with an immense amount of anguish -- a man who wanted to die. He vomited everything that he ate. He was just in immense anguish and immense pain. Our mission at L'Arche was to help him to move from the desire to die to a desire to live -- from a feeling of being no good to a sense of his value and his worth -- from a feeling of guilt to a feeling of trust. This can come about only through the transforming power of love. Through that love which reveals that you are beautiful; love that understands your pain and your needs; love which celebrates; love which empowers and calls you to be and to be yourself; and a love that forgives.

But for Eric, how could this be revealed to him? He was blind and he was deaf. So the only way of communication with Eric was through our hands. These are the incredible hands that we have been given by Jesus -- hands that give security; hands that give peace; hands that manifest love. But hands that also can hurt; can take; can abuse. I had the privilege of giving Eric his bath every morning, of holding his fragile naked body. And through our hands (because it was not just me, but those of our community together) we revealed to him that he was beautiful. We are to touch people with a deep respect -- to touch them with tenderness. Our hands, and not just our voices, may become vehicles of the love of Jesus. The Word became flesh, so that our flesh may become word. Our flesh, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can reveal to people their value -- that they are cherished and loved by God.

Jesus, as he knelt down in front of the feet of his disciples, knows that tomorrow he will be dead. But he wants to have with each disciple a moment. Not just to say goodbye. He wants to touch them -- to touch their feet; to touch their bodies; to touch them with tenderness and love. Maybe to each one he says a word; maybe looks each one in the eye. There is a moment of communion.

So there is communion through the Body of Christ, where Jesus says "do this in memory of me." But there is also this communion as he kneels at their feet. And later he will say "I have done



this as an example for you. And what I have done to you, you must do one to another." So this is a gesture of communion.

The washing of each other's feet and the institution of the Eucharist should not be separated. We are called to eat the Body of Christ so that we can wash each other's feet.

This is a special moment of Jesus with his disciples: Jesus must have touched these bodies with an immense respect and love and tenderness. He was revealing to them, in a special way, his love for them. But he also revealed to them that each one of them was beautiful, was chosen, and was loved to continue this mission, which is his mission, to announce the good news to the poor, freedom to captives, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, and to announce a year of grace and forgiveness.

When Jesus is washing the feet of the disciples, he is cleansing their feet to show that he wants to cleanse their hearts. Jesus doesn't judge, he doesn't condemn; he cleanses. He just wants us to be people of the resurrection -- people who stand up; people who believe in the gift of Jesus -- so that we can bring this gift to our broken world.

### **The washing of feet to teach how to exercise authority**

So Jesus is there on his knees as a servant, as a slave – he is there for us. He says to us : "I want to serve you; I want to empower you. Because you will receive the Holy Spirit. And you must continue what I have done. You must be filled with the Spirit of God, so that you can go out to the ends of the earth, to bring that love to all people of all cultures."

Jesus knows that to exercise authority is not easy. And Jesus, as he kneels at our feet, is saying, "I want you to exercise your authority in love." As a good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. Exercise authority with tenderness and love. Exercise authority in truth and in forgiveness. Jesus is teaching us how he wants us to exercise authority -- not from the top of the pedestal, but close to people. Confirm them; help them to grow to freedom in truth.



### **The washing of feet to transform the pyramid into a Body**

The pyramid, we know what it is. Some few have power and privileges and wealth. And at the bottom is the immense number of the poor and the broken. And Jesus wanted to transform this into a Body. That is why Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians, talks about the Church as Body where every person is different, and everyone is important. Those parts of the body which are the least presentable, the weakest, are necessary to the body and should be honored. Jesus wants us to discover the Church as Body where each one is important -- where leadership is important, because the body needs the element of the leadership. But we are all together as brothers and sisters in the same Body which is inspired, motivated and inhabited by the Spirit of God.

The washing of feet is symbolic. It is something about service; something about communion; something about mutual forgiveness, togetherness, and oneness. But at the same time Jesus insists so much about the washing of feet, about touching the body, that I believe that this symbol is also sacrament. It is something very special. It is not just to talk with people, but to recognize that their body is the Temple of God. Recognize that the Spirit of God is living in them. Recognize that their body is precious. I believe that Jesus insists on the washing of feet because our bodies are precious, Temples of the Spirit.

We are called to be in communion, to forgive each other, to serve each other, and to discover that together we are all called to walk the downward path.

We are all called to be small. "The camel cannot go through the eye of the needle." But we who carry authority and power, in some way we are called to be like little children. And we are

called to serve each other in rectitude and in truth as Jesus. And as we become small, then maybe we can go through the eye of the needle.

And so now, that is what we are going to do. We do so in a witness of our desire to follow the humble Jesus, the broken Jesus, and the weeping Jesus -- the Jesus who became little and humbled himself even more. In some way we want to follow Jesus on that downward path. This is the path which, as we go down, then with him we rise again to be a sign of resurrection in our world.

Jean Vanier

---

*Theme: Washing of feet*

## **Reflection on Jean Vanier's text**

### **A sign for the transmission of love**

Before leaving his disciples, Jesus chose "the feet" to show his kindness and love. No doubt that he addresses words of encouragement to each one because of the difficult moments they will have to live during his Passion.

Also for Jesus, the time has come to share with his disciples the final minutes of his life and to give them, before leaving, his last recommendations. The apostles have to be purified before being admitted to his farewell meal. So, he washes their feet. He does not judge them, he does not condemn them; he simply wants to prove that he loves them as they are. At that very moment, he must have thought of Peter who would deny him three times, of Judas who would betray him, of James and John who wanted places of honour in his kingdom.



For Jean Vanier, the washing of feet and the institution of the Eucharist go together. And he tells us that we are called to eat the Body of Christ so that we may wash one another's feet.

### **The Washing of Feet** **To Teach the Service of Authority**

Jesus, even though he is the Son of God, sees himself as a servant. Jesus knows the disciples will be invested with great power and he is aware of their ambitions. The washing of feet symbolizes service, communion, mutual forgiveness, coexistence, unity.

The disciples shall receive the Holy Spirit and they will have to continue what Jesus has taught them. **To be invested with authority is to serve...** A very difficult thing to do. And Jesus knows it. He wants the power to be exercised with tenderness and love, truthfully and with a spirit of forgiveness. In other words, to have authority over other people is to help them grow in an atmosphere of freedom and truth.

### **The Washing of Feet** **To Transform the Pyramid into a Body**

Jesus wants us to perceive the Church as a Body in which each member is important. Nevertheless, the function of the person in charge is essential for the unity of the body and its proper functioning. Finally, we are all equal as brothers and sisters in the same Body inhabited by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is important to recognize that each person is precious: each person is the **Temple of the Holy Spirit**.

With the washing of feet, Jesus calls us to live in harmony, to forgive one another and to help one another on the boulevard of Love via Salvation: Christ.

As Jesus made himself humble among his friends, we are invited to imitate him with our capacities and our talents, our own means and especially with our heart. Example: Being with those who cry or are sick, being with those wounded by life or with the homeless; being with those who celebrate a joyful event or who are sad.

In 2009, and within the social context that is ours, what does our humble Jesus expect from us? He wants us to accept all persons regardless of what they are, to be compassionate, to be good listeners...

It's a beautiful theory, you would say, and I agree. But I would be on the right road if only I could accept the present moment with all its unknowns, such as an unannounced visit, a bothersome neighbour, some bad news, an intruding person requesting a service, etc.

It is quite an achievement to accept with patience anything that is nerve racking, but we must go further than that. Because Jesus has said: "To those who have been given much, much will be expected of them."

As for me, I must show a loving, intuitive and kind heart, a heart capable of responding to today's cries for help. How could I otherwise truly believe in the Risen Christ?

Carmen Dallaire  
Chicoutimi

---

*Theme: Washing of feet*

## The Rendezvous

*"You call me Master and Lord and rightly; so I am! If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you."* John 13, 12-15

John describes the Last Supper and mentions only the washing of feet. No reference is made to the bread and wine given by Jesus to his disciples as his body and blood. He is the only one to mention that very touching gesture of Jesus kneeling before each of his friends and washing their feet. John really wanted to remind us of that very special lesson: *"I tell you most solemnly, no servant is greater than his master. Now that you know this, happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly. I tell you most solemnly, whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."* John 13, 16-20



At each retreat of many days, this practice inspired by the Gospels is customary to Faith and Sharing, Quebec. Each year, we experience that privileged moment of prayer, of silence and compassion. But for certain people, it is with some hesitation that they look forward to it, no matter how Gospel-based it is. The feet are marked by one's life: corns, crevices, chapping, deformities, sicknesses, nails, odor, swellings, all such things leave no one indifferent. Some are ashamed, shy or emotionally upset. Others have feelings of disdain, of disgust, of pity or are simply afraid, and are therefore absent. Showing one's feet or touching another person's feet are signs of confidence, and become intimate gestures that are rather scarce or difficult to perform if the real meaning of the gesture is not fully understood. Often enough the understanding comes as a grace by participating in the gesture. Those who agree to do it put their faith in Christ's words: *"Happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly."*

During Jesus' time, such a custom had a cultural connotation; they were friends, young, living in a warm country, wearing sandals, used to the custom, but it was never done by the master. In Quebec, the occasion is made to happen; few people know each other, certain persons are shy, handicapped, others are old and the shoes difficult to take off. But we should be willing to do it because of our faith: *"You must also wash one another's feet"* i.e. live up to Christian authenticity proper to a disciple of Christ, to be of service to one's neighbor, by imitation, without judging whoever is my neighbor, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The washing of feet is a gesture of absolute humility that enables the others to help me.

The washing of feet is a sincere intention to let the others touch my heart.

The washing of feet is a perfect occasion to show my sufferings, my deficiencies, my secrets in return for divine compassion by means of a human service.

The washing of feet is inspired by the Holy Spirit to ensure the realization and the perennial quality of a commandment so dear to Jesus: *“Love one another as I have loved you.”*

The washing of feet is a sacrament. To participate in it is to call upon God’s grace!

Such is the ultimate goal of Jesus: to love, to be humble and ready to serve like Him. *“Bear with one another charitably. Never have grudges against others or lose your temper, or raise your voice to anybody, or call each other names, or allow any sort of spitefulness. Be friends with one another, and kind, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ.”* Eph 4, 2-3,31

The washing of feet is the sacrament of charity and Christianity and it should be perpetuated. Happy are those who share with others. It is a source of grace and humility.

Michelle Desmeules  
Québec

---

*Theme: Washing of feet*

## **We are called by God to open our hearts to others**

### **A story of love: the heart of God**

John: 17,20-23: “I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.”

Jesus has only one desire, a desire as hot as fire, an ardent passion as only divine love can be: *to reveal the heart of God so that we may be introduced into a communion of love with the Father.*

### **Washing of feet: what God can be so vulnerable?**

In Saint John’s Gospel, chapter 13, we see Jesus get down on his knees before the twelve apostles and wash their feet as a slave would do to his master, an inferior to a superior. The history of humankind was turned upside down when Jesus did such a gesture. In his letter to the Philippians, Saint Paul says: “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as all men are, even to the point of accepting death.” He humbled himself - he lost all thought of himself, he emptied himself. It was total annihilation – assuming our human condition, to save us by his Cross, sublime gift of love. By such a sublime gesture, Jesus is showing us something truly incredible: he shows us God’s true face, one of humility and vulnerability. God opens his heart to us, and like Peter, we are stunned, amazed, even scandalized! Never had a human being dared to imagine so small a God, a child born in a stable, the son of a carpenter living in a very small village lost in a faraway Galilee and unknown to the great of this world. Through Jesus, the Father reveals a humble God who makes himself small and close to us, eager to stay with us, ready to act by us and through us and ready to make us one with him. He who eats my body and drinks of my blood is in me and I in him. He will live eternally.



## **Jesus wants to introduce us to a communion of love with the Father.**

Our God, humble and vulnerable, incarnated in Jesus, wants to reveal his heart to us. Also he wants to put us on the road to holiness! A road of suffering and also of joy, a road that leads us for sure to the fullness of God who is light. It is the road that he has followed while on this earth, from his hidden life to the sermon on the mount, from the painful incredulity of his disciples to the marvelous gratitude of the miraculously cured, from the frustrating incredulity to the beauty of the Transfiguration, from the hatred of the Pharisees to the triumph of the procession of the palms; finally, the excruciating and glorious way of the Cross to the Resurrection!

“Unfortunately! Throughout history, Jesus’ simple message was so often truncated or made meaningless. The humble and good God who beckons us to love was often presented as a powerful God who judges, punishes and inspires fear. Humankind needs to rediscover a humble God, the God of love who is all heart; to rediscover also his message of kindness, of tenderness, of non violence and of forgiveness that really brings out the beauty of our universe, of all that is matter, of our bodies, of all persons and of all that is life. Such a road of discovery, of exploration is, for sure, strewn with obstacles, but it is a road that is worthwhile taking.” (Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human*).

## **A question of GLORY - God calls men and women of all times to holiness**

“I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one, me in them and you in me.”

By praying to the Father to introduce us to his love so that we may be ONE, to make us reach perfect unity as he is one with the Father, Jesus invites us to a state of glory: “I have given them the glory you gave to me that they may be one as we are one.” Glory! It is not a question of the worldly honours that do not last! “Do not be afraid when a man grows rich, when the glory of his House increases; when he dies he can take nothing with him, his glory cannot follow him down.” (Psalm 49, 17).

The glory that Jesus gives and for which he prays to the Father, the glory of Christians is being one with our glorious Master. “I pray for those you have given me; they are yours and all that is yours is also mine, and it is as such that I was glorified in them.” Saint Irenaeus taught that “the glory of God is man fully alive.” The glorification of a Christian is fully achieved in Christ; the glory of Christ flourishes in a Christian. Being conscious of that glory generates in us a feeling of Christian dignity and Christian honour. (VTV 417)

Jean Vanier, in his meditation on the Gospel of Saint John, reminds us of that call to become ONE among ourselves and with God: “As human beings, we are a mixture of presence to God and of absence to God, of light and darkness, of truth and chaos, of good and evil, of openness and refusal. No human being is pure or holy by himself. We become holy only by the holiness of God. By ourselves, we cannot cross the abyss that separates the finite from the infinite. God comes to meet us and we become holy by accepting him. That supposes that gradually we become liberated from our desires, our egoism, from the walls that surround our hearts and our intelligence and that separate us from God, from the others and from our inner self. Such a holiness is GIVEN in answer to Jesus’ prayer: “Make them holy in the truth”. (Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus*)

Paul Rancourt  
Quebec

Theme: Washing of feet

## A Sacred Gesture

*“He rose from supper... poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet.”* (John 13, 4-5)

*“Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them.”* (Luke 22, 19)

It is in John and in the synoptics that we find these two gestures (the washing of feet and the sharing of bread); they are presented as being of the same Eucharistic reality. For me, they are gestures of mercy, sacred gestures, even gestures closely related to the Covenant.

In allowing my feet or my hands to be washed:

- I confess, in front of my colleagues, my meanness, my frailties, my lack of sweetness and my lack of listening, openness, and availability;
- I confess the generosity of my sister or of my brother, who grants me mercy;
- I confess the mercy of my Triune God who always gives access to his Heart and, this time, through my sister, my brother and my colleagues.

More than washing my flaws in my relations, my sister (my brother) keeps their trust in me to the point of asking me for the gift of a prayer. It's a sacred gesture. By the grace of the Highest and the invocation of my colleagues, it's the joy of communion. I love you and I put you in the Heart of Jesus and I entrust you to the Holy Spirit. It's the dear Covenant!

And then, next...

I wash your feet and your hands: I put in front of you our forgetfulness, our rifts, our pains, as Jesus has forgiven his apostles all their indifference, their irrelevancy, their distrust.

And you pray the Holy Spirit over me so that my poor small heart grows and becomes with yours, my friend, and with Jesus, by Jesus and in Jesus, celebration and thanksgiving. It's the service of sweetness and of tenderness.

For me, the washing, in small Church groups, is also a holy gesture. Jesus prayed over his disciples. As a mere servant, he knelt down at the foot of friends, of his dear friends. He washed them. He prepared them for his important mission: the Church.

In faith, we wash one another's feet so to become persevering in the love of our Master and able to favour sharing truthful, generous and comforting. It's a marvellous gesture possible for everybody, even the more handicapped person.

In the “Faith and the Sharing”, by using the symbol of the washing of feet or the hands, we know that Jesus welcomes each one of us in His Life, in his suffering Body, but also in his glorious Body so that each of us fulfills herself and himself in our mission. Thus, when I'm washed, all the others are washed because in my heart with Jesus I keep them all. And when I wash my friend, I also wash all the others, because I know that in his or her heart he or she keeps them all! What a wonderful blessing!

With our Lord by the grace of the Holy Spirit, in the joy of our Father, the washing of feet accomplished with the splendour of a prayer is a beautiful experience of “Faith” and also a genuine gesture of “Sharing”, of holy tenderness.

It's a worthy gesture given to our Triune God and a Eucharistic gesture which celebrates the love of the mystical Body of Jesus Christ.

For me, it's a blessed gesture that I always live with powerful emotion.

Alleluia! O my soul!



Lise Bégin  
Québec

Theme: Washing of feet

## Interior spiritual experience

Several years ago, on a Holy Thursday, the Lord made me live an interior spiritual experience.

At the IRDPQ Center, during the washing of hands, he helped me understand that though I was limited in my physical capacities, I would have to accept doing SIMPLE GESTURES towards those around me.

I was a person capable of being in charge; but on the other hand, during the past years, I had to learn to be humble. "TO BE INSTEAD OF TO DO."

Simple gestures pass through the senses: listening, seeing, touching, talking. Simple gestures that bring interior comfort to the others and that are not always so visible.

When we lose our physical capacities, it is easy to feel quite useless but we must not forget that we can be useful in so many other ways.

*"I strongly wish that my sight, my touch, my whole being would be a means of announcing the Good News to the poor and to all those who thirst for the love of God: THEY ARE LOVED BY GOD."* (Jean Vanier as quoted in the magazine *Panorama*)

Hélène Verret  
Québec

---

Theme: Washing of feet

## The Washing of Feet at Faith and Sharing

The Faith and Sharing community of Sherbrooke had the privilege of participating in a five-day regional retreat with their cousins from Montreal, Valleyfield, Ottawa, and also united in prayer with those of Rouyn-Noranda and Timmins.

The theme: "*Jesus, a man of many relationships...*" was quickly actualized among our brothers and sisters and sustained by a deep and precious activity in which love was at the very core. The washing of feet was done in a very simple and generous way. One's limits were compensated by another's capabilities. Time was taken either to help or to accept the help given with great confidence. The faith and the sharing were unpretentious, true and realistic. A beautiful dignity could be seen in each face because Jesus made it possible.



I give thanks to God for all the love that was offered and received during that retreat. I believe that if we are humble, simple and truly open, we can wash each other's feet everyday of our life by performing small gestures filled with tenderness and gentleness.

With gratitude.

Lise Morin, coordinator  
Sherbrooke



## My Disability: Cerebral Palsy

A brief presentation of myself: My name is Eric Parizeau. I was born on February 3, 1975, at the Royal-Victoria Hospital in Montreal. I'm afflicted with cerebral palsy because I underwent a lack of oxygen when I was born. My mother who was suffering from high blood pressure had a very difficult delivery. She almost passed away, like myself, during labour. When the nurse saw that my lips were becoming blue, she carried me in another room to revive me. Then I stayed in the hospital for a month. I don't know when I came out of it.

Then, unfortunately, I swallowed thirteen pills by mistake. I was two years old when it happened. My mother panicked and called an ambulance to drive me to the emergency, but I was transferred to a pediatric hospital, in Montreal. I was seriously ill; I was connected to all kinds of tubes. It was then that a doctor noticed that it was indicated in my file that I underwent a lack of oxygen at the time of birth. He met with my parents to discuss the problem. He told my mother that I was suffering from cerebral palsy. He advised my mother to meet with a neurologist to diagnose my state of health. The neurologist confirmed to my mother that I was suffering from a light spastic diplegia.

I started to walk at the age of three years old. I was going to the Constance-Lethbridge Readaptation Center. I was attending training sessions in physiotherapy and ergotherapy because I was only walking on my right foot and on the tip of my toes. I also had a knock-kneed walk, meaning that my knees were rubbing against each other. Moreover one hip was shorter than the other and my left arm was also deformed; I cannot extend it completely. My ergotherapist suggested that I wear special shoes for walking.

Then, when I reached four years old, I started to talk a little. I was resuming the sessions of therapy. I was now introduced to a language and speech therapist. Many times a day, I was walking so to get some stimulation to increase the tonus in my legs. I was also moving my left arm more than my right. Every month, I was seeing my neurologist and my orthopedist.

When I was getting out of the bus, I had to reach the Center by foot; my legs were aching so much because my muscles and my sinews were working hard. I was feeling completely exhausted because I was walking 1.5 kilometers. Consequently, my sinews were very stiff due to spasms. Also at night, I was aching more; I didn't have any control over my legs; all my sinews were so stiff that I was moaning with pain.

When I was around six years old, I went to visit my neurologist at the hospital. I needed an electroencephalogram, because it was the only way to know which part of the brain has been damaged. We know that my cells are dull, meaning that the messages sent to the muscles are wrong. Sometime, I didn't have any control over my muscles because I felt so exhausted. Moreover I was taking Ritalin because I was hyperactive. It was helping me to take it easy, but at eight years old I stopped taking it because it is harmful for someone suffering from cerebral palsy.

Later, when I was reaching eight years old, my orthopedist was worried; I was growing up fast and I was risking finding myself in a wheelchair. He told my mother that I could walk better if I had surgery on the right foot. My mother approved. I was then nine years old. They stretched the tendon of the right ankle so that I could walk on the heel. It was winter; I was powerless with a cast during two months. I was lucky though, I didn't need physiotherapy. I was doing fine on my own. At first, it was difficult to climb the stairs because the tendon was still weak, but after eight years I improved. I was still walking knock-kneed. Concerning my left arm, the orthopedist was irresolute. I don't use it.

During my school days, it was not easy because I was put in special education classes. I didn't like it, but I had no choice. Everything was set out when I was in kindergarten. Parents of the children were afraid that I would hurt them because of my disability. They asked the school authorities to transfer me to another school, otherwise they would withdraw their children from the school. As for myself, I couldn't understand why those parents were scared of me. At that time, handicapped people didn't deserve respect. One day, an information meeting was organized by the municipality for people and parents to talk about handicapped people.

When I was at the primary level in school, there was a teacher in my class who punished pupils physically; she was hitting me with a ruler. I was seven years old at that time and I complained to my mother. My Mom met with the head of the school and I was transferred to another school, but I was put in a special education class. I was called all kinds of names by the pupils; this made me terribly angry very often, because I didn't understand why they were so

disrespectful for handicapped people. Many times I was moving from one school to another because my mother was moving from one town to another.

When my primary school studies were completed, my mother was still worrying, fearing that I would be hurt by the pupils in special schools. She asked a doctor to write an official document stating that I had the ability to resume my education in a regular school.

I spent five years at the secondary level, but always in special education classes. I attended the Dalbé-Viau Polyvalent School, in Lachine. There also most of the students were disrespectful toward me because I was an outsider and I was having difficulty to walk. They poked fun at me because of my jaw; my top teeth were protruding more than my lower teeth; I was suffering from a faulty occlusion. They nicknamed me Beaver and Jano the Rabbit. They were hurting me and I was getting easily angry. It was too bad; I had a few friends who were respectful there.

When I reached eighteen years old, I had a jaw surgery. They set upright my top teeth and the lower part of the jaw was leveled up with the upper part. I couldn't use my jaw for two months. I was fed with liquids. It was a difficult time: I was doing absolutely nothing and I couldn't go out. During the last two weeks I was fainting quite often. I was anxious to be free from the braces.

I went back to my studies in order to get my secondary school certificate. I was also volunteering to help other handicapped people. Of course, I would like to practice sports like swimming, jogging, because it would make my muscles stronger and it would relieve my sinews. I intend to subscribe to the A.Q.S.P.C. This is an organization which helps disabled persons to practice sports. Also, I work for *Défi Sportif* and *Tour de l'Île* of Montreal as volunteer. During summer, I provide help to Stéphane, a friend who is disabled like myself; he is more seriously handicapped because his four limbs are defective. At suppertime, I sit with him and help him; when he has to go out, I give him a hand and care for his needs.

I attend the Faith and Sharing meetings; I help Mary get the meeting room ready. Then I help the handicapped people take off their coats, eat lunch, go to the washroom. I like this; I believe in God and in Jesus. I often pray at home; I think about my brother who passed away when I was one year old. So my memories about him are missing.

In concluding, I will say that I mix well with the people around me. Stéphane is my best friend; I love him, he's like a brother to me.

Eric Parizeau  
Montreal

---

## Our newsletter: Heart-to-Heart

A little more than 13 years ago, in the Spring of 1996, a group from Sherbrooke felt ready to take over the challenge of publishing the liaison newsletter for the North-American movement of *Faith and Sharing*. In the letter sent to all the previous subscribers whose name, address and other information were in our records, we wrote the following comment: «*The newsletter will be shorter and the number of issues less... there will be no more than three sheets printed on both sides so that the postal cost will be minimum... The overall costs have been cut down so to meet our policy: 1 year (2 issues) = \$ 3.00; 2 years (4 issues) = \$ 5.00; **3 years (6 issues) = \$ 6.00** and, last, a request to subscribe with a voluntary donation = \$5.00 yearly*». Moreover, we have always strongly promoted a three year subscription which diminishes greatly the work in the area of accounting and subscriptions.



*Heart - to - Heart*

As you may realize, we were successful to the point of gradually increasing the number of sheets, eight for the last issue, while keeping a very reasonable cost in spite of increasing expenses (mainly postal), with which we had to deal since 1996. This stunning achievement was

possible chiefly due to the subscriptions sent in with a donation. We would like to thank sincerely all those who decided all these years to subscribe with a donation which allowed us to solicit just a symbolic contribution from the less well-off among us.

Since most of our subscribers are three year subscribers with the regular subscription, it's possible to appraise the outcome of the last issue, the April 2009 issue.

Income:	\$ CAN 1.00 per issue	\$ US 1.20
Expenses:	\$ 1.11 postal costs (0.98 + taxes in Canada)	\$ US 1.33
	\$ 0.03 per envelope	
	\$ 0.20 paper and printing	
	\$ 0.01 for sticker	
	\$ 0.05 for use of computer	
Per issue:	\$ 1.40 in Canada	\$ US 1.62

(Either in Canada or in the US, the difference is close to \$ 0.40 between the expenses and the income, the expenses being more.)

Up to June 2009, the printing of the newsletter was done by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in Bromptonville; it was done on a benevolent basis and the costs were very affordable. But now, this special service has been discontinued at the end of the school year 2008-2009. The best price we were able to obtain presently is 2½ times more than the former price which means \$0.50 for an eight sheet newsletter in comparison with \$ 0.20 we were paying before. It's up to you to do the sums. For 13 years, our price for the printing never increased; will it do the same for the next 13 years? If we study the trends in the marketplace today, it would be a miracle.

More than ever we believe that we must continue publishing this newsletter to keep a close and warm relation between the different groups of *Faith and Sharing*; sure, the undertaking is fragile, but how precious and worthwhile this bond is? Thus we wish to carry on the good work as long as possible, maintaining a «popular» price for those who want to subscribe. To reach this goal we will need sharing on the part of those who can afford it; this kind of sharing that affirms itself by making a voluntary donation as a subscription which is still \$15.00 for three years (\$2.50 per issue).

Many thanks to those who write articles for the Heart-to-Heart newsletter of *Faith and Sharing*; you know how to give it dynamism and how to make it OUR OWN newsletter.

Jean Beloin

for the production committee of the Heart-to-Heart newsletter

---

## A Summary of the North American Committee Meeting May 2009

The North American Committee (NAC) met May 1 – 3, 2009 at the Ermitage Sainte-Croix in Pierrefonds Quebec. Seven NAC members and one guest prayed, shared our life in Faith & Sharing for the past year and conducted business. The following are highlights from the 10 pages of minutes!

➤ Regional Reports:

Six of the 7 Regions told of their activities and retreats. (Region 5 has no Faith & Sharing Communities.)



- Treasurer's Report from Jean Roy (fiscal year ending April 30, 2009)
  - Revenues: \$ 5,059.50 (includes NA Retreat)
  - Expenses: \$ 5,430.10 (includes NA retreat and NAC expenses)
  - Deficit: (\$ 370.60)
  - Bank Balance: \$ 6,495.11 (before expenses of airfare & lodging for this meeting)
- Heart to Heart Bulletin
 

There are 155 French subscriptions and 55 English.  
The NAC is very grateful to the team in Sherbrooke for the generous donation of their time and effort toward putting together our Bulletin. (*See the article in this issue entitled Our Newsletter: Heart-to-Heart for more information about the cost of the bulletin.*)
- Organizational Structure
 

Held a lengthy discussion of proposals for a new organizational structure for F&S. The question before us: how can the structure of F&S best support our current reality and the mission of F&S? A new structure will be presented to the General Assembly meeting in July – during the NAC retreat. (*See the article in this issue for further information about the new design.*)
- North American Retreat
 

Set dates, named animators, and agreed to investigate 3 places to hold the retreat. (*See article in this issue for more details.*)
- Website
 

Discussed setting up a simple F&S website with the help of La Maison Les Beatitudes in Sherbrooke.
- Evaluation
 

NAC welcomes the support we each receive at this meeting. We are grateful for each other and for all of our F&S brothers and sisters.

Pat Mueller  
English Coordinator

## **Is It Time to Downsize Faith & Sharing Structure?**

The North American Committee (NAC) began asking this question as we observed that the notion of "Region" no longer seems relevant in our current reality, that it is increasingly more difficult to find people who will accept leadership responsibility and that our structure feels cumbersome.

The NAC French Coordinator, Jean Roy, reminded us of Faith & Sharing's current reality:

- Regions 2, 4 & 6 each have one local community and one retreat
- Region 1 has 2 communities and 1 retreat
- Region 5 has no communities
- Regions 7 has 3 communities and 3 retreats
- Region 3 has 6 communities and 3 retreats but no Regional Coordinator.

He also proposed that we look at a new way of structuring Faith & Sharing.

At last May's meeting the NAC explored the possibility of a new structure by asking ourselves:

Given the current reality, is the NAC too large? What is the role of a regional coordinator where there are only 1 or 2 communities in the Region? How can the NAC better foster the vision & spirit of F&S as our numbers decline?

We concluded unanimously: Let us draw closer to one another by suppressing the Regions and reorganizing our structure. In this new vision, there will no longer be Regional Coordinators, instead local communities will relate directly to one of the NA Coordinators. There will be a smaller, more flexible NAC that will support the mission of F&S through a direct link to the local communities. Our hope is to revitalize the spirit of Faith & Sharing and make the most of the opportunity this current reality provides.

First steps in this process:

1. Discuss and decide on many details (begun at the May NAC meeting)
2. Consult with Madeline Seguin to discover if changing the structure jeopardizes our Charter with the Canadian government. (Her opinion is that we can change our general structure as we want, as long as we respect the incorporation rules.)
3. Investigate other ways to collect and distribute donations. (None we looked at seem feasible so we intend to keep the current system.)
4. Based on the decisions from last May's meeting, write a new organizational structure document to be reviewed by the NAC and presented at the next General Assembly in July of 2010. (Assigned to Pat Mueller with assistance from Chris Alvarado.)

What will stay the same?

1. Two Coordinators (French & English)
2. Spiritual Guide (a bishop or priest)
3. Secretary & Treasurer
4. An annual General Assembly meeting
5. NA retreats (currently every 3 years)
6. NAC meetings (although some may be electronic)

Look for more details in the April issue of Heart to Heart for example "what will be different" and how a direct link between NAC and the local community leaders will be structured.

Feedback from members is very welcome. Let any NAC member know of your affirmations, concerns and/or questions.

Pat Mueller  
English Coordinator

---

## **Serve the Lord with Gladness!**

### **As Faith & Sharing's English Coordinator**

Serving the Lord through Faith & Sharing is a special privilege as we each work to make known God's message of love for all, especially the poor. THANK YOU to all who serve especially those in our local communities. *Rejoice and be glad in your ministry!*

It is time to call forth someone from our English speaking communities to serve Faith & Sharing as the new English Coordinator. My mandate expires in July of 2010.

The English Coordinator works closely with the French Coordinator, is a member of the North American Committee, helps prepare the North American retreats and communicates with local English speaking communities. The nomination is for a 3-year term with the possibility of a 2-year renewal.

The person nominated should be active in a local Faith & Sharing Community and have a commitment to and a love for the mission of Faith & Sharing. While some of the business of the NAC is conducted through email, the person should be available to attend North American Committee meetings once a year at the most.

If you are interested in serving the Lord as the English Coordinator (or know someone is)...

If you are willing to share you gifts with Faith & Sharing (or know someone who is)...

If you are ready to receive the blessings of a Faith & Sharing servant leader (or know someone who is)...

If you seek a challenge (or know someone who does)...

please give the name of a nominee (yourself?) with a few sentences about why you are nominating this person to Pat Mueller, English Coordinator :

ppmueller@att.net  
248.661.9041  
29640 Vista Ct, Farmington Hills, MI 48331  
*Rejoice and be glad in service to the Lord!*

Pat Mueller  
English Coordinator

---

**You're Invited! Save the Date!**  
**2010 North American Retreat**  
**Sunday July 18 to Wednesday July 21<sup>st</sup>**

While July of 2010 may seem far away, it is good to put the date on our calendars so our busy schedule does not get in the way of attending this prayerful gathering of Faith and Sharing members across Canada and the United States. Here are some of the details that we know:

**Date:** Sunday afternoon July 18 to Wednesday afternoon July 21<sup>st</sup>

**Animator:** Fr. Pierre Desroches from Montreal is a former French Coordinator for Faith & Sharing. The talks will be given in both languages, alternating between French and English. Translation equipment will be provided.

**Place:** "Centre de l'Amour" in Plantagenet, Ontario, 50 km East from Ottawa. Check the website at [www.centredelamour.org](http://www.centredelamour.org). (If you go through Google, it will offer you the option of translating the homepage into English.) On the website, you can see some pictures of the Center.



**Transportation:** Arrangements will be made to pick up people from the airport and drive them to the retreat center.

**Registration:** Application forms will be sent to your local and regional coordinators in 2010 for distribution to members. Let them know that you are interested in attending!

**Cost:** To be determined.

The North American Retreat schedule is much like your own local retreat, only you have no details to worry about!! It offers you a time to pray and share with other F&S members. What a golden opportunity to develop closer links with other communities and to drink deeply from the well of God's Word. Please make plans to attend!

Pat Mueller  
English Coordinator