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**Our
Blessed
Mother:
A Perfect
Role
Model**

Virtues
SERIES

Poverty and Purity of Heart



Jean Vanier: Forging Arks of Amity

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Forging Arks of Amity

Carole St. Laurent

As we face the war on terror, the terror of war, and hatred among religions and races, now more than ever we must heed God's call to peace. But how do we accomplish such a monumental feat? For answers, I turned to Jean Vanier, a hero of faith, humanitarian service, and a champion of peace building. Jean Vanier didn't prescribe a path to peace building; rather, he shared his personal outlook, which has held true for him for more than fifty years: Change the world one person at a time.

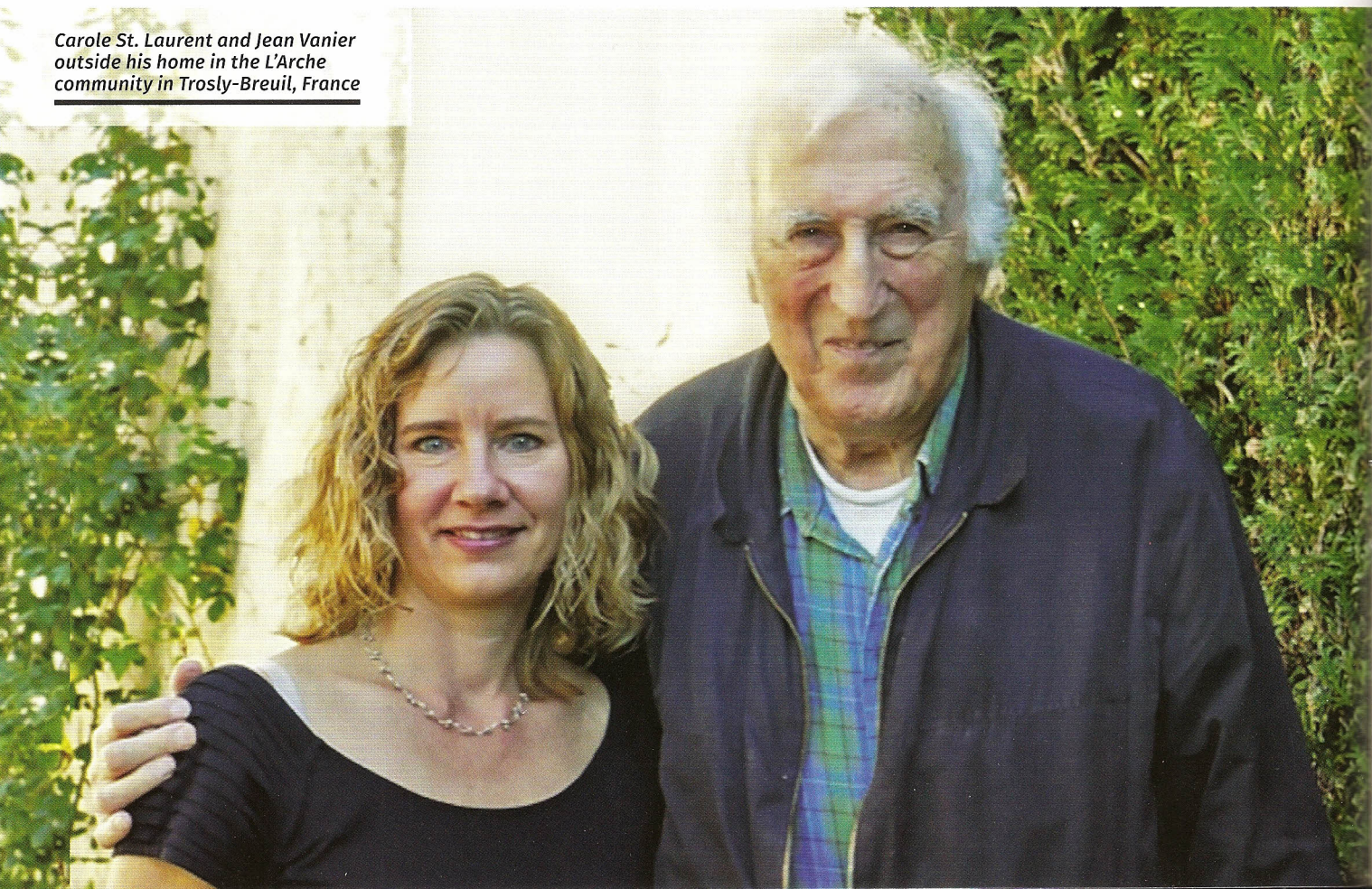
Indeed, that's how he started L'Arche ("The Ark"), by extending an invitation for two people to live with him in Trosly-Breuil, France. This gesture turned into a movement to support intellectually challenged

individuals. L'Arche now exists in thirty-five countries and includes 147 homes.

I met Jean at his home in Trosly-Breuil during a personal peace quest.

Thank you so much for meeting me. I consider you such a strong man of God and of peace. I feel like my vocation is peace building. With a camera, a pen, and the gravitational pull to hear personal experiences of peace and conflict, I've had deep conversations in Uganda, Rwanda, Panama, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus, and beyond. People find peace in love, generosity, nature, escape from the Lord's Resistance Army, or fleeing conflict. But now I'm seeking the

Carole St. Laurent and Jean Vanier outside his home in the L'Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, France



next step on my journey as a peace builder. I want to show the world using the eyes of others. I want to show the world through the eyes of others. I want to build empathy using the lens of a camera or erase barriers using technology.

Q. *How do you keep your own peace when you're faced with such great human conflict?*

a. Let yourself be guided. I think that if you become a woman of compassion for people who are lonely and broken, you can find unity through compassion. The only answer is to meet those who are hurting and crushed and enter into a relationship with them. That is communion. The whole reality of what we are doing here is that the strong learn to be weak, the weak learn to be strong, and we all learn to be human. What we like to say in L'Arche is, "Change the world one person at a time." It's up to you to discover who you can befriend and who is broken.... It is very simple, meet people, eat with them, and transmit [through befriending] peacefulness. Because the opposite of peace is the anguish of loneliness, and from that anguish you have fear, and from fear rises hate, and from hate arises the wounds that are created. We cannot change the world, but we can meet a few people. Let people reveal who they are in their pain, whatever it is...and have fun together, be they Muslims or Christians. It's about getting involved and meeting them with our feet on the ground. "Feet on the ground" is compassion for each person. It is a long road. It frequently starts by doing and then moves into a meeting, then becomes more like a community, fidelity. That's where peace is. The barriers drop and we can meet. But that takes time. So many people are terribly lonely. But you can't always do that alone. You need community. That's what Catholic Worker, L'Arche, and World Vision do. Community is always something that's special....It's a place where we're wounded, but it's a place where we grow in the acceptance of others just as they are and help their gifts to grow, rather than getting caught up in the sadness of the

For more information on peace, visit crypeace.org.



A courtyard at La Ferme (The Farm), Trosly-Breuil, France

things they do not have....It's about living together, which can often mean hurting each other, then seeking forgiveness. Maybe peace comes through forgiveness, maybe that is the heart of everything—we've all been hurt. I met a man [Jean Paul Samputu] who lost his father and several siblings in the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda. He was angry for years. He found his own healing through forgiving the killer of his family—who was his friend—and now he's an advocate for peace and forgiveness. He calls forgiveness the most underutilized weapon for the mass destruction of hatred.

Q. *It seems very easy to empathize with the heart of the victim. How do you empathize with the heart of the oppressor?*

a. I'm not sure you can empathize. Maybe you can pray for him. Consider the vision of Mahatma Gandhi....Recently, a Swiss theologian and psychologist [Lytta Basset] talked about *bienveillance*—looking kindly at people. She said maybe you can't, but you can pray for the oppressor because he is also a broken person. A lot of people have been humiliated and either slip into a world of depression or violence. When the oppressed have power, they become oppressors. Often the most broken think their brokenness will be healed through power. It's not true. They believe their identity is equal to power, and it takes time for people to realize their real identity is as a human person. #

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