

The Wisdom of Jean Vanier

A Biographical Sketch

Jean Vanier was born in Canada in 1928 and is still living. After serving several years in the British and Canadian Royal Navies, he resigned to pursue a doctorate in Philosophy. In 1964, he and two men with developmental disabilities founded L'Arche, an intentional community, in France. Since then, 103 more such communities have been created throughout the world. At this stage in his life he has a world-wide ministry. He has written extensively about his experience in community building. The following quotes are taken from his book, *Community and Growth*. I urge you to give yourself the gift of purchasing this book.

Community as Belonging

"The deepest yearning in a child is to be in communion with its mother and father. This is the most fundamental need of every human being, the source of all other needs and desires."

"Each person with his or her history of being accepted or rejected with his or her past history or inner pain and difficulties in relationships with parents, is different. But in each one there is a yearning for communion and belonging, but at the same time a fear of it."

"The longer we journey on the road to inner healing and wholeness, the more the sense of belonging grows and deepens. The sense is not just one of belonging to others and to a community. It is a sense of belonging to the universe, to the earth, to the air, to the water, to everything that lives, to all humanity. If the community gives a sense of belonging, it also helps us to accept our aloneness in a personal meeting with God. Through this, the community is open to the universe and to humankind."

Community as Openness

"The difference between community and a group of friends is that in community we verbalize our mutual belonging and bonding. We announce the goals and the spirit that unites us."

"Communities are truly communities when they are open to others, when they remain vulnerable and humble; when the members are growing in love, in compassion and humility."

Community as Caring

"Community must never take precedence over individual people. It is for people and for their growth. In fact, its beauty and unity come from the radiance of each person in their truth, love and union with others."

"In community, people are always called to become more."

"The right question to ask is: 'Who am I trying to please?' If we are always trying to please Jesus and not just the group, then we will grow, and the community will be for people."

Community and Cooperation

"In community, collaboration must find its source in communion. It is because people care for each other and feel called to be with each other, walking towards the same goals, that they co-operate together."

"Communion is based on some common inner experience of love; it is the recognition of being one body, on people, called by God to be a source of love and peace...When community is just a place of work, it is in danger of dying."

Community, a Place of Healing and Growth

"So community life brings a painful revelation of our limitations, weaknesses and darkness; the unexpected discovery of the monsters within us is hard to accept."

"The heart of each one is broken and bleeding. We want so much an infinite and incarnate love that does not suppress liberty; that does not manipulate us but gives us freedom and creativity. Community life with all its pain is the revelation of that deep wound."

"We are broken, but we are loved. We can grow to greater openness and compassion; we have a mission. Community becomes the place of liberation and growth."