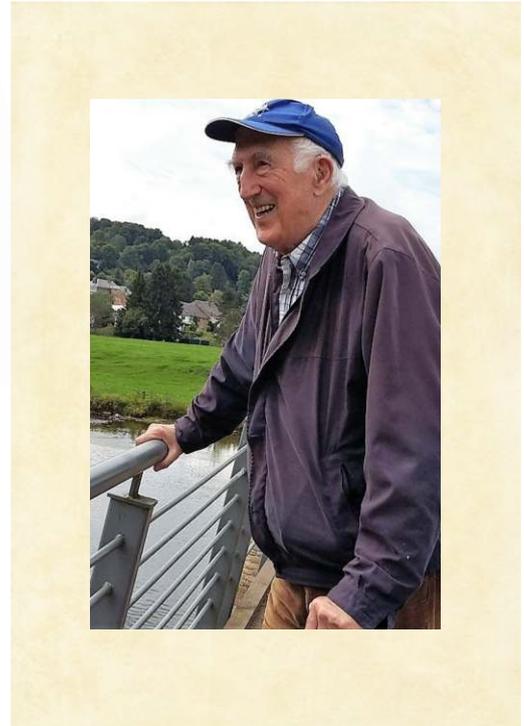


A letter from Jean

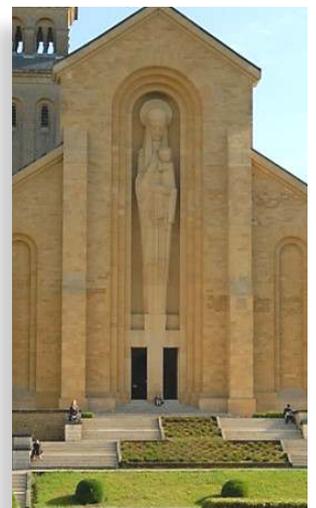
August 3rd

I'm back at the monastery of Orval where I have been coming each August for 32 years now. The swallows are still at work, singing, flying and crying their sheer joy at being alive. Each year in the spring, they arrive from Africa, leaving again in the autumn having made their nests and nurtured their young within the walls of the monastery. I confess that I am happy here. I give thanks for this place of peace where there reigns a light yet deep silence, despite the many guests who come to rest here. No phone, no newspapers, no word from our poor world with all its anguish and its violence, just the profound silence with the wonderful trees surrounding the monastery and the two swans that swim, or rather glide majestically over the pond. With their long necks and their imposing look, they are quite royal.

I benefit a lot from the monastery church in order to pray and live the offices with the monks, who are more in number than last year. When it's too hot outside, the tall abbey church is a cool resting place. For me, these three weeks help to free me up, healing me from the stress of the year. I have a lot of time to thank God for my life and for all I have received over so many years and a lot of time to walk in the woods. I need this time of renewal. In September, I will be one year older, and despite my 89 years, my health is holding up, thanks be to God. The doctors watch over me in addition to Odile who is a guardian angel.



I need
this
time
of
renewal





L'Arche and Faith and Light communities continue to multiply and, I hope, to deepen despite the challenges, crises and suffering of all kinds. God is watching over the flock. I wasn't in Belfast for the big international meeting of L'Arche but I've heard a lot about it, and I was able to see the videos. What a marvel of grace and joy! Thanks to Patrick and Eileen for the five years that they have watched over the Federation with wisdom; and joy at the arrival of Stephan and Stacy who are the new leaders of L'Arche International.



Yes, God is watching over us all because he wants to see the poor and those who are weakest integrated into the human family: they have their place and it is an important place in order to re-enchance humanity and restore hope in a world that is sometimes so anxious and so unstable due to violence and fear.

My greatest joy of the past year is my life in my community in my foyer at Trosly. What a joy to be in the midst of so many brothers and sisters, some of whom I have known for more than 40 years. They really are signs of God's presence. My joy is also to be at La Ferme where I give retreats and tell people about Jesus who is meek and humble of heart, who came to reconcile us with each other. To work for unity is to work for peace.

*To work for unity
is to work for peace.*

I have given many retreats for members of Faith and Light, and especially one which brought together members of our communities of Faith and Light in Russia and Ukraine, two countries that are in conflict. At the start of the retreat, the Ukrainians were a little worried about this meeting with the Russians; but day by day unity began to appear and on the last day they danced together during the send-off celebration. Now that I no longer travel, I have the joy of putting down my roots in daily life and living that today with my brothers and sisters.



And of course, I am still writing! My latest book is going to appear in early September in French and I hope soon afterwards in other languages. It is entitled A Cry Is Heard. Thanks to François-Xavier Maigre, who greatly assisted me in writing it. Is it not the cry of so many people who feel lost, isolated, or without a goal in life and who are waiting for some good news? This book tells of my very personal journey over these long years, before L'Arche and at L'Arche, and the discovery of this spirituality lived not only with people with disabilities, but also with all those who are weak and humiliated, those who are rejected and seen as having no value. On the contrary, we discover that in living a genuine relationship with them, they transform us, humanize us and draw us closer to God.

In this book, I also reflect on the evolution of humanity. Where are we going? Can we hope for peace, one day? Of course, there are great advances in communications, but where are the signs of a renewal of humanity? I have the impression that a new hope is being born especially among many young people, in the opening of hearts to a universal dimension of each person, in each culture.

A letter from Jean

Many people are working so that our planet can remain a place of peace and not a place of destruction, a place where the life of different species can continue to flourish. They want to work for peace, non-violence and unity. Perhaps this quest for peace is only a trickle of water in front of the boiling waters of violence and fear but that trickle is truly there. It shows itself in the desire of many people to find a new way of living together. Maybe the time of frenzied individualism is beginning to diminish and make space for the desire for a life where people commit themselves together. I am touched by these new communities coming to life in Paris and elsewhere in France where street people live with volunteers (The Association for Friendship, The Lazarus Association). They are healing and transforming each other.



It's a bit like Francis of Assisi, in the Middle Ages, who was transformed when he started to live with lepers: he transformed them and in his own turn was himself transformed. The vision of Jesus is to announce good news to the poor; this good news is not the gift of money but the gift of friendship that reveals that they are valuable and important. This vision of community is not only to live under the same roof but to live together with a common project or mission. Isn't this the vision more and more present in some workplaces and clinics and social services that want to function as communities where decisions are taken together and where each person, from the top of the ladder to the bottom, is taken into account and considered important?

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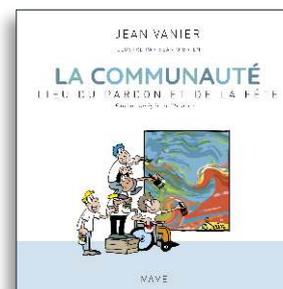
This requires that the authority be exercised as a service for the sake of the mission, but also for the well-being of each person whatever his or her culture, religion or political vision. This trickle of peace then expands and extends through the life of the community, each person welcoming the other warmly like a brother or sister in humanity: one learns to forgive, to be reconciled with each other. For that to happen, it needs a spirituality that keeps going deeper, like a living energy that brings us to truly love others, even those who may appear to be our enemies.



I dream that the prophecy of Isaiah would come true, where he writes, in Chapter 11, of a time of peace where "the wolf will live with the lamb, the panther will rest beside the kid goat. The calf and the lion cub will go together, led by a small boy. The cow and the bear will befriend each other, and see their young lie down together. The lion, like the ox, will eat straw. The infant will play by the den of the cobra, the young child will put his hand into the viper's lair. No longer will there be any harm or violence over the whole of my holy mountain, for the country will be filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea."

Yes, we need to dream but we must also work together for greater unity in each community, in each family, village and company, etc.

Another book will be released on September 15th: it's a very short version of Community and Growth. Each excerpt is illustrated by a drawing by Sean O'Brien which visually captures the essence. Excellent and fun, and not just for people who have difficulty reading! Thanks to Sean for his beautiful drawings and for his friendship.



A
letter
from
Jean

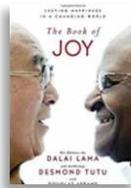


"Summer in the Forest", the film directed by Randall Wright in the Val Fleuri foyer in Trosly, and at L'Arche in Bethlehem, has been shown in some cinemas in Britain. A great success, much appreciated by the critics. It reveals the people of L'Arche in all their beauty, and simplicity. I hope that it will soon be shown in cinemas in other countries. Thanks to Randall who made this movie with such delicacy, out of the desire to reveal to our society that people with disabilities can help us live more humanly.



On the occasion of the screening of the film in London, I went with Celine and David from my foyer - two stars of the film - to meet Queen Elisabeth. I was very moved by this woman, now 90 years old, whom I knew when she was just 21. I was then a young officer on the British Navy battleship taking her parents, King George VI and his wife, to South Africa. The voyage took 17 days out, and another 17 days back again. Queen Elisabeth is an exceptional woman, welcoming and loving, with true wisdom. For over 65 years now, she has reigned with both great love and a sense of duty to God and her country.

At this moment, I am reading a book on the meetings between the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, two men over 80 years old who have suffered a lot in their lives because of the political crises with China or South Africa. I see how compassion is at the heart of Buddhism: a compassion that ripens slowly in each person, through meditation and concern for the well-being of each human being, especially the most suffering and most rejected. Is this not also the heart of the Gospel? "Be compassionate as the Father is compassionate; do not judge, do not condemn but forgive" (Luke 6:36).



The Dalai Lama says that when he wakes up each morning, his first words are words of support and help for people who are suffering. I have a lot to learn from him. Perhaps, when we learn about the tragedies, moments of suffering, accidents and attacks in our societies, we could take some time to be in communion with these suffering people. This communion can become a prayer that helps those who suffer, easing their pain.



*Perhaps we could take
some time to be in communion
with these suffering people.*

August 20th

I am continuing this letter at Taizé - a very lively community that was founded in 1940 by Roger Schütz, with the aim of creating a Protestant monastic community open to welcoming men of other Christian churches. Over the years it has become a big ecumenical community (there are over a hundred committed brothers) which welcomes young people who are searching - and these young people come not only from all the countries of Europe but also from across the world. At the end of August, 2,000 young people between 18 and 30 years old came to Taizé: each day they live three long times of prayer, with moments of reflection in a group in the morning and conferences that are available in the afternoon. I gave several talks. One on the heart of L'Arche: the meeting with a person who is very different from us, who transforms us. And another, with a Muslim man, on God the Almighty who is also God the humble, and the way God works in creation. I'm very touched by so many young people seeking God, seeking a new meaning to their lives.

*Peace and love
to each one,
Jean*

