



MICHAEL HUTCHINSON

I'm Michael Hutchinson, I am currently the Community Leader of L'Arche Brisbane.

L'Arche was founded in France by Jean Vanier in 1964. The word L'Arche translates to mean the Ark. As L'Arche we are people with and without intellectual disability, sharing life in Communities belonging to an International Federation.

Our Mission is:

- To make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities revealed through mutually transforming relationships.
- To foster an environment in Community that responds to the changing needs of our members, whilst being faithful to the core values of our founding story.
- To engage in our diverse cultures, working together towards a more human society.

L'Arche Brisbane was founded in 2003. The Community came into being, after much prayer and trust in God, that people with and without intellectual disability could live lives where their individual gifts were fully recognised.

I was born into a Catholic family and had the benefit of education through the Good Samaritan Sisters and the Christian Brothers. After school, I obtained a job and life was moving along as it did in the 70's. I was going along in life thinking I was doing okay. The combination of both home and school set me up to be a person who cared for my fellow human family.

In 1980 my life took a different turn and I was led to the writings and examples of Jean Vanier. This introduced me to L'Arche and Faith and Light and this has had a fundamental change to where my life has gone. I was influenced by these words of Jean Vanier; *'We are not called by God to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things with extraordinary love.'* I have tried hard to live by this in my everyday dealings with people.

Another well-known writer Henri Nouwen, who spent the last 10 years of his life living in a Community of L'Arche says, *'Pay attention to the people God puts in your path if you want to discern what God is up to in your life.'*

Living my life as part of L'Arche puts me in front of the very raw emotions of my fellow humans. There are many times of joy and celebration and there are times of hurt and great disappointment. How I meet my sisters and brothers in these times, is where the rubber hits the road. It is so important that in both these extremes that I am able to show my own woundedness. It is through being able to show our own wounds that each of us is able to grow together.

The day-to-day can have many times of ordinariness and possibly the mundane. It is then that I remember the words of Jean Vanier *'Let us not put our sights too high. We do not have to be saviours of the world! We are simply human beings, enfolded in weakness and in hope, called together to change our world one heart at a time.'* (Becoming Human p 163).

The times that give me greatest joy are those when I can be with our members with disabilities and our Assistants. Spending time together sharing stories, a laugh, a cuppa are all life-giving moments. Sometimes there does not have to be a lot of words, it is in knowing that we are there for each other and that we are sharing a common bond in time and place.

I would like to conclude this time together with some words of Henri Nouwen *'Compassion can never coexist with judgement because judgement creates the distance, the distinction, which prevents us from really being with the other.'*