

It's Good To Be Human Together

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When Jack Medved meets someone new, he writes their name on a ship he's drawn, called his "Friend Ship." Medved, 22, who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) when he was a toddler, says he needed a way to remember all the friends he was making.

"I was making a list of all my friends. There were so many," Medved said. "[I made it a ship] because of the play on words. There are many ways that ships have changed history. There was one with a crazy story, Noah's Ark. Now that's a story about caring."

'Friend Ship' is the name of a group that is working to bring a L'Arche community to San Diego. Their name was inspired by Medved's drawing, and caring is what they are all about.

L'Arche (French for 'ark' and rhymes with marsh) is a worldwide federation of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers. The adults with disabilities, or core members, live with adult assistants in a spirit of faith and friendship, according to L'Arche USA. There are 153 communities throughout 38 countries, with 21 emerging communities — Friend Ship being one of them. There is only one other L'Arche community in California, in Orange County.

L'Arche was founded in 1964 by Jean Vanier, a Catholic priest and theologian. He visited various asylums throughout France where people with disabilities were sent, and he wrote in a book that he was overwhelmed by the human degradation he saw. He invited three of the men he met in the asylums to come live with him in a small home north of Paris. Two of the men stayed with him, and the first L'Arche community was born.

"Jean Vanier focuses on a key Christian belief that everybody is made in the image of God," said theology professor Dr. Rebecca Laird. "If you have breath, you bear the image of God and have gifts to share."

What is different about L'Arche, Laird said, is it assumes core members are teachers, and communal life is focused on doing things 'with,' not 'for' those with disabilities.

Laird is the president of the launch team for the Friend Ship group. She, along with her husband Michael Christensen, has written three books on Henri Nouwen, a priest and friend of Vanier who spent the last decade of his life living in a L'Arche community in Canada. It was after a Henri Nouwen conference at University of San Diego (USD)

in February 2018 that Laird received an email from a group inviting her to join and assist six families in discerning if they should work to bring a L'Arche community to San Diego.

Andrea Moriarty and Maria Nagy (Medved's mom) were part of the group of six moms who began thinking about forming a L'Arche community about two years ago. They both have adult sons with autism.

"For the families involved, all of us need a plan for our adult children," Nagy said. "For both the fullness of their lives, and for when we are no longer able to care for them. None of us are guaranteed that our kids are going to be in that [L'Arche] community, but we all know that whether or not they are in that house, they need the L'Arche community. We're really building [L'Arche] for everyone, and it just needs to be in San Diego."

Moriarty said what attracts her to the L'Arche model is that it is rooted in the Christian faith, mutual relationships and is part of a worldwide network. She first heard about L'Arche when her son Reid, 25, was diagnosed with autism when he was three, and she read a book by Henri Nouwen called "Adam" where he talks about living with an adult man with disabilities in L'Arche.

"There's things that you can't learn in a textbook, that you have to learn in relationship," Moriarty said. "You learn by doing, and the 'doing' is [learning] by interacting with people who are different."

L'Arche requires emerging communities to go through five stages of pre-formation and discernment. Friend Ship is in stage three, which includes the process of forming a board committee who will oversee funding and real estate. The group can't technically be called 'L'Arche San Diego' until they have completed the five steps, which is why they call themselves Friend Ship.

Friend Ship's motto is "Come on board, because it is good to be human together." Like animals and humans sharing the boat in the story of Noah's Ark, and like Medved's "Friend Ship," L'Arche is rooted in welcoming and celebrating difference — recognizing that at our core we are vulnerable human beings, Laird said.

"That's a quote from Vanier [it is good to be human together], which is just the simplest, profound core value of L'Arche," Moriarty said.

Earlier this month, the group painted a mural at Pioneer Day School in Ocean Beach with mural artist Kid Wiseman. The mural says "It's good to be

human together," and the art was inspired by a community member artist with disabilities.

"We have a number of artists in our community of 20-year-olds with disabilities, and many of them love art," Moriarty said. "[We thought] a mural would be a public billboard of L'Arche San Diego in formation. People would see it... and make conversation of what it means to be human together."

Penny Richichi, a member of Friend Ship, lived as an adult assistant at a L'Arche community in Tacoma, WA for four years right out of college. She said those years were incredibly foundational, and for her, L'Arche is a "light of hope."

"Life can be so competitive, but L'Arche teaches you a different way," Richichi said. "It teaches you that you can be human. It teaches you that you're loved in everything. You don't have to be number one to be loved."

Friend Ship's vision for L'Arche San Diego is to have an easily accessible welcome center, where activities and gatherings with the broader San Diego community would take place. Laird said after establishing the welcome center, the hope is to have a few residential homes or apartments throughout San Diego where core members live with assistants.

The proximity to both PLNU and USD is important to both Nagy and Moriarty to keep the community sustainable and give students a chance to live out justice and their faith.

"You can talk all day long about social justice, but you have to have space for people to live it and practice it," Nagy said. "If one in eight people live with a disability, it's highly likely that that's probably the broadest opportunity to live the faith in that respect."

The next Friend Ship event will be in March 2020 at Liberty Station. Moriarty said folks can join the 'Friend Ship San Diego' Facebook group to follow along with the group's journey.

As Medved said, there are many ways that ships have changed history. Friend Ship San Diego may be one of them.

"Our hope for Jack is to establish community for him that outlasts us," Nagy said. "Where he's a contributor and he's connected, and he's both giving and receiving from the community, which is what we all want from our communities. I think the hope for L'Arche is to build intentional community, people living and sharing life in all it holds."



Friend Ship San Diego logo, courtesy of Friend Ship San Diego



Portable L'Arche mural. photo by Michael Christensen



Mural at Pioneer Day School. Photo by Michael Christensen

Q&A with Rick Power

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The powerful, the elusive: Board of Trustees. PLNU students may not know the purpose of this superintending group and how they operate. The Point interviewed with Vice Chair Rev. Rick Power on the role of the Board of Trustees on the PLNU campus.

What does the Board of Trustees do?

Basically, the Board of Trustees is a body of elected women and men who love PLNU and accept responsibility to help the university accomplish its mission.

We do this by electing a president and evaluating his/her performance each year. We receive reports from all the

cabinet members to ensure that the administration is working effectively as a team to achieve the PLNU mission.

Financial accountability is especially important, so we carefully assess the financial position of the university each year. The board also oversees itself to be sure our members are fulfilling their responsibilities. We have annual nominations and elections to fill positions on the board.

Many members on the board live in different states. How do you operate with the distance from each other and the PLNU campus?

We require representation from all the Nazarene districts on the Southwest Field. That includes all or part of six different

states. Also, there are "at-large representatives" that may live outside the Southwest Field. These are alumni or others with strong connections to Point Loma who meet the qualifications to serve as Trustees. We have regular meetings twice a year and special meetings, if needed. In between meetings, we communicate by conference call, email or other means.

Is the board involved in any day-to-day happenings on campus?

No, the board doesn't get involved in the operational side of campus life. But we are very interested in what's happening on campus. You'll find board members visiting the campus all through the year for homecoming, commencement, sporting events,

concerts, committee meetings or just to visit students.

What kind of situation would have to occur on campus for the board to be involved?

President Brower communicates with us whenever there is something unusual happening. When there are security threats or serious personnel issues, he keeps us informed. He wrote to us about the concerns that were expressed regarding perceived political bias among chapel speakers. He shared with us how he and the Spiritual Development leaders were planning to address these concerns. The Board of Trustees is always welcomed to offer input, but we don't determine the actions of the president and administration.

How do you become a board member?

Nominations come from the 12 districts of the Church of the Nazarene that make up the Southwest Field. A committee of the board considers which nominees meet the criteria for membership and how we can best meet our goals of talent, connection and diversity. The term of service is three years, with about one-third completing their terms each year.

How many women are on the board? Minorities?

The current composition of the board includes 23 members: 7 women, 16 men; 5 minority members.