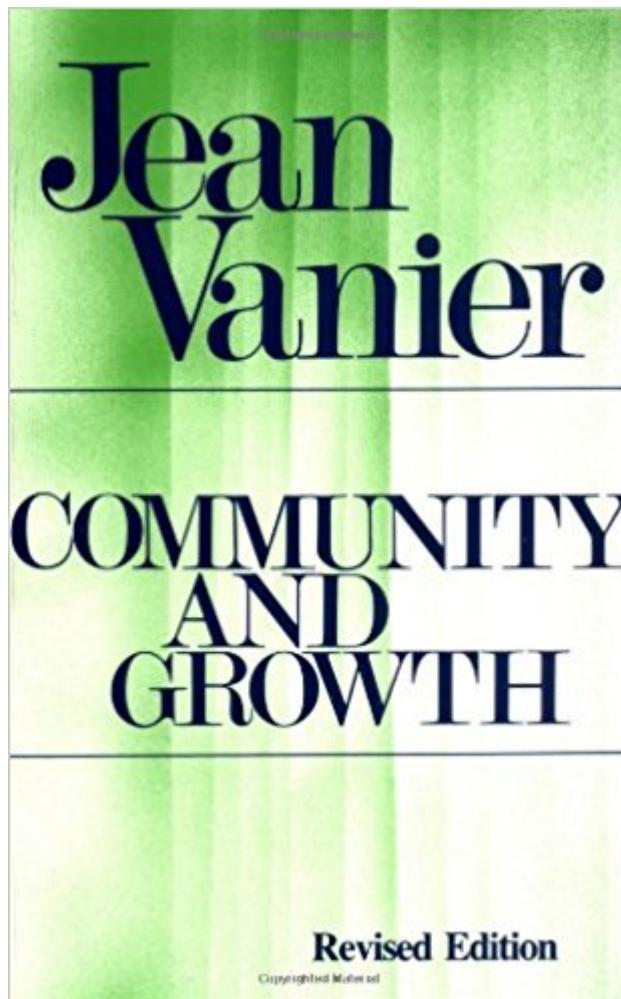


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# Community And Growth



## **Synopsis**

A guide to communal life. Completely revised.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 331 pages

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## **Customer Reviews**

Contemporary society is the product of the disintegration of more or less natural or familial groupings. People are afraid, uncertain - and shut themselves away. But they need companions and their ideals; in short, they need Community.

JEAN VANIÉR, the son of former governor general Georges Vanier, was educated in England and Canada. After eight years in the Royal and the Canadian Navy, he went to study in France, where he received his doctorate in philosophy, later teaching at St. Michael's College (University of Toronto). Distressed by the plight of people with developmental challenges, he founded L'Arche communities, and Faith and Light, two international networks of communities for people with disabilities. With many bestselling books and humanitarian awards to his name including the Pope Paul VI International Prize, the International Peace Award and the Companion of the Order of Canada Vanier lives in Trosly, France, in the original L'Arche community he founded in 1964. Shearer is a Jungian Analyst

Outside of the Bible, this is the most influential book I have read. Jean Vanier is able to convey profound and counter-cultural ideas in an easily understood and touching way. I think I am up to 5 or

6 copies of this book that I have bought and given away. Any time someone I know expresses an interest in Christian community I have to give them a copy.

This book reads like a blog about the nature and development of community. If you are interested in how communities work, how to grow and develop community, or just want to think more about community and personal growth, this is a great book with lots of good ideas. If you are part of a community and are looking for some good discussion starters about where to go as a community, how to function as a community, and how to develop as a community, this book would provide some good direction for that as well. The book did get a little repetitive for me, but it serves as a good resource for all things related to community.

Community And Growth by Jean Vanier (Shorter Book Reaction) Our world needs a rekindled sense of community. We sense it; we feel the isolation and our isolating habits and we groan for something more. Vanier sensed this many years ago when he wrote the original version of "Community and Growth" (1979). His wise words carry just as much wisdom for today as they did thirty years ago. "The essence of community," Vanier wrote, "is a sense of belonging." (p.16) "It is a place where people are earthed and find their identity." (p.13) Discovering and cultivating community is coming to find "my people" and our common call together. This happens through the practice of embracing one another, brokenness and all, and practicing forgiveness. "A community comes about when people are no longer hiding from one another, no longer pretending or proving their value to another." (p. 24) "When we accept that we have weaknesses and flaws, that we have sinned against God and against our brothers and sisters, but that we are forgiven and can grow towards inner freedom and truer love, then we can accept the weaknesses and flaws of others." (p.35) Vanier also adds: "Too many people come into community to find something, to belong to a dynamic group, to discover a life which approaches the ideal. If we come into community without knowing that the reason we come is to learn to forgive and be forgiven seven times seventy-seven times, we will soon be disappointed." (p.37) Rather than finding a place that hides our inner struggles, we discover in true and formative community that God is weaving us together, immersing us in one another's brokenness so that we become practiced in forgiving and nurturing those who are experiencing such brokenness; this leads us to practice the same thing in the world around us. This is our practice of imitating Christ's incarnation, his plunge into our broken world. Vanier's book continues as a wise and friendly guide that can help us discern how to nurture such community with the people God has placed us with. An example: the chapter, "Walking Toward the Covenant" caused me to wonder how

we can nourish people toward a covenant life in the church, a true sharing of all our life together so we eventually see the fruit from that sharing. And: How can we evaluate our life together based on that cultivation of fruit instead of attendance, budgets, or a sense of how impressive our programming has become? The chapter titled "Mission" contains some of the most freeing and powerful language on mission I've read. Vanier wrote these powerful lines: "[Communities will seek] to pray and to be present in a special way to the smallest and the weakest within their community or outside it." (p.94) "People who gather together to live the presence of Jesus among people in distress are therefore called not just to do things for them, or to see them as objects of charity, but rather to receive them as a source of life and of communion." (p.95) "The cry for love and communion and for recognition that arises from the hearts of people in need reveals the fountain of love in us and our capacity to give life. At the same time, it can reveal our hardness of heart and our fears.... The cry of the poor is threatening to the rich person within us. We are sometimes prepared to give money and a little time, but we are frightened to give our hearts, to enter into a personal relationship of love and communion with them. For if we do so, we shall have to die to all our selfishness and to all the hardness of our heart." (p.98) Within the collection of wonderful quotes, I began to wonder, "How do I nurture this? What steps do I need to take to help people step into this kind of life together?" I discovered as I finished *Community and Growth* that it may have been Vanier's intent to leave me with many questions; I discovered that Vanier had not written a mathematical manual for me or anyone else to follow in rote but instead, he was guiding me to see and anticipate something yet to come, something which I must participate in the construction of alongside my brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the beauty of the book: my questions will propel me (and your questions you) into prayerful discernment with the communities we've been planted in by God. Our prayer and discernment will be met, I'm sure, with God's unique guidance for us in our unique locations and with our unique people. The questions that Vanier's writing has inspired will help me, and you, become aware of what to cultivate and aware of what direction we must follow. May our journeys be blessed!

This man is a Saint in our midst.

This book is insightful, challenging and sobering. It has awakened me to the reality that we know very little of the essence of true community in our western culture today. It is going to require deep sacrifice and a reworking of our deeply held individualistic convictions. In short it's going to take a revolution of the heart, led by the Holy Spirit among those who truly believe and are willing to submit

personal agendas to the revealed will of God.

Love this book. Love this man. Love the communities of L'Arche that he started. I've read this book many times, and while I currently live in a L'Arche community and therefore what he writes is directly applicable to my life, I think this book has something to share with people in every situation, too. You should read it at least once in your life!

Vanier has a gift for examining the human condition and interpreting the application of God's purposes to this. His writing style might take some getting used to for some readers, but none of the concepts or subjects he takes on are over anyone's head. Enjoying going through the book now.

I love Jean Vanier, this man stands head and shoulders above many in the Church today, worth reading anything he has written...

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