

I Believe in You

Wisdom from community with persons with disabilities
on believing in ourselves and the other



Luca Badetti

Foreword by
Jean Vanier

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*To the community of loved ones that was there for me
in March of 2017 when the unexpected happened.*

True ordinariness is tangible holiness. *I Believe in You* by Luca Badetti is an invitation to embrace this beautiful reality by experiencing within ourselves the liberating power of love, simplicity, surrender and trust, inspired by the book's messages and the stories from the community of L'Arche present in its pages. Time spent with this book welcomes us to relax with our authentic selves in an age marked by narcissism and doubt. As you travel with Badetti to uncover life's meaning "in unexpected places" outside of ourselves, each chapter will encourage you to find essential value in yourself in surprising places as well. This gentle, prophetic, heartfelt work is worthy of reflection...and prayer. He has given us a psychological and spiritual gift at a time in society when we most need it.

Robert J. Wicks

Psychologist and author of *Night Call*

I found this book to be a true eye-opener. Through narratives with a community of persons with and without disabilities, it encourages us to encounter ourselves and others in a way that can deepen our spirituality.

David Richo, PhD

author of *How to be an Adult*

"The stance of tenderness—that loving respect made manifest in gentleness—can free us to be who we are," reads one of the many quotes in Luca Badetti's book, *I Believe in You*.

Living in relationship in community with the so-called intellectually disabled, Luca tenderly unveils his own growth and evolving inner transformation inspired by stories from those very housemates! Luca, with depth and conviction, further invites you and me to tenderly search the stumbling complexities of our own inner lives, mostly in relationship to ourselves, but also to others, so as to free who we truly are. *I Believe in You*

engenders serious introspection but also validates the exquisite gifts of those so often marginalized by those of us who fear the challenges of becoming more truly human.

Sue Mosteller, CSJ

Executrix of Henri Nouwen's literary estate

Luca Badetti's thoughtful book is a gentle and valuable reminder to those of us who struggle with feeling "good enough" to be loved—just as we are with our strengths and weaknesses, abilities and limitations—that each of us is lovable as people uniquely fashioned by divine Love. He shares the "life wisdom" he has gained through living in community with people with disability—valuable lessons of living without pretense, trusting in our innate goodness, and sharing life in interdependent relationships.

Wilkie Au, PhD

Author of *God's Unconditional Love*

Are you finally ready to believe in you? Are you ready to claim your own beauty and goodness? In *I Believe in You* Dr. Luca Badetti invites you to discover you are worth being known and celebrated. Written in a warm, calm, personal style, Dr. Badetti shares significant narratives that, stemming from a unique community that has much to teach us about finding and offering ourselves, embody what it means to be(come) fully human, fully alive, and fully being. You must read this book.

David Arute

Professional Counselor, Co-President of The Mansio Center

Badetti has written a wonderful book which explores the question of belief – how we believe in ourselves, in others and in God. The L'Arche community members with whom he lived

were his inspiration and teachers, helping him to learn who we all are: God's beloved. This book is a very profound human story of acceptance. Through stories, it shows us how to truly be present, listen and understand ourselves and the other. It challenges our view of those outside of our "comfort zone" and invites us to let down our barriers to celebrate what it is to be truly human.

Ronald Rolheiser, OMI
President, Oblate School of Theology
Author of *The Holy Longing*

A precious and much-needed book. A lot of our personal and social issues stem from not trusting our innate value and, consequently, that of our fellow human beings. The relevant insights and inclusive stories in these pages can help us believe and grow in our humanity, healing our relationship with ourselves and our relationships with others.

Helen Prejean, CSJ
Author of *Dead Man Walking*

In the spirit of the Gospels Luca Badetti's book, *I Believe in You*, takes us on a spiritual journey that opens our hearts to trust in ourselves, which as he says, "is not about achieving something, but about receiving the gift of our being." He has cut through to the heart of the spiritual life. "Receiving the gift of our being" is both the challenge and the gift of spiritual living. And he does this with gentle sincerity by inviting us to encounter, in these pages, members of his L'Arche community and, in our lives, those that are often marginalized. This leaves us with a profound experience of Divine Presence at the heart of our being.

Ken Sedlak, CSsR
Author of *Why God Loves Us...No Matter What*

In this poignant book, Luca Badetti is sharing lessons and insights learned about life from his friends with disabilities in the community of L'Arche. By Luca's willingness to be open to them, they have become true teachers, teaching him not so much about people with disabilities but about the essence of what it means to be human, to accept ourselves, and to be open to the grace and wonder that can come from relationships with others, especially those on the margins. Simply, in understanding them, we understand ourselves. With elegance and simplicity, Luca Badetti invites us into that journey.

Bill Gaventa, MDiv

Director of the *Summer Institute on Theology and Disability*

People from different walks of life and backgrounds can find, in this book, fresh and novel insights into their individual and social development, as Luca Badetti shares experiences and reflections from living in a diverse community of people with and without intellectual disabilities. Insightful, yet easy to read, informative yet accessible, this is a book for the journey.

Tamar Heller, PhD

Distinguished Professor and head of the
Department of Disability and Human Development
(University of Illinois at Chicago)

An inspiring and thought-provoking work that reveals hope in humanity.

Brian Schmisek, PhD

Dean of the Institute of Pastoral Studies,
(Loyola University Chicago)

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Foreword

This is a precious little book. It reveals people who have intellectual disabilities in a new way. Over the past forty years, people have begun to discover that those with these disabilities are real people and should not be put into big institutions away from society. They can give talks; some can even become film stars and do beautiful things. In the Special Olympics many win medals. Society is beginning to discover that people with disabilities are important.

This book brings something new and surprising. It tells us, through the experiences of the author, that they can teach us to become more human, and so bring change to our society.

They can teach us about relationships, about spirituality, about fidelity and open hearts, kindness and compassion, all these virtues which are so frequently crushed in our society where people seek more about winning and power.

This book can help each one of us to be more open to people with these disabilities and so discover the real meaning of being human.

So thank you, Luca, for this little book. You learned much by living in L'Arche communities in North America and Europe, part of a huge international family of communities which began in 1964 when I welcomed Raphael and Philippe from a heartless institution in France. They taught me how to become more human, more open to others and more loving. I hope each reader can discover in a new way what it means to become really human.

Jean Vanier

Preface

Our lives are enshrined in mystery, light and shadows. As we grow through the years we seek to make sense of this and find a meaning to life that resonates as true within us. Philosophies have suggested various meanings to life: happiness, pleasure, knowledge, and ethical living. Religions have opened the search to a broader horizon, seeing love of God, communion with people, detachment from materialism, and respect for creation as spiritual components without which the human person suffocates. The sciences have developed sophisticated healing practices, whether physical or psychological.

Amid all of this, who or what do we believe in? There are many paths, contrasting values and attractive options that could be followed. This book does not propose a comprehensive answer to this question but presents ways by which we can deepen our belief in ourselves and one another. Although belief is often associated with God or a set of concepts, we have neglected how primary and essential belief in ourselves and in each other can be. We can search in high places for big answers, often failing to see what is right next to us and within us. We may wait for big revelations while neglecting the richness we can find in all the little stories that make up our lives and our relationships.

To believe means to trust. This is true etymologically, but most essentially it is a reality that can be experienced. Do we believe, or trust, in ourselves? Do we believe, or trust, in others? What does this mean in the first place and how to do so?

We might take for granted that we know who we are until we start questioning it. Some identify with family and social status, professional roles, geographic location and other markers that give them a sense of who they are, only to feel

alienated from their identity once these are threatened (the end of a relationship, the loss of a job, a move to another country and so forth).

Our sense of belonging might be dispersed across different cultures, social groups, and virtual platforms, making us feel stretched in different directions. We might have had experiences when we felt valued and cherished, but also some that tarnished our self-esteem, thus holding contrasting histories in our very being. In our world or in our neighborhoods—and potentially our very homes—we hear of people in survival mode just trying to pull through and, via the images we see in the media, we become aware of inaudible violence in different parts of our globe. How can we believe in ourselves and in other human beings?

The reflections presented in this book do not come primarily from my readings of heady philosophers, important theologians, or interesting psychologists, but from my community experience with people that have intellectual disabilities. In my years living and working in L'Arche, international faith communities in which people with and without disabilities live together in an inclusive spirit of friendship and belonging, I have experienced how persons with disabilities can witness to something quite special. Their example, stories, and insights can lead us on the way to become more human and consequently transform society.

To some it might seem novel that people with intellectual disabilities can lead us on the path of believing in ourselves and in each other. Throughout history, in fact, society has generally not believed in them in the first place: they have been consistently pushed aside, their voices silenced and their wisdom stifled. They have often been treated as not fully human. In becoming friends and living in community with them, however, I have realized that their place should be not at the margins of society but at the center, alongside people without intellectual disabilities.

Life often presents its meaning in unexpected places. It is not always found in grand narratives, in experts' opinions, or

in ideological assents, but is often quietly whispered through the “littleness” that people easily forget, overlook, or bypass, busying themselves with loftier thoughts, bigger plans, and quicker answers.

Francis of Assisi found meaning by stripping himself of riches and finding value in the sun, the moon, the rain, and other elements of creation; Mother Teresa found God among lepers and others discarded by society; Gandhi responded to the noisy arrogance of war by proposing the simple humanness of nonviolent encounters; Nelson Mandela lived a fulfilling life while enduring many years confined in a prison cell because of his belief in the diverse unity of the human family.

In the 1960s Jean Vanier, a philosopher of sharp mind in search of direction, visited an asylum for people with intellectual disabilities in a small village north of Paris, Trosly-Breuil. He did not realize this would change his life. Jean was touched by the need for friendship that the people in that institution had. Cut away from society they cried out for love, a human need we all share. Jean invited two of them, Raphael and Philippe, to live with him and transform a nearby dilapidated house into a home they named “L’Arche” (French for “the ark”). The three started living together in a spirit of Christian community, sharing meals, prayer, play, and work. Jean was being led from intellectual prowess and control to a gentle and receptive way of the heart. The scriptural image of God choosing the “foolish of the world” to confound those deemed “wise” (1 Cor. 1:27, NRSV) and the exhortation to become friends with the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind (Lk 14:13) was being incarnated day in and day out in the small Trosly home and eventually beyond, as visitors interested in this new way of life brought L’Arche to different countries.

Today, in L’Arche homes across the world, people with and without intellectual disabilities, from different religions, cultures, and backgrounds share a dwelling together as housemates or work-mates and live out a spirituality of unity and togetherness. Together they do very human things: they cook, eat, pray, play, clean, go on outings, rest, watch TV, and live the