

L'ARCHE

KEY ELEMENTS OF A L'ARCHE COMMUNITY AND EVALUATION GUIDE



L'ARCHE CANADA

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KEY ELEMENTS OF A L'ARCHE COMMUNITY

I- Elements

Introduction

This Zone Document on "The Key Elements of a L'Arche Community" is based on thirty years of experience and on the two fundamental texts for L'Arche in Canada: the Charter of L'Arche and our Identity & Mission Statement.

A L'Arche community grows and develops when we can identify, articulate and be accountable for the fundamental and continuing elements and gifts which define who we are and who we want to become. This will give us a dynamism which will motivate and inspire us.

We recognize the need for a continuity of common principles, goals and practices in all of our communities. The purpose of this text is to help us build our communities through its use by Coordinators, communities and boards to evaluate where a community is in its development and to set priorities for future growth. It can also be a good tool for the formation of community members and Board members.

Following are the fundamental elements expressed in simple point form under two headings linked to the Charter:

Principles : the values we want to live;

Practices : the concrete ways by which we will achieve our goals, live our values and fulfill our Mission.

More and more we are aware of the need to work together and to work diligently to build communities of L'Arche that are rooted in the following essential elements.

1. The Value of Persons with a Developmental Disability ("core members")

«The aim of L'Arche is to create communities which welcome people with a developmental disability, to reveal the particular gifts of people and give them a valid place in society. The people with a developmental disability are at the heart of a L'Arche community.»

Principles

- The life of core members has value, dignity and integrity.
- Core members have gifts which the community seeks and actively finds ways to reveal.
- Core members actively participate in all aspects in the life of a L'Arche community.
- The community wants to secure for its member's education, work and therapeutic activities which will be a source of dignity, growth and fulfilment for them.

Practices

- Core members have stable, on-going, valued relationships within the community and outside of it.
- There are clear means of communication for core members to express their dreams, desires, needs and choices.
- Each core member has a program of growth, which is reviewed annually.
- Core members participate in decisions concerning them.
- Each core member has meaningful work or daytime activity.
- Outside professionals work with the community to support the growth of core members.
- Core members have opportunities to participate in and contribute to their local neighbourhood and local community life.

2. Life Sharing

« The different members of a community are called to be one body. They live, work, pray and celebrate together, sharing their joys and suffering and forgiving each other, as in a family. They have a simple life-style which gives priority to relationships. »

Principles

- Home life is at the heart of a L'Arche community.
- Relationships are based on the attitude of "living with", which is different from "doing for".

Practices

- Core members and assistants have a place in their home and contribute to its creation.
- Priority is given to building relationships in an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual care.
- Good conditions are put in place to foster the long term commitment of assistants living in the homes and working in the day programs.
- There is a prayer life in each home.
- There is an established recognizable rhythm of life in the home, work and community.
- Core members and assistants participate in the routines, activities and traditions of their home and of the community.

3. Mutuality

« L'Arche fosters and supports relationships of mutuality in which people give and receive love.»

Principles

- People are of equal value and are bound together in a common humanity.
- Weakness and vulnerability in a person, far from being an obstacle to union with God and others, can foster it.
- Differences in people are respected and valued.

Practices

- Friendships and mutual relationships are recognized and encouraged.
- Covenant relationships are encouraged, supported, announced and celebrated.
- There are clear community traditions regarding meals, celebrations, reconciliation, worship, holidays, etc. which foster bonding between people.
- Members express what they are living in language that respects people and builds community.
- Members have a voice and decisions are made at the appropriate place.
- There are clear community traditions and policies regarding appropriate behaviour.
- Different types of accompaniment are in place for all community members.
- There is a commitment to helping members maintain their long term relationships with their families and friends.

4. Faith Community

« L'Arche communities are communities of faith, rooted in prayer and trust in God. They seek to be guided by God and by their weakest members, through whom God's presence is revealed.»

Principles

- Trust in Providence
- Welcoming and open, the community has a religious identity which is valued and respected.
- The unique spiritual journey of each person is respected and encouraged.
- The covenant is our particular spiritual path as a L'Arche community.

Practices

- Members are active in their own faith traditions and are encouraged to deepen their own spiritual life.
- The community has an obvious and active spiritual life.
- The community recognizes and lives out its ecumenical vocation.
- The community has a pastoral minister.
- There are links with local churches, synagogues, religious groups and their leaders.

5. Leadership, Management, Structures and Human Resources

« The communities seek to be competent in all the tasks they are called to accomplish »

Principles

- Each L'Arche community has the leadership, management, structures and human resources necessary for it to live the Charter and fulfill its Mission.
- Leadership and authority is exercised as a service to the community.
- There is cooperation and a partnership among Boards, community leaders, L'Arche Coordinators, pastoral ministers and long term assistants.
- There is a dynamic balance among the four fundamental functions of leadership (Gerald Arbuckle):
 - To conserve, i.e. to keep L'Arche in contact with its original founding;
 - To manage, i.e. to set up structures that allow the day to day needs of the community to be met;
 - To nurture, i.e. to respond to the legitimate needs of the members of the community.
 - To be prophetic, i.e. to be ever open to discovering new ways to live out the Charter and the Mission within a rapidly changing world.
- Subsidiary, i.e. decisions are made at the "lowest" level possible. Consensus decision making is used whenever possible.

Practices

- The community assumes its rights and responsibilities as a member community of the Federation of L'Arche. (See L'Arche Canada Membership Agreement).
- There is a functioning and competent Board of Directors which ensures the community is faithful to the Charter and that the community fulfills its Mission.
- The Board of Directors and the community understands and supports the place and vocation of assistants, particularly long term and confirmed members.
- There is an effective community leader who carries the vision and spirit of L'Arche and who ensures that the community is growing as a L'Arche community and who fosters the long term commitment and vocation of the assistants.
- There is a community constitution which defines roles, the selection process for roles, responsibilities, authority, decision making and accountability within the community.
- There is an annual review for each community member.
- There is a written policy and procedures manual.
- There is an effective and competent community council.
- There are regular and effective team meetings at all levels of the community (i.e. home, work, administration etc.)
- Membership is clearly defined in writing. The place of each member is recognized, affirmed and celebrated. Community members participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.
- There are effective orientation, formation and training programs for assistants.
- There is a reasonable compensation, benefits and pension policy for all assistants and employees.
- There are financial accounting and reporting systems in place.

6. Communities integrated in society

« L'Arche seeks to offer not a solution but a sign, a sign that a society, to be truly human, must be founded on welcome and respect for the weak and the downtrodden. »

Principle

- L'Arche communities are open and welcoming to the world around. They form an integral part of life in their localities.

Practices

- The community works closely with government authorities, professionals and the families of the core members.
- The community is well integrated in its neighbourhoods, local churches and local community life.
- There is solidarity and links with other L'Arche communities.