



GUIDE TO
PRACTICES
THAT PROVIDE
MEANING



We are people, with and without developmental disabilities, sharing life in communities belonging to an International Federation. Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together. We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need of one another.

L'Arche Identity and Mission Statement

Cover: Core Member Fritz Schloss from L'Arche Greater Washington DC. Photo by Brian Taylor

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INTRODUCTION

The following document is designed to provide guidance to assistants, coordinators, and community leaders as they seek to maintain and to grow in the practices which provide meaning in our communities. We hope it inspires creativity and affirms the lived experience of L'Arche in the US.

In the fall of 2016, L'Arche Communities throughout the US participated in a survey which provided the majority of data used to author a White Paper entitled "Enhancing and Nurturing L'Arche Spirituality in US and Beyond" (attached).

We are grateful that all of the communities in the US participated in the survey. We learned of the great value placed on spirituality. Equally inspiring was the expressed desire to continue to grow spiritually, and to learn how other communities experience meaning.

We have compiled a guide of current and longtime practices lived in the US which is based on what we learned in the community survey and through past documentation.

The following practices were mentioned by multiple communities as holding meaning for participants. We have attempted to provide context when practices might be ritualized. Some of the resources provided have been excerpted from other L'Arche documents and are cited.

There is great spiritual diversity within L'Arche USA, and language in the area of spirituality may be comforting to the majority, and may also feel exclusive to those who do not identify as Christian. Our Identity and Mission statement grounds us in the use of God as descriptor of the divine. That said, not all who come to L'Arche understand or find meaning in God language. This tension is discussed fully in the White Paper. We name it and understand that for our communities there can be confusion of how best to live this tension. In this document, we will attempt to use inclusive language, understanding that direct quotes will be left as written.

Because of these tensions, and the great value that has been named of spirituality in our communities, we recommend that regular reflection of spiritual practices take place in order to assess the spiritual wellness of the community. See the section offered for reflection at the conclusion of this document.

It is our hope that this guide will be helpful, and will enhance the practices lived in the communities of the US. If our team can offer assistance, please feel free to contact us.

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Dinnertime prayer at L'Arche Atlanta. Photo by Ann Borden.

MEALTIME PRAYER

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS PRACTICE?

- The prayer is valued and respected by those gathered
- That it is comfortable and accessible by the people living in the home
- It is inclusive of all gathered at the table
- Communal prayer links us to the divine and to the L'Arche Federation.

WHY WE PRAY AT MEALTIME?

- Communal prayer reminds us of our connection to the Divine
- We are mindful of the gifts we have received
- It is a rooted practice that calls us to intentional spiritual practice
- It reminds us that when we pray we belong to a federation of communities with whom we share common practices.

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- There are Community traditions regarding meals, celebrations, reconciliation, worship, holidays, etc. which foster bonding between people." *Key Signs of a Healthy Community*
- In a L'Arche community we have a specific spirit and mission, expressed in our Identity and Mission statement, our values, our Charter and Faith Traditions. Our Identity and Mission can be reflected in particular evolving traditions, and in an atmosphere of joy, celebration and forgiveness, in our trust.

MEALTIME PRAYER

in God. We recognize and want to develop our spiritual life together (individually and in community), in all that we live and do. *What is a L'Arche Community?*

EXAMPLES OF MEALTIME PRAYERS

- Many communities state that mealtime is a natural time of intentional prayer. Most communities begin the meal with a simple prayer or song. This part of the prayer is short.
- The conclusion of the meal sometimes involves the lighting of a candle and passing the candle or other sacred object. Each member is invited to share something they are thankful for, something they would like to pray for, and/or something that needs healing. This unifies the table and provides a time to reflect on the day – to raise what community members are grateful for – what they are concerned about – what they would like to offer to God. This practice works for all regardless of individual spirituality as the way of reflecting can be phrased as a prayer, declared as a statement of thankfulness or concern, or held in silence.
- Many communities begin or complete the evening meal with a reading of sacred text or a song.

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- One person in the survey described the best prayer times are when they take the time to create a sacred space with a candle and some intentionality.
- One community frames this prayer as Rose/Thorn/Bud:
- What is the rose of the day – the blessing of the day
- What is the thorn of the day – something rough or something that hurt
- What is the bud – something to look forward to
- Each evening after eating, those gathered at the table share a time of prayer at the table. We have a large board that is on the wall near the table, and a basket with cut out hearts, people shapes, animal shapes, house shapes, etc. Each person writes or draws what they would like to pray about on the shape they choose. Each person names their intention and it is placed on the board. This sharing is concluded by a short common prayer. Adapted from *Celebrate our Unity*



Artwork by Joan MacDonald, L'Arche Cape Breton

COMMUNITY NIGHT/PRAYER NIGHT

Community night was mentioned by several communities in the survey as holding significant meaning. Several communities include a particular religious practice. It is important that religious practice be chosen carefully and be inclusive of the members gathered. Prayer night may be separate from community night, and is sometimes open to others outside of daily life. Some communities maintain regular prayer nights, rotating between open and closed to outside members.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS PRACTICE?

- It intentionally brings the whole community together regularly, (the average is monthly) often including friends, family, and visitors, and contains a spiritual element.
- It is well planned and encourages community participation.
- It can serve as a catalyst for celebrating seasonal traditions (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Solstice, etc.)

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- The Community has an obvious and active spiritual life. *Key Signs of a Healthy Community*
- We share community life through a wide network of mutual relationships, united in the same mission and spirit. *Appendix to What is a L'Arche Community*
- It's the [community's] role to help people discover each other more deeply, their beliefs, their beauty, and to help people discover that the things that unite are far deeper than the things that divide.

COMMUNITY NIGHT/PRAYER NIGHT

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY NIGHT:

- Weekly or Monthly prayer nights offer a technique, way, or insight into prayer that becomes an important routine for the community, (lead by different community members) flowing into spontaneous praise and prayers.
- Mime is often used for telling story (scripture, daily life, personal journey)
- Once a month, several communities invite outside groups to come for dinner and lead the prayer and song after the meal.
- Community nights may have different themes based on the season.

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- A recent community night focused on “Big L’Arche.” The evening began with a simple grace and meal. To begin the reflection, all were invited to greet each other silently. New members of the leadership team were blessed, and a video was shown of the Federation Assembly in Belfast. Still photos were then shown from the assembly, and the International Mandate was presented with gestures to help the community understand our common international mandate. An announcement was then made about the date/place of the regional gathering in the next year. To conclude, small tokens from the Federation Assembly were given to each person.

CELEBRATING OUR GIFTEDNESS

To begin, people meet in pairs to talk about their gifts. They write down the gifts they recognize within themselves, and after a time of sharing, bring the paper back to the circle (These could be cut in the shape of a gift).

- Introduction to service
- Opening Song: “Tis a Gift to be simple.” OR “ Listen, listen, listen to my heart’s song.”
- Reading from sacred text about giftedness (could be 1 Corinthians 12 or something from another tradition, or a L’Arche text.
- Announcing the gifts – each pair shares the gifts of each other – if it is a large group – the refrain from the song is sung every 3 – 4 pairs. If the group is smaller, the refrain is sung after each pair share. The paper “gifts are placed on a poster to be kept somewhere in the community.
- A prayer of thanksgiving is offered after all have shared

Final song marks the completion of the prayer

Adapted from Celebrate our Unity



L'Arche Chicago celebrates Christmas: Sarah Lineberry, Director of Professional Services and Core Member Noah Cichon

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS/SEASONS

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- The celebration/acknowledgement of holidays often are the traditions most honored in community life.
- Holidays are celebrated in a way that is inclusive and honors the people living in the homes.
- Planning and preparation is done well and involves as many community members as possible.

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- There are Community traditions regarding meals, celebrations, reconciliation, worship, holidays, etc. which foster bonding between people. *Key Signs of a Healthy Community*
- In a L'Arche community we have a specific spirit and mission, expressed in our Identity and Mission statement, our values, our Charter and faith traditions. Our Identity and Mission can be reflected in particular evolving traditions, and in an atmosphere of joy, celebration and forgiveness, in our trust in God. We recognize and want to develop our spiritual life together (individually and in community), in all that we live and do.

Appendix of What is a L'Arche Community

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS/SEASONS

EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS/SEASONS

- Most of the communities in the US are rooted in Christianity and have traditions centered on the seasons of Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter. These traditions are important and sacred. It is also important to incorporate traditions of members who may have another spiritual or religious identity. For example, one community celebrates the Seder Meal, or Jewish remembrance of The Passover and Hanakkah. The community is led by the Jewish Core Members.

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- Annual “great souls” liturgy in November for remembering loved ones who have passed away. When a person dies, a symbol is chosen that represents them and is placed in the garden, or in one of the homes. At community night, we share stories about all the people who have died over the years that were connected in the community. On the prayer table are the symbols that represent the people who have died during the current year. Each person is talked about, stories are shared, and the community blesses the symbols. Family members and friends of the people who died that year are specifically invited to this evening.
- A seasonal “Emmaus Walk,” where the community visits the various places of worship of community members.
- Memorial Day visiting of cemeteries to remember community members and loved ones who have died. One community marks death anniversaries with storytelling.
 - Community night near Martin Luther King Holiday (January 15)
- Prayer space is in the center of room containing a candle and photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr. The community listens to a sermon or speech by King. The evening continues with the singing of gospel music and giving thanks for the witness of King. The prayer focus is for an end to racism and prejudice.
- Gandhi Jayanti – (October 2nd)
- One community celebrates Gandhi’s birthday. Using East Indian décor a prayer table in the center of the room contains a candle and a picture of Gandhi. The community sings Indian bhajans. Someone tells the story of Gandhi’s life and his message. The prayer focus is for the L’Arche Communities in India.

FOOT-WASHING

Foot-washing is a deeply rooted L'Arche tradition because of the embodied nature of the humility and service that is integral to life in L'Arche. It is often celebrated on Holy Thursday, but is also incorporated in many of our retreat experiences. Rooted in Christian tradition, but inviting to all, the foot-washing experience is a beautiful reminder and celebration of our call to service in l'arche. It can be done in the following way:

The reading is shared of Jesus washing the disciples' feet (John 13:1-7). (This could also be acted out). An introduction can be made that though the story and the ritual is rooted in Christianity, it is a story that everyone in L'Arche can enter into because of the kind of service to one another that is essential to life together (oftentimes assistants literally wash the feet of core members, and every person is invited to offer others acts of service and humility daily).

One assistant experienced a footwashing in India, among Muslims, Hindus, and Christians, and everyone was invited into the story as a story of humility and one emblematic of the core of L'Arche values and spirituality. In fact, in India, the story of the footwashing was culturally more contextual because of the similarities to biblical cultural norms (walking barefoot or in sandals, the feet being dirty, the feet being considered a lowly place of the body that would not be touched by anyone of a higher social standing).

If the gathering is large, it is divided into groups of 4-6. One person begins by washing the person's feet next to them, and all go in a circle until everyone has been served and has served in the washing.

Incorporating quiet music in the background can assist in holding a sacred space. If there are issues with someone having their feet washed, it has been a practice that hands may be washed instead.

Some communities add a fragrant oil to the water (lavender is a popular choice).

The foot-washing is concluded by the singing of a song, a simple prayer, or a shared meal.



Community members from L'Arche Japan and L'Arche Kenya washing each other's feet at the International Assembly in Belfast. Photo by Elodie Perriot.



Celebrating L'Arche's 50th Anniversary at L'Arche Portland.

ANNIVERSARIES/BIRTHDAYS

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- The person being honored is reminded of their value.
- The person being honored is made to feel special.
- It is a time to celebrate, have fun, and be reminded of special moments in a person's life or time in community.
- An anniversary celebration highlights the person's years in L'Arche.
- The person's story is told and key moments are recalled.
- The gifts of the person and their growth and achievements in the past year are named.

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- Each community should celebrate their anniversaries according to its own history and tradition – like the moment God inspired the foundation.
- The place of each individual member is recognized, affirmed and celebrated.

Individual members participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them. *Key Signs of a Healthy Community*

- We celebrate the unique gifts of each person. *Identity Statement*

ANNIVERSARIES/BIRTHDAYS

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

ANNIVERSARIES

- A dinner of the person's choosing is prepared, they are given a card, and the prayer after the meal focuses on their gift to the home.
- Upon arrival in the community, each person is given a stole, and on their anniversary each year they receive a symbol representing their gift in the past year to add to their stole. (This could be a banner with their name on it.)
- Anniversaries are celebrated the first Thursday of each month, at the end of our monthly prayer meeting, with the person being honored sharing about significant moments of their year (while holding a candle). The person is then blessed by the community.
- Anniversaries in community are celebrated at Community Thanksgiving
- Both Core Members and Assistants are celebrated and recognized on or around their L'Arche Anniversary each year-the celebration is organized by the people of the home, or the team of which they are a part.
- The essential elements include: Choosing a time when most of the Assistants and Core Members can gather, the making of the person's favorite dessert (ideally made by someone in the home), the sharing of the person's coming to L'Arche story (companions or designated person to help Core Member prepare ahead of time to share), and written affirmations by Assistants and Core Members in the home,

POSSIBLE FORMAT:

- Table is set with a beautiful dessert and tea. Fresh flowers and a candle create a special tablesetting.
- Decorate the chair of the person being celebrated
- Once everyone is seated around the table, announcement is made of person being celebrated and the number of years that person has been in the community/L'Arche.
- Allow the person to share their L'Arche story
- Go around in a circle and verbally offer affirmations of the honored person
- End with a prayer and pass out dessert

BIRTHDAYS

- Both Core Members and Assistants are celebrated and recognized on or around their birthday each year.
- There is essential value in appreciating and celebrating each person
- Planning and looking head is important. Ideally, birthdays are mapped out for the year on a single sheet for easy reference, so that, celebrations can be planned and anticipated several weeks before they happen. Naming a person to be responsible for planning and personalizing the event is important.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- How will the person feel loved, cared for, and valued?
- Is there a theme?

ANNIVERSARIES/BIRTHDAYS

- How are the interests/preferences of the person considered?
 - Who will help Core members invite family?
 - Restaurant or home?
 - Menu?
 - What day works for getting all or almost all of the Assistants and Core Members to attend?
-
- Affirmations are a way of naming the value and gifts of the person being celebrated.
 - Cards and signs are essential-gifts are not.
 - Keeping in mind what people love can spark creativity when planning a birthday or anniversary. For example, one core member loves Starbucks, so the community decorated the dining room in Green and White, made a large paper copy of the Starbuck's logo for a "Pin the star on the Starbucks lady," rather than pin the tail on the Donkey. An assistant who was a former barista made fancy coffee drinks.

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

CORE MEMBERS:

- It is common for core members to want to go to a favorite restaurant to celebrate.. Generally, this is kept to a small celebration: Assistants and core members from the home and a family member or very close friend to be invited. A special dessert can be had at the restaurant or later at the house.
- A collection is taken from both the Assistants and other Core Members to purchase a gift.
- On Birthdays ending in a "0" the Core member may choose to have a community celebration. If the Core Member has the funds, he or she can choose a venue (restaurant or an outside space) or have it catered. If the Core Member has limited funds, a house based party is always good. The home/team helps coordinate the event- helping the Core Member send out invites, planning of the food, gifts and decorations.

ASSISTANTS

- Traditionally, Assistant celebrations are home based and consist of planning around the persons' favorite meal and dessert.
- Although, on birthdays ending in 0, the Assistant can choose to go out for a special celebration with the house.
- Birthday parties for core members are elaborate. Everyone in the community is usually invited, including core members from other houses and members of the core members' family.



A blessing at L'Arche Greater Washington, D.C. Photo by Brian Taylor

WELCOMING/GOING FORTH

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- There is an openness and attitude of welcome to all guests, whether or not they are expected. (House members stop what they are doing to welcome them).” *Key Traditions of L'Arche Communities*
- Each person is valued and appreciated.

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- The community welcomes people of different intellectual capacity, social origin, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, national origin, sexual orientation and marital status. *Key Signs of a Healthy Community*
- L'Arche seeks to create homes of welcome and belonging. Welcome, as one of the pillars of L'Arche spirituality, is an invitation to the “stranger.” It expresses the commitment to openness to and engagement with the other, whose humanity is seen as sacred and valuable. *Enhancing and Nurturing L'Arche Spirituality in the Communities of L'Arche USA and Beyond*

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

WELCOMING NEW ASSISTANTS/CORE MEMBERS

- If possible, a photo of the new person is displayed well before their arrival so that members can recognize the new person and will know their name.

WELCOMING/GOING FORTH

- A welcome sign is made.
- The bedroom is prepared with all necessities provided.
- Members of the household are told of the person's expected arrival as soon as possible and it is marked on the calendar. All are helped to anticipate welcoming the new person joyfully.
- The new person is invited to tell their story at a community gathering.
- New Assistants are invited to tell their story also at an Assistants meeting.
- In the fall, a celebratory community Bar-B-Q is held when several new assistants have arrived and each person is introduced. The names of new people are published in the community's weekly newsletter.

WELCOMING GUESTS

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- A core member and assistant prepare the bedroom for the guest.
- A specific Core Member answers the doorbell.
- A Core Member gives guests a tour of the home.
- Leave an extra place-setting at the table for a stranger or guest.
- Consideration is given to Core Members who find it stressful to have guests. • Special care is given to volunteers working in our community. If a volunteer is present during mealtime, they are invited to join the community for the meal. Volunteers are offered water and snacks during volunteer time.

SENDING FORTH

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- If an Assistant is leaving, Core Members close to the Assistant are told individually. • A celebration of the departing person is planned. Someone is named to be responsible for planning this celebration.
- The person who is leaving has an opportunity to speak about what they have received—the gifts and their own growth--while in the community.
- Attention is paid to the grieving that Core Members may experience as a result of departures—prior to, during the celebration, and afterward.
- For transitions, the community gathers to bless those moving on with prayers, affirmations, and a blessing song. The candles made by the community are often given at these celebrations, which is a reminder of the connection that remains.
- Persons who are leaving are invited to stay in touch and assured that they will be welcomed back for visits. Addresses are exchanged, and core members are helped to stay in touch after the person has left.



Ben Miller blesses Meredith Zubell with Ashes

RETREATS/FORMATIONS

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- L'Arche is only healthy if its members are growing personally and spiritually. Retreats and renewals are privileged times an individual is given to pay attention to their own well-being and personal and spiritual growth. We celebrate the desire that the person has to continue to grow, and the community affirms them in this desire.
- Formation is integral in community life. It provides meaningful time for assistants to gather together and reflect on how the mission and spirituality of L'Arche connect to their lives in a personal way.

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- When we live in community, and everyday life is busy and difficult, it is absolutely essential for us to have moments alone to pray and meet God in silence and quietness.
- We develop relationships with other L'Arche communities and participate in the life of the international Federation. *What is a L'Arche Community Appendix*

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE

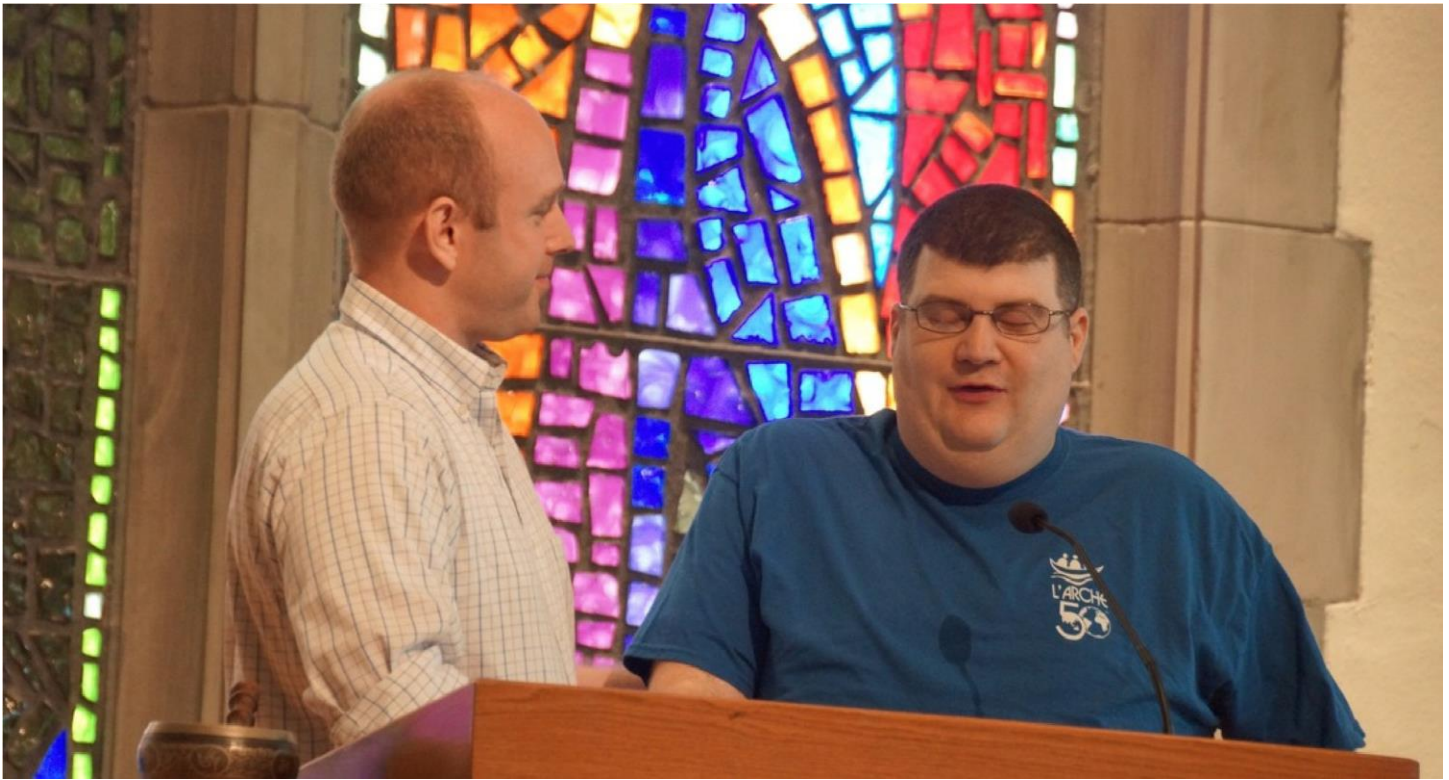
- Most communities have weekly or bi-weekly assistant formation which includes a time of prayer or meditation, and usually includes a time of check-in. Several communities develop a schedule of formation topics which range from practical issues such as

RETREATS/FORMATIONS

Core Member Care, to more spiritual/human development topics as contained in *The Pillars of L'Arche Spirituality*.

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- Marking [retreat/formation] times with a send-off celebration helps the person to transition into the experience of the retreat or renewal and to continue to feel the support of their community while they are away, and it helps those who will miss them to understand and deal with their absence.
- A Core Member and/or Assistant preparing for a retreat/formation shares their plan with others in the community, and invites members to pray for them while they are away.
- Persons leaving for a retreat or renewal are given a blessing at community prayer before they leave and are presented with a card and candle or other symbol to take with them on their retreat or renewal.
- The community prepares a special send-off meal for retreat/formation participants, and presents them with a small poster with a picture and message from each one in the house/community to take with them.
- Assistants that attend a formation are invited to lead the community assistant formation when they return in order to share what they learned during their time away.



L'Arche Atlanta's Tim Moore and John Hudson speaking at church.
Photo by Michael Thompson and courtesy of Columbia Theological Seminary.

CHURCH/WORSHIP ATTENDANCE/FAITH SHARING

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- Supporting and honoring the spirituality of each person is fundamental in L'Arche.
- Each member is encouraged to grow in their spiritual life
- Each member is given the opportunity to attend worship in the tradition they wish.

HOW DOES THIS PRACTICE CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- The Community encourages its members to deepen their own spiritual life and live it according to their particular faith or tradition. *Key Signs of a Healthy Community*

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE

- Some communities attend Faith and Light gatherings each month
- Most communities attend worship each week, most in the Christian tradition. This practice is life-giving to the majority. Many find extended community at their place of worship. Many core members have active roles within these faith communities.

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- Assistants wishing to worship outside of the community tradition are given the opportunity to do so by having at least once a month time away on their preferred day of worship. This requires a shuffling of schedules or the hiring of fill-in staff, and is necessary in order to support the spiritual growth of our assistants.

CHURCH/WORSHIP ATTENDANCE/FAITH SHARING

- Assistants gather once a week for 20-30 minutes of silence, or contemplative prayer. In one community, this happens after night-time routines; in another at the beginning of the team meeting.
- Core members are supported in their religious or spiritual practice. The community prioritizes these practices on days of worship.



L'Arche Chicago Community Members enjoying a beach vacation together.

MUTUALITY

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- Each person in L'Arche is respected.
- Each person is encouraged to grow in relationship with one another.
- There is a commitment to community life.

HOW DOES THIS TRADITION CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- “Whatever their gifts or their limitations, people are all bound together in a common humanity. Everyone is of unique and sacred value, and everyone has the same dignity and the same rights.” *Charter of the Communities of L'Arche II*
- “The Core Members call us into an openness and spirituality that disregards the cerebral differences in religion and, instead, focuses on one’s ability to love, forgive, and find delight in the everyday.” *Enhancing and Nurturing L'Arche Spirituality in the Communities of L'Arche USA and Beyond*

EXAMPLES FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- Daily check ins (sometimes with assistants, and sometimes with core members and assistants). The Community makes this a priority in order to make sure this happens every day. The pace is usually slower and more intentional. This is a sacred space and provides a spiritual centering.

CHURCH/WORSHIP ATTENDANCE/FAITH SHARING

- After Dinner prayer or reflection: This can be a time of intentions as described in the meal prayer section. It may be a focused reading – either scripture or other meaningful text. The purpose is to provide time for meaningful connection with God and with one another.
- Prayer after dinner is customary.
- Said well by an assistant: It is important to remember that when we serve and care for one another, we are serving and caring for the face of God, times of sharing life are deeply spiritual and a time of self-sacrifice and honoring of the other.
- One core member shared that they like to pray to themselves before going to bed. They added that even though they are alone during this time, they do not feel lonely.
- There is a recognition of the sacredness in our daily lives. Our core members invite us to be present, to be grateful, and to be honest.
- Each September members of the house pledge a gift they will share in service to the community. Each person lights a candle as they make their commitment. All celebrate by sharing a meal together. Close friends and volunteers in the home are invited to this commitment ritual.



Hazel Pulliam of L'Arche Greater Washington DC lighting a prayer candle.

DEATH/DYING

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL ABOUT THIS PRACTICE?

- The questions of the dying person should be answered honestly.
- Reminisce with the dying person about the important moments in the person's life.
- Good communication is maintained with the person's family as death approaches. The community works with the family of the dying person to plan the visitation and funeral.
- Leaders are attentive to and walk with community members through the grieving process. Help from professionals should be enlisted as needed.
- A vigil is kept with the dying person.
- At the wake and funeral, the person's life is honored by telling stories and naming their gifts.

HOW DOES THIS PRACTICE CONNECT TO THE CORE VALUES OF L'ARCHE?

- This [L'Arche] spirituality is supported by the "pillars" of our ongoing practices of welcome, simplicity, forgiveness, celebration, authentic relationships, suffering and joy, prayer, loss and grief, growth, and the commitment to be a light for the world. *Enhancing and Nurturing L'Arche Spirituality in the Communities of L'Arche USA and Beyond*
 - "...Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members." *Mission Statement*

DEATH/DYING

- “The lives of many people with an intellectual disability are steeped in the experience of multiple losses. For some this can be a source of lifelong distress. It is always important to support and minimize the pain of necessary losses.” *Celebrating Life in the Face of Death*

EXAMPLE FROM COMMUNITY LIFE

- During the dying process of a core member, each member of the home spent many hours sitting quietly with him and occasionally singing his favorite songs.
- At a core member’s wake, his co-workers told the story of how his smile helped create a positive work environment.
- When a community member died, the community made a collage of her life and displayed it at her funeral.
- A core member’s family stated: “Alan was in hospital and near the end. We were delighted that members of the Community brought some of Alan’s favorite possessions, his large Pluto, Thomas the Tank, his drawings and some photos. We felt part of the Community and therefore given extra comfort.” *Celebrating Life in the Face of*

Death

- “Brenda became ill suddenly late at night and was taken by ambulance to hospital, where she died. Next day the news was given individually to each member of the house and in the afternoon we all went together to the hospital to see her body and say goodbye to her.” *Celebrating Life in the Face of Death*



A L'Arche Seattle day of reflection. Photo by Bess Brownlee

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE REFLECTION

Spiritual practices within our communities are lived uniquely and reflect the lives of the members. In order for these practices to remain alive and meaningful, we are called to intentionality and awareness. For this reason, we strongly encourage these traditions be assessed on a regular basis.

Evaluation can be formal or informal and will be most meaningful when inclusive of all members. We also know that any practice lived authentically can provide enrichment in any tradition. Thus, the importance of intentional, rather than routine practice.

We recommend that assessment be done mid-year, or after a significant staffing/core member change, and members have had time to settle in.

SOME STARTING POINTS/QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Where are the sacred circles, places where the community connects with one another and God in a meaningful way, within our community?

- How do we pray or reflect together?
- How are moments of joy or pain marked?
- How do we engage new members in these practices?

How are new people invited to share their spirituality or sacred story?

Are our traditions life-giving to the whole?

- Can we make any adjustments which might help people feel more included without

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watering down what is meaningful to the majority?

How are we engaging members who do not have a spiritual or religious practice?

- What might enhance our current practices?
- Do our practices influence the development of human character?

How do we encourage dialogue and active participation with members who come from differing perspectives of religion and spirituality?