

KEY ELEMENTS OF A L'ARCHE USA COMMUNITY AND EVALUATION GUIDE

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Key Elements of a L'Arche Community

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KEY ELEMENTS OF A L'ARCHE USA COMMUNITY

I. Introduction

This L'Arche USA policy, "Key Elements of a L'Arche USA Community" is based on thirty-five years of experience in L'Arche USA and L'Arche Canada of living L'Arche and on the fundamental texts for L'Arche, which include the Charter of L'Arche, the Constitution of the International Federation of L'Arche Communities, and L'Arche North America's and the Federation's Identity & Mission Statement. L'Arche USA is indebted to L'Arche Canada for the prior drafts of this policy.

A L'Arche community grows and develops when we identify, articulate and hold each other accountable to the fundamental and continuing elements and gifts which define who we are and who we want to become. This gives us a dynamism which motivates and inspires 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 Regional and Zone Coordinators, member communities (boards, community leaders, community councils, and individual members), communities aspiring to join L'Arche, and Regional and Zone boards. This policy is also used 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. This policy is also used to evaluate whether a member community should lose its membership in L'Arche.

This policy is written in the following format. The headings come from the Charter and are followed by quotes from the Charter. Following the Charter quotes are "Principles" which identify in more detail the values which flow from the quotes. Following "Principles" are "Practices" which describe in more concrete terms the ways by which we will achieve our "Principles" and 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.

A. The Value of Core Persons (Persons with a Developmental Disability)

"The aim of L'Arche is to create Communities that welcome people with a mental handicap . . . , reveal the[ir] particular gifts and give them a valid place in society." Charter of the Communities of L'Arche I, 1 and 2

1. Principles

- a. Core persons have value, dignity, and integrity.
- b. The Community values the gifts of each core person.
- c. Core persons actively participate in all aspects in the life of a L'Arche Community.

- d. The Community wants to secure education, work, and therapeutic activities for its core persons that will be a source of dignity, growth and fulfillment.

2. Practices

- a. Core persons have gifts such as welcome, wonderment, spontaneity, and directness. The Community actively finds ways to reveal and affirm the gifts of core persons.
- b. Core persons have stable, on-going, valued relationships within the Community and outside of it.
- c. There are clear and ongoing means of communication for core persons to express their dreams, desires, needs, and choices.
- d. Each core person has a program for growth, which is reviewed annually. This includes growth in love, self-giving and wholeness, as well as independence, competence, and the ability to make choices.
- e. Core persons participate in decisions concerning them to the fullest extent possible.
- f. Each core person has meaningful work or daytime activity.
- g. Outside professionals work with the Community to support the growth of core persons.
- h. Core persons have opportunities to participate in and contribute to their local neighborhood.

B. Life Sharing

“Home life is at the heart of a L’Arche Community. 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.” Charter of the Communities of L’Arche III, 2.2

1. Principles

- a. Home life: Home life is vital to a L’Arche Community.

- b. Relationships: Relationships are based on the attitude of “living with”, which is different from “doing for.”
- c. Celebration: L’Arche celebrates life, L’Arche, the signs of hope in the world, and God, the source of all life. L’Arche also identifies and affirms the gifts of its members as a form of celebration.
- d. Trust: Recognizing our strengths and weaknesses, L’Arche builds trust through faithful and open relationships.

2. Practices

- a. Core persons and assistants have a place in their home and contribute to its creation.
- b. Priority is given to building relationships in an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual care.
- c. Good conditions are put in place to foster the long-term commitment of assistants living in the homes and working in the day programs. Such conditions include opportunities for growth, security, long term planning, and continued training and formation. To foster lifetime commitment, Communities are required to incorporate as well as adopt and implement L’Arche USA’s individual membership policy.
- d. There is an established recognizable rhythm of life in the home, work and Community.
- e. Core persons and assistants participate in the planning and creation of routines, activities, special events, and traditions of their home and of the Community.
- f. The Community commits itself to the extent possible, to accompany its confirmed members throughout their lives, if that is what those members want.

C. Mutuality

“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, 1

1. Principles

- a. All people are of equal and sacred value and bound together in a common humanity.
- b. Differences in people are respected and valued.
- c. Weakness and vulnerability in a person, once acknowledged, fosters unity with God.

2. Practices

- a. The community welcomes people of different intellectual capacity, social origin, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, national origin, sexual orientation and marital status.
- b. Friendships and mutual relationships are recognized and encouraged.
- c. Covenant relationships are encouraged, supported, announced and celebrated.
- d. There are Community traditions regarding meals, celebrations, reconciliation, worship, holidays, etc. which foster bonding between people.
- e. Members express what they are living in language that respects one another and builds community.
- f. The place of each individual member is recognized, affirmed and celebrated. Individual members participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.
- g. There are clear Community traditions and policies regarding appropriate behavior.
- h. Different types of accompaniment are available for all individual members.
- i. There is a commitment to helping individual members maintain their longterm relationships with their families and friends.

D. 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.” Charter of the Communities of L’Arche III, 1.1

A “sense of communion unites the various Communities throughout the world. Bound together by solidarity and mutual commitment, they form a worldwide family.” Charter of the Communities of L’Arche III, 2.3

“Each person according to his or her own vocation, is encouraged to grow in love, self-giving, and wholeness, as well as independence, competence, and the ability to make choices.” Charter of the Communities of L’Arche III, 3.1

1. Principles

- a. Welcoming and open, the Community’s spiritual practices are valued and respected.
- b. The unique spiritual journey of each person is respected and encouraged.
- c. Covenant relationships are essential to the spiritual journey of L’Arche.
- d. The Community recognizes that it has an ecumenical and inter-religious vocation and a mission to work for unity.
- e. Growth: L’Arche is committed to nourishing growth individually and corporately. By unmasking the illusions of our existence, we seek an authentic spiritual life. We need courage to reach out beyond the limitations of our fragile and finite existence toward ourselves, others, and our loving God in whom all life is anchored.

2. Practices

- a. The Community encourages its members to deepen their own spiritual life and live it according to their particular faith or tradition.
- b. The Community has an obvious and active spiritual life.
- c. The Community recognizes and lives out its ecumenical and interfaith vocation.

- d. The Community has spiritual accompaniment such as a pastoral minister(s).
- e. The Community supports and participates in formations, retreats, councils, general assemblies and other events sponsored by the various circles of L'Arche.
- f. There are links with local churches, synagogues, mosques, ashrams, temples and other religious congregations and their leaders.
- g. The Community helps its members discern whether to commit to and announce the covenant in L'Arche.
- h. There is a prayer life in each home.

E. Leadership, Management, Structures and Human Resources

“The Communities seek to be competent in all the tasks they are called to accomplish.” Charter of the Communities of L'Arche III, 4.2

1. Principles

- a. **Servant Leadership:** Structures and leadership positions are designed to serve the Community through shared leadership. The fruits of servant leadership are inclusive involvement, common vision, and effective communication.
- b. **Partnership:** There is trust, cooperation, and a partnership among individuals and groups involved in the community . The structures foster the dynamic of this cooperation; and embrace the interconnectedness of the spiritual, legal, financial, and communal elements.
- c. **Subsidiarity:** Decisions are made in the circle closest to the people affected and are only referred outward when they cannot be solved in that circle.
- d. **Participation:** decision-making processes are defined, published, and open. Wherever practical, they involve the people who implement and are affected by the decision.
- e. **Accountability:** Each person charged with a mandate is accountable for that mandate to specific people or entities, as well as to those who provide the funds.

- f. Dispute Resolution: When there are honest irresolvable differences or when those who carry authority misuse their power, there must be effective means of challenging them and safeguarding the dignity of individuals and the life of the community. For this and other conflicts, clear grievance and dispute resolution procedures should be in place to address the conflict and to allow healing to begin.
- g. Stewardship: Out of grateful hearts, L'Arche seeks to care responsibly for its people, resources, time, and environment.

2. Practices

- a. The Community has the leadership, management, structures and resources necessary for it to live the Charter and fulfill its Mission. These elements are clearly documented and available for all to see and understand.
- b. There is a functioning and competent board of directors.
- c. The board of directors and the Community ensures that the necessary resources are available so that core persons and assistants can effectively live their respective vocations.
- d. The Community employs a high standard of care for the core persons who have been welcomed into the Community. This includes meeting or exceeding governmental licensing and other legal requirements regarding building, health, safety, labor and welfare.
- e. The board of directors and the Community understands and supports the place and vocation of assistants, particularly long term and confirmed members.
- f. There is an effective Community leader who carries the vision and spirit of L'Arche, shares leadership, ensures that the Community is growing, and fosters the long-term commitment and vocation of assistants.
- g. The Community works in partnership with and subject to those individuals and bodies mandated to carry authority in the region, zone and International Federation of L'Arche.

- f. There is a Community constitution or other document that defines roles, the selection processes for roles, responsibilities, authority, decision-making and accountability within the Community.
- g. There is an annual review for assistants, administrative team members, and other employees.
- h. There is a written policy and procedures manual that includes policies on sexual harassment and abuse.
- i. There is an effective and competent Community council.
- j. There are regular and effective team meetings at all levels of the Community (i.e. home, work, administration, etc.).
- k. There are effective orientation, formation and training programs for assistants.
- l. To the fullest extent possible, all assistants and employees receive reasonable compensation and benefits, including healthcare and a retirement policy.
- m. The Community has generally accepted financial accounting and reporting systems in place and submits annual financial statements to the zone.
- n. The Community financially supports the various circles of L'Arche through the payment of annual dues.
- o. The community conducts criminal background checks on all applicants for employment. The community verifies prior employment, particularly if in L'Arche.
- p. The Community has adopted and understands the community, zone, and if applicable, regional dispute resolution policy.

F. Communities Integrated in Society

“L'Arche Communities are open and welcoming to the world around them. They form an integral part of life in their localities, and seek to foster relationships with neighbors and friends.” Charter of the Communities of L'Arche III, 4.1

“The Communities of L’Arche want to be in solidarity with the poor of the world, and with all those who take part in the struggle for justice.” Charter of the Communities of L’Arche IV

1. Principles

- a. The community is open and welcoming to the world around it, fostering relationships with neighbors and friends.
- b. Inculturation: The Community lives among different cultures. It embraces this diversity while engaging in an on-going process of reciprocal and critical interaction, adaptation and challenge between the Community and the culture.
- c. Solidarity: All people are woven in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. L’Arche recognizes this inter-related reality as it seeks solidarity with the poor and with all those who struggle for justice.
- d. Inclusivity: L’Arche welcomes people without regard to race, gender, marital status, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, or culture.

2. Practices

- a. The Community works closely with government authorities, organizations, professionals, families and guardians of people who have developmental disabilities, and with others who work in a spirit of justice and peace. . This includes other faith communities, Faith and Light, ARC, advocacy groups, etc.
- b. The Community is well integrated in its neighborhood, community, and local congregations.
- c. There are solidarity links with other L’Arche Communities, regions, and zones. These links can take various forms including friendships, shared retreats, formations, accompaniment teams, financial assistance and shared assistants and coordinators.

II. Implementing Tool

The following is meant to serve as an aid to deepen one's understanding of the key elements that constitute a L'Arche Community. The method outlined below is suggested as one way of engaging in the document at a personal and group level, by way of reflection and discussion.

Method:

1. Decide what groups in the community will focus on the document e.g. Community Council, LTA, Heads of Houses, Formation group, Assistants, Board members, Households, etc.
2. Given the length of the meeting decide what sections will be covered in a single meeting.
3. Distribute the Key Elements document a couple of weeks prior to reflecting on it.
4. At the meeting, the facilitator (Community leader, experienced LTA or board member) could give the background to the development of this document (see introduction to document). Take turns reading aloud the material to be covered. The facilitator could then ask if any clarification is needed.
5. If the group is large you might break into small groups each taking a different section. If the group is small you might break into 2 or 3's concentrating on only one section at a time. Examples of questions to be reflected on and shared in small groups could be:
 - a) What inspires / challenges me?
 - b) How is this vision calling me and the community to change?
 - c) Who can help me/us achieve this change?

The small groups could be invited to share the essence of their dialogue with the whole group.

EVALUATION GUIDE

I. Introduction

This evaluation guide, based on the practices identified in the "Key Elements" document, can assist a community to get a clear picture of how it is growing and developing as a L'Arche community. This will encourage a community to claim and affirm its gifts and strengths. It will also promote an action plan to initiate changes where they are needed. It would be a good tool for Regional Coordinators to use when they visit the community once a year.

How to Use This Evaluation Guide

Each practice in the "Key Elements" document describes an essential and desirable element of a L'Arche community. To use this evaluation guide:

A. Rate the community's performance from 1 to 5 on each practice according to the following categories:

1. Poor or unsatisfactory achievement: much improvement is needed and expected
2. Below average achievement: would benefit from more attention
3. Good achievement: demonstrates regular on-going attention
4. Very good achievement: demonstrates superior effort and accomplishment
5. Excellent or outstanding achievement: serves as a model to be shared with other Communities

B. At the end of each section, comment on how well, in general, the community is performing in this particular area of community life.

C. At the end of the Evaluation Guide write a maximum of five specific goals to improve the practices outlined in the guide based on the ratings and comments given.

To be most effective, the goals must be clearly written, realistic, measurable and shared.

D. At the end of the Evaluation Guide fill out the Plan of Action based on the goals you have identified.

This Evaluation Guide works best in a group process (e.g. as a home, community council or board) because it will generate energy, affirmation and more ownership for the changes needed.

II. Questionnaire

A. The Value of Core Persons

Practices: *Please fill in the rating (1 to 5) for each practice in the space provided before each practice.*

- _____ 1. The Community actively finds ways to reveal and affirm the gifts of core persons.
- _____ 2. Core members have stable, on-going, valued relationships within the community and outside of it.
- _____ 3. There are clear and ongoing means of communication for core members to express their dreams, desires, needs and choices.
- _____ 4. Each core member has a program of growth, which is reviewed annually.
- _____ 5. Core members participate in decisions concerning them to the fullest extent possible.
- _____ 6. Each core member has meaningful work or daytime activity.
- _____ 7. Outside professionals work with the community to support the growth of core members.
- _____ 8. Core members have opportunities to participate in and contribute to their local neighborhood and local community life.

Comments:

B. Life Sharing

Practices: *Please fill in the rating (1 to 5) for each practice in the space provided before each practice.*

- _____ 1. Core members and assistants have a place in their home and contribute to its creation.
- _____ 2. Priority is given to building relationships in an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual care.
- _____ 3. Good conditions are put in place to foster the long term commitment of assistants living in the homes and working in the day programs. Such conditions include opportunities for growth, security, long term planning, and continued training and formation.
- _____ 4. The Community is fully implementing L'Arche USA's individual membership policy.
- _____ 5. There is an established recognizable rhythm of life in the home, work and community. Core members and assistants participate in the planning and creation of routines, activities, special events, and traditions of their home and of the community.
- _____ 6. The Community commits itself to the extent possible, to accompany its confirmed members throughout their lives, if that is what those members want.

Comments:

C. Mutuality

Practices: Please fill in the rating (1 to 5) for each practice in the space provided before each practice.

- _____ 1. The Community welcomes people of different intellectual capacity, social origin, religion, gender, race, , ethnicity, age, disability, national origin, marital status, and sexual orientation.
- _____ 2. Friendships and mutual relationships are recognized and encouraged.
- _____ 3. Covenant relationships are encouraged, supported, announced and celebrated.
- _____ 4. There are Community traditions regarding meals, celebrations, reconciliation, worship, holidays, etc. which foster bonding between people.
- _____ 5. Individual members express what they are living in language that respects one another and builds community.
- _____ 6. The place of each individual member is recognized, affirmed and celebrated. Individual members participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.
- _____ 7. There are clear Community traditions and policies regarding appropriate behavior.
- _____ 8. Different types of accompaniment are in place for all individual members.
- _____ 9. There is a commitment to helping individual members maintain their long term relationships with their families and friends.

Comments:

D. Faith Community

Practices: Please fill in the rating (1 to 5) for each practice in the space provided before each practice.

- _____ 1. The Community encourages its members to deepen their own spiritual life and live it according to their particular faith or tradition.
- _____ 2. The community has an obvious and active spiritual life.
- _____ 3. The community recognizes and lives out its ecumenical and interfaith vocation.
- _____ 4. The community has spiritual accompaniment such as a pastoral minister(s).
- _____ 5. The Community supports and participates in formations, retreats, councils, general assemblies and other events sponsored by the various circles of L'Arche.
- _____ 6. There are links with local churches, synagogues, mosques, ashrams, temples and other religious congregations and their leaders.
- _____ 7. There is a prayer life in each home.

Comments:

E. Leadership, Management, Structures and Human Resources

Practices: *Please fill in the rating (1 to 5) for each practice in the space provided before each practice.*

- _____ 1. The community has the leadership, management, structures and resources necessary for it to live the Charter and fulfill its Mission. These elements are clearly documented and available for all to see and understand. _____
2. There is a functioning and competent board of directors.
- _____ 3. The board of directors and the Community ensures that the necessary resources are available so that core persons and assistants can effectively live their respective vocations.
- _____ 4. The Community employs a high standard of care for the core persons who have been welcomed into the Community. This includes meeting or exceeding governmental licensing and other legal requirements regarding building, health, safety, labor and welfare.
- _____ 5. The board of directors and the community understands and supports the place and vocation of assistants, particularly long term and confirmed members.
- _____ 6. There is an effective community leader who carries the vision and spirit of L'Arche, who ensures that the community is growing as a L'Arche community and who fosters the long term commitment and vocation of the assistants.
- _____ 7. The Community works in partnership with and subject to those individuals and bodies mandated to carry authority in the regions, zone, and International Federation of L'Arche Communities.
- _____ 8. There is a community constitution which defines roles, the selection process for roles, responsibilities, authority, decision making, and accountability within the Community.
- _____ 9. There is an annual review for assistants, administrative team members, and other employees.
- _____ 10. There is a written policy and procedures manual that includes policies on sexual harassment and abuse.
- _____ 11. There is an effective and competent community council.
- _____ 12. There are regular and effective team meetings at all levels of the community (i.e. home, work, administration, etc.)

- _____ 13. There are effective orientation, formation and training programs for assistants.
- _____ 14. To the fullest extent possible, all assistants and employees receive reasonable compensation and benefits.
- _____ 15. The Community has generally accepted financial accounting and reporting systems in place and submits annual financial statements to the zone.
- _____ 16. The Community financially supports the various circles of L'Arche through payment of annual dues.
- _____ 17. The Community conducts criminal background checks on all applicants for employment. The Community verifies prior employment, particularly if in L'Arche.
- _____ 18. The Community understands the community, zone, and if applicable, regional dispute resolution policy.

Comments:

F. Communities Integrated in Society

Practices: *Please fill in the rating (1 to 5) for each practice in the space provided before each practice.*

- _____ 1. The community works closely with government authorities, organizations, professionals, families and guardians of people who have developmental disabilities , and with others who work in a spirit of justice and peace. This includes other faith communities, Faith and Light, ARC, advocacy groups, etc.

- _____ 2. The community is well integrated in its neighborhood, community, and local congregations.

- _____ 3. There are solidarity links with other L'Arche communities, regions, and zones. These links can take various forms including friendships, shared retreats, formations, accompaniment teams, financial assistance, and shared assistants and coordinators.

Comments:

III. Goals

Based on all the ratings and all the comments, write down a maximum of five specific goals in order of priority and then fill out the Action Plan Chart.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

IV. Evaluation Tool

The following is meant to serve as an aid in using the evaluation guide of the Key Elements document. The evaluation guide should be used when:

- The community has reflected on the content document,
- The community leader and regional coordinator agree that the preconditions are present in the community for its use, i.e. the community is not in a time of major transition; there are no major conflicts existing in the community.

As a general principle this evaluation guide should be processed by a mature group within the community, i.e. Community council or LTA group and Board Members (particularly Section 5). It is important that those involved in the evaluation have a love for, and a long term commitment to the community.

Method:

1. Distribute the evaluation guide to the appropriate group a few weeks prior to a predetermined deadline.
2. Ask members of the group to score each practice and comment on each section individually.
3. Each member hands in their evaluation to the community leader by the agreed upon date.
4. The community leader compiles the evaluations and determines the average score for each practice.
5. A meeting is called of those who have filled out the evaluation guide. At that time the community leader hands back to each person their forms, and a copy of the averages that have been compiled, for comparison purposes.
6. With each section, people could talk in 2's to determine what the average rating is revealing to them (approximately 20 minutes).
7. A general discussion of the whole group could follow each section to determine strengths and weaknesses and to develop goals.
8. Once the evaluation guide is complete, small groups or the entire group could be asked to develop an action plan for the identified goals.
9. As this work would precede the Regional Coordinator's visit, the community leader would discuss the results with the Coordinator upon his/her arrival in the community.

10. The Coordinator would then meet with the designated group and review specific goals and a dialogue would take place around specific areas of strength and concern. This information would also be shared with the Board.
11. The action plans should serve as recommendations in areas of growth for the community between visits and would be followed up and reported on by the Coordinator at subsequent visits. This process will hopefully bring clarity and give direction to communities as they strive to live out the vision of L'Arche in conjunction with its Charter and Mission.

V. L'Arche Community Evaluation Guide - Action plan

Date:

Community:

Please list a maximum of five goals in order of priority and fill out the following chart:

Specific Strategies/Processes; Date of Goal; Objectives to be used; Person Responsible/Accountable to Carry Task to Completion.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Adopted at the L'Arche USA General Assembly, April 22, 2006