

Charter of the Communities of L'Arche

The aim of l'Arche is to create communities, which welcome people with a mental handicap. By this means, l'Arche seeks to respond to the distress of those who are too often rejected, and to give them a valid place in society. ...

L'Arche began in 1964 when Jean Vanier and Father Thomas Philippe, in response to a call from God, invited Raphaël Simi and Philippe Seux, two men with mental handicaps, to come and share their life in the spirit of the Gospel and the Beatitudes that Jesus preached.

From this first community, born in France and in the Roman Catholic tradition, many other communities have developed in various cultural and religious traditions.

These communities, called into being by God, are united by the same vision and the same spirit of welcome, of sharing and simplicity.

AIMS

1. The aim of l'Arche is to create communities, which welcome people with a mental handicap. By this means, l'Arche seeks to respond to the distress of those who are too often rejected, and to give them a valid place in society.
2. L'Arche seeks to reveal the particular gifts of people with a mental handicap who belong at the very heart of their communities and who call others to share their lives.
3. L'Arche knows that it cannot welcome everyone who has a mental handicap. It 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.
4. In a divided world, l'Arche wants to be a sign of hope. Its communities, founded on covenant relationships between people of differing intellectual capacity, social origin, religion and culture, seek to be signs of unity, faithfulness and reconciliation.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. 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. The fundamental rights of each person include the right to life, to care, to a home, to education and to work.
Also, since the deepest need of a human being is to love and to be loved, each person has a right to friendship, to communion and to a spiritual life.
2. If human beings are to develop their abilities and talents to the full, realizing all their potential as individuals, they need an environment that fosters personal growth. They need to form relationships with others within families and communities. They need to live in an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual affection. They need to be valued, accepted and supported in real and

warm relationships.

3. People with a mental handicap often possess qualities of welcome, wonderment, spontaneity, and directness. They are able to touch hearts and to call others to unity through their simplicity and vulnerability. In this way they are a living reminder to the wider world of the essential values of the heart without which knowledge, power and action lose their meaning and purpose.

4. Weakness and vulnerability in a person, far from being an obstacle to union with God, can foster it. It is often through weakness, recognized and accepted, that the liberating love of God is revealed.

5. In order to develop the inner freedom to which all people are called, and to grow in union with God, each person needs to have the opportunity of being rooted and nourished in a religious tradition.

THE COMMUNITIES

1. Communities of faith

- 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. Each community member is encouraged to discover and deepen his or her spiritual life and live it according to his or her particular faith and tradition. Those who have no religious affiliation are also welcomed and respected in their freedom of conscience.

- Communities are either of one faith or inter-religious. Those which are Christians are either of one church or inter-denominational. Each community maintains links with appropriate religious authorities and its members are integrated with local churches and other places of worship.

- Communities recognize that they have an ecumenical vocation and a mission to work for unity.

2. Called to unity

- Unity is founded on the covenant of love to which God calls all the community members. This implies welcome and respect for differences. Such unity presupposes that the person with a handicap is at the centre of community life.

- This unity is built up over time and through faithfulness. Communities commit themselves to accompany their members (once their membership is confirmed) throughout their lives, if this is what those members want.

- 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 their

suffering and forgiving each other, as in a family. They have a simple life-style, which gives priority to relationships.

- The same sense of communion unites the various communities throughout the world. Bound together by solidarity and mutual commitment, they form a world-wide family.

3. Called to growth

- L'Arche communities are places of hope. Each person, according to his or her own vocation, is encouraged to grow in love, self giving and wholeness, as well as in independence, competence and the ability to make choices.

- The communities wish to secure for their members' education, work and therapeutic activities, which will be a source of dignity, growth and fulfilment for them.

- The communities wish to provide their members with the means to develop their spiritual life and to deepen their union with and love of God and other people.

- All community members are invited to participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.

4. 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 neighbours and friends.

- The communities seek to be competent in all the tasks they are called to accomplish.

- The communities wish to enable people with a handicap to work, believing work to be an important means of integration.

- The communities seek to work closely with:

- * The families and guardians of people who are handicapped
- * Professionals
- * Government authorities
- * And with all those who work in a spirit of justice and peace for people who are handicapped.

CONCLUSION

L'Arche is deeply concerned by the distress of people who suffer injustice and rejection because they are handicapped. This concern should impel the communities of l'Arche to do all they can to defend the rights of people with a mental handicap, to support the creation of places of welcome for them and to call our society to become more just and respectful towards them.

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.