Key Traditions of L'Arche Communities
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## Aging

### What is Essential to this Tradition

- The aging person’s membership and belonging is assured.
- People who are aging are kept in the information and invitation loop.
- The need for a different rhythm of life is understood by the person who is aging and by the community.
- If the person is moving, the core members, assistants, and friends who are close to the person are kept informed and reassured of their continued contact with the person.

### Why We Celebrate the Aging Process

- Aging is a normal and healthy human process—not to be shunned or denied. Celebrating aging helps people to be less fearful of getting older.
- This celebration gives opportunity to remember together the person’s story and accomplishments—things they have done, special vacations, lives they have touched.
- The person’s opportunities and the nature of their contribution to others may be changing and it helps to acknowledge this and to name what they are still able to contribute.

**Examples:**

- A core member who is no longer able to walk has a special role in her home of watching at the window for the arrival of people coming home from work. She waves a greeting of welcome to them and signals their arrival to others in the house.
- A seniors’ program helps each member create a beautiful Life Story book. This book helps them integrate their life story, enables friends to review their story with them and is a source of great pleasure for the person. If they eventually move to an outside facility, it can help new caregivers get to know them.
- An aging assistant is provided with a living space close to the community where she is able to remain connected and participate in community life as she is able.
- A community that has a member in a nursing home has a roster of weekly visitors to help this member stay in touch with the community and vice versa. If possible, the person comes for regular visits to the community. If the person cannot attend a special community celebration, the community arranges for a celebratory videotaped visit of the person’s closest friends to the nursing home the day before. They take flowers and cards and the elderly person is helped to feel that their connection to their community is still very important. The videotape, hopefully with a few words or a wave
from the member in the nursing home, is played at the community celebration so that others know that this person still is a valued member of the community.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche</th>
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<tr>
<td>• “<em>We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need of one another.</em>” <em>(Identity/Mission Statement)</em></td>
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<td>• “<em>The place of each member is recognized, affirmed and celebrated.</em>” Key Elements Document 5.</td>
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<td>• “<em>Good conditions are put in place to foster and sustain the long term commitment of members.</em>” Key Elements Document 2.</td>
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### Anniversaries of Arrival

#### What is Essential to this Tradition

- A 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.
- The person feels valued and honoured.

#### Why We Celebrate Individual Anniversaries

- Individual anniversaries are celebrated to acknowledge the person’s commitment and belonging to the community and to honour the person’s presence and gifts.
- Anniversaries are celebrated because each person should be able to hear from others that they are valued and special.
- Anniversaries are celebrated because doing so builds community and the sense among ourselves that each one is important.

**Examples**

- At the community prayer all those celebrating their anniversary that month are presented with a chapter for their life story book highlighting the key moments and accomplishments and the contribution of the person during the past year.
- In one house 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.

#### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “*Significant events in the lives of members are celebrated.*” Key Elements Document 2.
- “…*They need to be valued, accepted and supported in real and warm relationships.*” L’Arche Charter
Change of Roles

What is Essential to this Tradition

- The person who completes a mandate or term in a role is thanked and the service they gave is honoured in a communal celebration.
- A person's new role or place in the community is announced.

Why We Celebrate when a Person Changes Roles

- L’Arche depends on the gratuity of its members. Celebrating a change of roles can be a time to express appreciation for the person and what they have given.
- Such celebrations allow others in the community to know about and understand the change in roles that is taking place.

Examples:
- When people are thanked for their work in a role they are invited to speak to the community council about some of the highpoints and challenges they have lived.
- Changes in roles are announced at community night and the people concerned are called up to be thanked. It is announced who the new person is who will take on the role or when it will be filled, so that people are not left anxious.
- In one community, a symbol—a small figurine-- is passed from one person to another when there is a change of roles. House leaders and community leaders receive the figure of a shepherd, the person called to recruitment a figure of a flute player, people called to prayer a figure praying, and so forth.

How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “All members have a place of belonging and contribute to creating community and its ongoing development.” Key Elements Document 2.
- “The L’Arche Canada Membership Document is implemented.” Key Elements Document 5
Community Meetings or Forums

What is Essential to this Tradition

- Community meetings gather the entire community.
- Ample notice of meetings is provided to everyone.
- Upcoming plans and proposals, events, information and issues relating to the community as a whole form the agenda.
- The meeting begins and ends with a prayer or song.

Why We Hold Community Meetings or Forums

- Community meetings build the body of a community. They create a sense of connection and facilitate communication among all those who are present.
- They help each person in the community to feel valued and are an important social time.
- Such meetings are a vehicle to carry Council Meeting agendas into the large group.
- They provide a place where individual members can contribute their insights to directions the community is taking.
- They strengthen unity and help each person to take responsibility for the community and its mission.

Examples:
- At a house meeting prior to the Community Meeting, Core Members are helped to understand the agenda and to prepare if they have something they wish to contribute. This also helps newer assistants learn community processes and express their views.
- When a community is opening a new house, community meetings help build consensus and excitement.
- There is a place on the agenda for homes to share current news.
- Tea and cookies help create a feeling of welcome and hospitality among those present.

How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “All members have a place of belonging and contribute to creating community and its ongoing development” Key Elements Document, 2.
- “Community members participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.” Key Elements Document, 5.
### Community Night

#### What is Essential to this Tradition

- Community night is a time to gather the entire community for socializing or celebrating.
- The night is well planned and scheduled, often around a theme.

#### Why We Celebrate Community Night

- Community night is often fun and relaxing and is looked forward to by all members.
- It allows members to connect personally and to strengthen bonds of friendship.
- It can be an opportunity to invite friends and neighbours.

Examples

- The musicians in the community may animate the evening. The music group includes Core Members.
- This night can be an occasion to send off or welcome members.
- It can be a place to recognize personal achievements.
- Community nights usually include a meal or refreshments.
- Themes of community nights are planned in accordance with events in the secular or religious calendar – Halloween, New Years, Solidarity, Valentine’s Day, Advent etc.

#### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “*There is an established recognizable rhythm of life in the home, work and community.*” Key Elements Document, 2.
- “*Each person has a right to friendship, to communion and to a spiritual life.*” L'Arche Charter
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<tr>
<td>• Community Prayer is a gathering of the community for worship.</td>
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<td>• It is participatory and includes singing and prayer.</td>
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<td>• It is ecumenical and sensitive to other faiths that may be represented.</td>
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| **Why We Pray Together as a Community** |
| • Community Prayer is a time to deepen our spiritual dimension and nourish members in their faith journey. |
| • In prayer we are all equal. |
| • People, no matter what their faith tradition, can relate to the core spirituality of L’Arche. |
| • It is an opportunity to welcome friends and other faith groups. |

**Examples**
- Core members often express themselves spontaneously at community prayer.
- When the prayer leader did not arrive a core member led the prayer time.
- A friend of the community is responsible to lead the singing.
- Some communities alternate invitations to local clergy to lead worship.
- It is planned and led by the Spiritual Life Committee of the community.

| **How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche** |
| • “The community has an obvious and active spiritual life. The community recognizes and lives out its ecumenical vocation” Key Elements, 4. |
| • “…Foster an environment where we can live out in our daily lives our identity as communities of faith.” Seven Calls Document |
| • “L’Arche communities, founded on covenant relationship...seek to be signs of unity, faithfulness and reconciliation.” L’Arche Charter |
### Community Anniversary

#### What is Essential to this Tradition

- The founding story of the community is retold.
- The founding members are given a place of honour.
- The celebration emphasizes gratitude and blessing.

#### Why We Celebrate the Community’s Anniversary

- It is a time to marvel at Providence which has guided and protected the community over the years.
- At this time we remember the generosity of people over the years and recall key moments in the community’s history.
- It is a time to help newer members of the community to learn and appreciate the community’s story.
- It is an opportunity to name again the founding charism of L’Arche and of the specific community.

Examples:
- A founding member delivers spaghetti sauce to each of the homes as a reminder of the first community meal.
- Founding members are invited to cut the Anniversary cake.
- Founding members (Core Members and Assistants) show pictures and are helped to tell early stories.
- A special dinner, dance or other event is planned.
- This can be a time special projects. One community enlarged its chapel as a 25th anniversary project; another held a public gala.
- Founding members who are no longer in the community are invited to a celebration.

#### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “L’Arche communities are communities of faith, rooted in prayer and trust in God” L’Arche Charter
- “…Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members, while being faithful to the core values of our founding story.” Seven Calls Document
## Dying Process and Funerals

### What is Essential to this Tradition

- 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 used as needed.
- A vigil is kept with the dying person.
- At the wake and funeral the person’s life is honoured by telling stories and naming their gifts.

### Why We Celebrate a Person’s Final Passage

- We accompany the dying person to reassure the person that they are not alone and are deeply loved.
- We celebrate to give thanks for the gift of the person in our lives and in the life of the community. We name how this person has made a difference in our hearts and in the world.

Example:
- When Mike was dying at home each member of the house spent many hours sitting quietly with him and occasionally singing his favourite songs.
- At John’s wake his co-workers told the story of how his smile helped create a positive work environment.
- When Pat died, the community made a collage of her life and displayed it at her funeral.

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “The life of people with intellectual disabilities has value, dignity and integrity.” *Key Elements Document 1.*
- “Significant events in the lives of members are celebrated. Story telling is one of the main ways we communicate meaning, values, history etc.” *Key Elements Document 2.*
- “…Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members.” Mission Statement
Membership

What is Essential to this Tradition

- The membership celebration follows the guidelines of the L’Arche Canada Membership Document
- The mutual commitment of a person’s phase of belonging in the local L’Arche community is central to the celebration.
- The nature of membership is made understandable to all members through artwork and skits or other creative means.

Why We Celebrate Membership

- We celebrate membership to clarify and respect the mutual commitment of the community and the member and to highlight the person's growth in the community.
- Membership celebrations help others to understand the various ways in which people can be members of L’Arche.

Examples
- Members are celebrated with a special meal and prayer time.
- Members receive a document that names their membership.
- Changes in membership are recognized at a community gathering.

How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “Every member is engaged in a Membership Process.” Key Elements Document, 2.
- “The L’Arche Canada Membership Document is implemented” Key Elements Document 5.
- “Mutually transformative relationships are encouraged, supported, announced and celebrated.” Key Elements Document, 3.
## Retirement

### What is Essential to this Tradition

- A retirement celebration highlights the passage from a person’s working life to retirement. It recognizes a person’s change of role and helps community members become aware of the person’s new place in the community.
- This celebration gives thanks and celebrates all that the person has accomplished during their working life.
- The person retiring has an opportunity to speak about their working years and their new directions and hopes for their retirement.

### Why We Celebrate when a Person Retires

- People’s work is valuable and they deserve to be thanked for it.
- Such celebrations honor the passage to retirement and strengthen communal ties.
- By welcoming people into retirement we continue to value them for who they are.

Examples:
- When John was asked to leave the workshop because he could no longer do the work, he interpreted this as retirement, walked around the workshop, shook everyone’s hand and was full of joy that he was finished that phase of his working life. His co-workers congratulated him.
- When David retired from the factory where he worked, his fellow workers created an annual award in his name for the worker who most helped to create a sense of community on the factory floor.
- In one community when assistants retire they are designated “elders” and are invited to continue to contribute their wisdom as they are able.

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “L’Arche fosters and supports relationships of mutuality in which people give and receive love.” L’Arche Charter
- “We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need of one another.” Identity/Mission Statement
- The Board of Directors and the community understands and supports the place and vocation of assistants, particularly intentional and confirmed members. Key Elements Document 5.
Send Off to Retreats and Renewals

What is Essential to this Tradition

- The community’s weekly newsletter announces names of people who will be going on retreats and renewals.
- At the community night or community prayer closest to their departure the persons who are going to attend a retreat or renewal are invited to tell the group where they are going and are then given a blessing.

Why We Celebrate People Going on Retreat or Renewal

- 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 affirm them in this desire.
- Marking these 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.

Examples:
- A Core Member or Assistant preparing for a renewal shares his or her preparations with others in the house at the weekly house meeting and asks for prayers.
- Persons leaving for a retreat or renewal are called up for a blessing at community prayer before they leave and are given a card and candle or other symbol to take with them on their retreat or renewal.
- The person’s house has a special send-off meal for them and gives them a small poster with a picture and message from each one in the house to take with them.

How does this Tradition Connect to the CoreValues of L’Arche

- “The unique spiritual journey of each person is respected and encouraged.” Key Elements Document 4.
- “Significant events in the lives of members are celebrated.” Key Elements Document 4.
Birthdays

What is Essential to this Tradition

- The person who has a birthday is honoured and made to feel special.
- The person hears their gifts named.
- The person’s friends and family are invited.
- The meal and celebration are well planned and prepared with care.
- A gift that would be valued by the person is chosen.

Why We Celebrate Birthdays

- The birthday celebration is a time to honour the unique presence and gift of the person’s life. Everyone needs to feel special.
- Birthdays can give an opportunity to remind the person of special moments in their life, to share memories and stories, and to express appreciation for the person.
- Birthdays are a time to celebrate life and to have fun.

Examples

- One Core Member likes to go out to the pub on his birthday. After a house party he and his closest friends head off for a beer.
- In one home, the birthday person’s favourite country and western songs are sung around the table.
- One house member likes to be served a special breakfast in bed on her birthday.
- Another person likes to invite former assistants and his long-time friends to his birthday.
- One Core Member needs to be listened to as she remembers family members who have died and who used to help her celebrate the special events of her life.
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<td>• “Human beings…need to be valued, accepted, and supported in real and warm relationships.” L’Arche Charter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “We celebrate the unique value of every person.”” Identity Statement</td>
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### Departures

**What is Essential to this Tradition**

- Members know as early as possible when someone is leaving the community.
- If an Assistant is leaving, Core Members close to the Assistant are told individually and reassured that they are not the reason for the Assistant’s departure.
- 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 after it.

### Why We Celebrate when People Leave Community

- The person who is leaving deserves to be thanked and to feel appreciated.
- The person who leaves takes L’Arche with them into the rest of their lives.
- The celebration helps Core Members and Assistants who are staying to say good-bye, to recognize the person who is leaving, mark the change that will happen in their lives if they were close to the person, and to grieve and come to terms with the change they will be experiencing.

**Examples**

- When people are leaving they receive a blessing at community prayer from those who have been closest to them.
- Persons who are leaving are invited to stay in touch and assured that they would be welcomed back for visits. Addresses are exchanged, and core members are helped to stay in touch after the person has left.

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “*Mutually transformative relationships discovered by sharing life together are at the heart of L’Arche*”. Key Elements Document 2.
- “*Members are cared for pastorally as they change and grow, and in times of grief and loss*”. Key Elements Document 4.
# House Meetings

## What is Essential to this Tradition

- House meetings are held at a regular time and have a familiar format.
- All members of the household are present. Every person is invited to participate and helped to share.
- News, issues, feedback, concerns are shared and plans are made for house events and house participation in wider events.

## Why We Hold House meetings

- The house meeting is a time of intimacy and connection between house members.
- It is an empowering time that almost all core members look forward to. Each person’s voice is valued in making decisions and resolving issues.
- At house meetings, plans can be made for the week and for upcoming celebrations and events.
- This meeting helps each person to take ownership and feel responsible for their home. Also, issues of conflict, such as typically occur around chores, television and care of the house, can be discussed and resolved.
- It can be an important time to welcome new Assistants or Core Members.

Examples:
- At one L’Arche home, two house members are responsible to invite a person to light the candle that marks the beginning of the meeting and to lead a prayer at the end.
- Tea and cookies are served at the beginning of the meeting. An Assistant and Core Member take responsibility for the refreshments.
- The House Leader leads the meeting with a core member. They open the meeting by asking for agenda items.

## How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “…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.” L’Arche Charter
- “People with intellectual disabilities and assistants participate in the routines, activities, and traditions of their home and of the community.” Key Elements 2
- “People with intellectual disabilities are empowered to take their rightful place in our communities and in our societies. Seven Calls document.”
Meals: Grace, Table Time, Prayer

What is Essential to this Tradition

- The table is attractively set.
- Attention is given to a seating plan so that Core Members who need support at the table have an Assistant beside them.
- After all are seated at the table, the meal begins with someone giving thanks for the food, or the group singing a grace, often with the household members holding hands.
- Core members and Assistants, in teams of two, prepare the meal together.
- The meal is appealing and is food that people like.
- Everyone at the table is enabled to help in the passing of dishes, salt and pepper.
- The table conversation includes everyone and each person is given an opportunity to share about their day.
- After the meal, there is a time of prayer, usually at the table--a candle may be lit, there may be a simple reading or a song, and there is silence and time for those who wish to pray aloud. Each person is respected as to whether or not they want to pray and those who need help to voice their prayers are assisted.
- Everyone helps in some way with clean-up and dishes if not with cooking.

Why the Evening Meal Time is Central to L’Arche

- Meals shared together are at the heart of L’Arche spirituality.
- Food is a gift and to be appreciated.
- Everyone can participate in the meal and in giving thanks. It is a time when we sense our equality as human beings.
- In every culture the sharing of a meal is a symbol of solidarity and peace.

Examples:
- At the weekly house meeting the menu and teams of cooks (always a Core Member and an Assistant) are established for the week and written on a calendar for all to check. Each core member has 2 or 3 favourite recipes to choose from and a personal cookbook with pictures and symbols.
- The core member who helps cook also says grace, and the cooking team is excused from doing the dishes.
- A small team is responsible each week to set the table attractively with flowers or a centerpiece.
- A welcoming breakfast table is set before people go to bed.
- A house member who takes his nourishment from a feeding tube still joins his house at the dinner table, is a part of the conversation, and is invited to taste special foods or drinks with a sponge stick.
- Each person has a regular clean-up task. This can be very simple such as wiping the place mats with a buddy, or more complex, such as loading the dishwasher.
- A meal can be an especially good time to welcome guests

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “There are clear community traditions regarding meals, celebrations, reconciliation, worship, holidays, etc. which foster bonding between people” Key Elements Document 2.
- “Home life is at the heart of a L’Arche community.” L’Arche Charter
- “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.” L’Arche Charter
## Welcome of Guests

### What is Essential to this Tradition

- Everyone in the house is aware that guests are coming before they arrive.
- 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)
- Guests are introduced to all members of the household.
- The bedroom is clean, fresh linen provided, and a welcome card made.
- The seating is planned for dinner guests.

### Why We Welcome Guests

- Hospitality is a hallmark of L'Arche.
- Core members have a wonderful gift of welcome.
- When guests come to visit we have an opportunity to introduce them to L'Arche and to build friendships.

Examples:

- A core member and assistant prepare the bedroom for the guest.
- A specific Core Member answers the doorbell and hangs up the guest’s coat.
- A Core Member gives guests a tour of the home.
- One community leaves an extra place at the table for a stranger who may arrive.
- Consideration is given to Core Members who find it stressful to have guests. Guests are welcomed only on one evening of the week. Such an individual may have an invitation out on evenings when guests are coming or have the options to dine in the T.V. room.

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “People with intellectual disabilities actively participate in all aspects in the life of a L’Arche community.” Key Elements Document, 1.
- “People with an intellectual disability 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.” L’Arche Charter
## Welcome of New Assistants and Core Members

### What is Essential to this Tradition

- 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.
- 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 calendar. All are helped to anticipate welcoming the new person joyfully.

### Why We Celebrate the Arrival of New People in L’Arche

- Welcome is an essential part of L’Arche. Good preparation helps everyone to welcome new people well.
- A sense of excitement about the person coming and a celebration when they arrive helps everyone make the transition and open their hearts to a new relationship.

Examples:

- Before the new person arrives a mail pouch pocket is prepared with their name on it and a serviette holder designated for them.
- The new person is invited to tell their story at a house meeting.
- 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.

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- *L’Arche seeks to reveal the particular gifts of people with an intellectual disability who belong at the very heart of their communities and who call others to share their lives.* — *L’Arche Charter*
- *“All members have a place of belonging and contribute to creating community and its ongoing development.”* — Key Elements Document 2.
Advent

**What is Essential in this Tradition**

Advent is a four week period set aside in the Christian tradition to prepare for the welcome of the Christ Child at Christmas. Before the first Sunday of Advent (usually near the end of November) each house in the community receives an advent wreath and candles. On the first Sunday one candle is lit, and on subsequent Sundays an additional candle is lit. With the lighting of the candle there is a short Advent reading.

**Why We Celebrate Advent**

- Marking Advent is a way of keeping a focus on the spiritual preparation for Christmas and the meaning of the nativity in the midst of the strong consumer orientation at this time of year.
- Celebrating Advent helps people to understand and enter into the joy of Christmas more fully.
- In L’Arche communities where some people go to their families at Christmas, celebrating Advent allows the community to anticipate the event of Christmas together before dispersing.

Examples:

- The Spiritual Life Committee plans weekly liturgies and provides houses with reading and reflection material and suggestions for a prayer focus.
- Each week during Advent, the Day Program prepares a banner illustrating the gospel story for that week. At a weekly community night the banner is displayed and the gospel story of the week in mimed. During Advent, some L’Arche houses have a longer prayer at their house meeting, including the lighting of the advent wreath and a reading.
- Some communities prepare a special prayer booklet to be used for the Advent season. It has stories by core members and assistants, outlines of figures of the advent season story that can be cut out (Zachariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Joseph, Mary), and a poster that can be removed and placed on the wall. The poster has a backdrop of the road to Bethlehem. Each evening after dinner the prayers of the house members are written on the figures and the figures are placed on the poster.
### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

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<tr>
<td><strong>• Members are supported in their own faith tradition</strong></td>
<td>L’Arche Charter</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>• The community has an obvious and active spiritual life</strong></td>
<td>Key Elements 4.</td>
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Christmas

What is Essential to this Tradition

- L'Arche Christmas celebrations seek to emphasize the spiritual aspects as well as enjoying the secular elements.
- The story of Jesus’ birth is recounted.
- Members are supported to attend church services if this is part of their tradition.
- Everyone participates in a gift exchange.
- A special meal is prepared.

Why We Celebrate Christmas

- In our community life, Christmas can be a wonderful time to remind ourselves of the story of God’s self-gift to us and God’s solidarity with our vulnerability in the birth of Jesus.
- For those who stay home in their L’Arche community, it is especially important to have a good Christmas because they may experience sadness at not being with family.
- Carols and Christmas music, open houses, decorations and special foods, which are often part of Christmas celebrations, can help bring community members and family and friends together.

Examples:
- Well before Christmas, the names of all community members are placed in a hat and each person draws out the name of someone for whom they purchase a Christmas gift for a specified amount of money.
- One house prepares a skit to present at the Community Night before Christmas.
- At a community supper on Christmas Day a mime of the story of Jesus’ birth is acted out at different points during the meal.
- Before Christmas, each Core Member in the house is helped to make a tree ornament and together the house members decorate the tree.
- The House Leader purchases dollar store favours to put at each person’s place as a surprise before the Christmas meal is served.
**How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche**

- *There are clear community traditions regarding celebrations.* Key Elements 2
- *“Community has an obvious and active spiritual life.”* Key Elements 4.
- *“Creative expressions by people with intellectual disabilities are honoured.”* Key Elements 1.
Lent

What is Essential to this Tradition

- Lent is a period of forty days culminating with the celebration of Easter. Lent in L’Arche communities is a time to emphasize our solidarity with those who are needy.
- During Lent, scripture stories of the public life of Jesus are read and prayed with.
- Times are set during Holy Week to mark Holy Thursday and Good Friday.
- A community service of forgiveness and reconciliation is held.

Why We Celebrate Lent

- Lent is a time to reflect on our life and relationship with God and others.
- For members of the Christian faith, it is a time to give thanks for the gift of Jesus.

Examples

- During this time each household reflects on themes related to the Lenten readings and creates artwork that helps deepen their journey towards Easter.
- The Spiritual Life Committee provides weekly themes for prayer times.
- Some communities have a weekly meal of rice and water and give the money that was saved to those in need.
- A foot washing service is celebrated on Holy Thursday.

- One community creates a Good Friday walk where the Stations of the Cross are marked by prayer for the work of various social justice groups in their area.
- Communities wishing to celebrate a Seder in the tradition of the Jewish Passover meal should consult the Spirituality Commission document for guidelines.

How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “L’Arche communities are communities of faith, rooted in prayer and trust in God.” L’Arche Charter
- “The unique spiritual journey of each person is respected and encouraged.” Key Elements Document 4.
### Easter

#### What is Essential to this Tradition

- The Easter story is recounted with emphasis on the new life that we are invited into.
- The community or individual homes prepare and enjoy a festive meal together.
- Members of the household take part in celebrations at their place of regular worship.

#### Why We Celebrate Easter

- Easter is the most significant celebration in the Christian calendar.
- It is a time of spiritual renewal.
- It reminds us that celebration and forgiveness are at the heart of our community life.

**Examples**
- Some communities hold an Easter vigil service followed by refreshments.
- The egg is seen as a symbol of new life and eggs are coloured or chocolate eggs are shared.
- The Easter story is mimed during a time of prayer before the meal.

#### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “Members are active in their own faith traditions and are encouraged to deepen their own spiritual life.” Key Elements Document. 4.
- “Integrate and harmonize our faith, community and professional lives.” Seven calls Document
**L’Arche Family Day**

### What is Essential to this Tradition

- On the first weekend in October we celebrate our belonging to a worldwide federation of communities and the gift of L’Arche to all of us.
- L’Arche communities connect with one another and learn about one another.

### Why We Celebrate L’Arche Family Day

- L’Arche Family Day strengthens the bonds among communities.
- It sensitizes L’Arche members to the needs of those communities that are facing particular challenges.

**Examples**

- On Family Day the story of L’Arche is shared through talks, interviews and public events.
- In one region Family Day is marked by an exchange of visits among communities.
- One community makes and sells soup and biscuits for Sunday lunch for all the churches in its town and gives the profit to Solidarity. Another community makes and sells desserts from different countries.

### How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “The same sense of communion unites the various communities throughout the world. Bound together by solidarity and mutual commitment, they form a world-wide community.” L’Arche Charter
- “L’Arche communities are open and welcoming to the world around. They form an integral part of life in their localities.” Key Elements Document, 6.
Solidarity

What is Essential to this Tradition

Solidarity has two aspects:
• Each community has a Solidarity Committee which creates opportunities to educate community members about the relationship it shares with a community in another region or zone through twinning. The committee also develops ways of building this relationship and holds fundraising events for Solidarity.
• Locally and regionally, communities seek to support one another and build relationships among themselves.

Why We Celebrate our Solidarity

• L’Arche communities do not exist in isolation but are part of a region, a zone, and an international federation. Celebrating Solidarity educates community members about our wider connections and responsibilities to one another as sister communities.
• Solidarity celebrations are times of gratitude for one another and the differences of culture and food and other traditions that can be shared and enjoyed.
• Wealthier societies have a responsibility toward those who are less well off.
• Communities in developing countries often have a stronger sense of community. There is much that we, in our more affluent society, can learn from them.

Examples:
• In the one region, communities raised funds to send small groups of core members and assistants to the communities in the South with which they are twinned. All community members were invited to be part of this effort through learning about the communities in the South, making cards, contributing at a fundraising dance, and sending off and welcoming the “ambassadors.”
• Communities send Assistants to other communities within a region or zone to have a different experience or to give support when one of the communities is short of Assistants.
• There is an annual exchange of visits of small groups of core members and assistants among communities in a region.
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<td>• “We are people with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life in communities belonging to an International Federation.” Identity Statement</td>
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<td>• “There is solidarity and links with other L’Arche communities.” Key Elements</td>
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United Nations International Day for Disabled Persons (December 3rd)

What is Essential to this Tradition

- L’Arche joins in this United Nations Day which draws attention to the plight of disabled persons both in our own locale and in regions where there is great poverty or war and human displacement.
- We recognize our solidarity with other groups that work for justice for people who are disabled.
- L’Arche focuses on the contributions that people who have disabilities can and do make to the quality of our society.

Why We Celebrate This Day

- This Day is an opportunity for us to collaborate with other groups in our locale and to strengthen bonds with them.
- It is an opportunity for all in the community to become more informed about the plight of people with disabilities in many situations other than L’Arche.
- It can be a time to celebrate the contributions of people with disabilities in our own community.

Examples:
- A L’Arche community invites a local Community Living Association group to create a joint public event at a nearby mall.
- Media people are invited to visit and prepare a story about the contributions of people who have disabilities.
- A community invites a speaker on the theme of challenges that people with disabilities face in our society or in a poor country. The gathering ends with prayer and a plan to approach their Member of Parliament about these needs.
- A community gives a presentation on the theme of the Day to a local Service Club.

How does this Tradition Connect to the Core Values of L’Arche

- “L’Arche wants to be in solidarity with all who work for justice.” L’Arche Charter
- L’Arche communities work to ensure the rightful place and respect for people with intellectual disabilities within society. Key Elements,6
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| Why We Celebrate |

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