



International Leaders Report

JUNE 2023



TOGETHER IN THE WORLD

FEDERATION ASSEMBLY | JUNE 20TH - 24TH 2023



Mandate Report of the International Leaders to the Federation Assembly June 2023

Six years ago, as an International Federation, we approved a mandate that called us to **go deeper**, **go out** and **go within**.

Going Deeper

The Charter

A priority of this mandate was to 'revise our Charter.'
It was quickly realized that we were not seeking to edit a document but to broadly engage members in creating a Charter drawn from our lived experience today.

This new Charter, put forth to the Federation Assembly for approval, has been co-created by people with and without disabilities. It was distilled from thousands of beads – each a unique expression of the life of our communities and members – joys, sorrows, challenges and hopes. Over 90% of our communities and settings participated in the process at some point.

We anticipate that we will not all agree with every expression or word, but we hope there will be a collective agreement to claim this Charter as a tool to continue to make meaning and to provide guidance as we navigate the years ahead.

Perhaps we can say the process with the Charter is not ended but entering critical phase in which it will be used personally, locally, and internationally as a means of reflection, support, challenge, dialogue, and celebration. Already, some of our International Formation programs have experimented with the draft Charter as a basis for offering our members opportunities to discover and integrate the fundamental values of L'Arche in a cross-cultural context.



Community and Spirituality

Our mandate called us to go deeper into the dimensions of spiritual and community life.

New models and expressions of mission continue to emerge. There has been a shift in language from 'living together' to 'sharing life.' We recognize that in many communities there is a need to open to new ways of living our mission - because of financial challenges, fewer assistants, or to respond to one's local context more authentically. A pilot project through our Evaluation and Learning work has begun to draw attention to the need to gather data on the impact of emerging models and share these learnings to help L'Arche move into the future.

Throughout this mandate, in the Charter process, in response to the revelations concerning our founder and amid the increasing diversity of our members, there has been conversations and exploration of the diverse experiences and language associated with the spirituality in L'Arche today. This reflection will need ongoing attention.



Other Things That Took Us Deeper

Our mandate has been marked by largely unexpected events both inside and outside L'Arche.

Never in our history has there be such a difference in context between two meetings of the Federation Assembly, the one in 2017 in Belfast, Northern Ireland and the one today in 2023, our first virtual assembly.

The death of Jean Vanier in May 2019, the public conclusions in February 2020 of an inquiry into allegations regarding Vanier, and in January of this year the communication of the report of the Study Commission upset the representation that we had of our founder, of our foundation and to a certain extent the representation that we have of ourselves as an organization. Outside L'Arche, a pandemic had unprecedented consequences around the world and naturally on our communities.

This has all taken place against a background of increasing environmental concerns and a deteriorating geopolitical situation, of which the war in Ukraine is the most acute expression.



Creating Space

An essential theme for us throughout this mandate has been to create space to listen.

A key place of listening as International Leaders has been the two councils comprised of members with and without disabilities, the International Reflection Council (a smaller council) and the Federation Council (larger and more representative of the whole Federation). Both councils provided us with insights into what is being experienced in our communities as we reflected together on the draft Charter, on the impact of Covid and the inquiry, on what is giving life today and what is not and on the developments during this mandate. The practice of 'open calls' provided opportunities for questions to be raised and to listen to each other's realities across the Federation.



Going Out

Ironically, the most visible manifestations of the International Federation's relationship with society will have been the release of the results of the inquiry in 2019, followed earlier this year by the publication of the Study Commission's report.

We cannot claim that the inquiry, like the work of the Study Commission, was undertaken without difficulty on our part, without mistakes or even without resistance, but we have also come to understand that these steps, difficult and painful as they were, paid tribute to L'Arche, for having made the choice to understand its past and to report on it publicly in the very name of the values that underpin our communities.



The 2017 mandate invited us to go outward, and it was therefore an invitation to "go out" and "get out of your house" because our mission is to work together for a more human society and to be together with the world around us, our friends, our families, our neighbors. But for 3 years, the instruction during the pandemic was "don't go out", "stay at home" and this naturally limited the possibilities of interaction.

Some of our community and outreach practices were lost and have only recently been recovered and renewed. In the face of the challenges during the pandemic, some of our communities were able to reach out to individuals with disabilities and their families to provide essential resources and connection.

During this mandate there have been exciting examples of forging new opportunities for exchange of experience with others. The networking and formation opportunities with partner organizations that has developed in Asia reflects a vision of sharing our mission that brings life to our communities in Japan and the Philippines and with like-minded organizations in Taiwan, China, and Singapore. The Relation-Based Care initiative which has recently completed its 3rd cohort in East Africa and 1st cohort in West Africa is a model of integrating the values of L'Arche with professional support for persons with disabilities in dialogue with local culture and partners.

In response to the war in Ukraine, L'Arche communities in Europe, especially in Poland and Lithuania, have opened their doors to refugees with financial support provided from communities across the world.

And, while there have been some valued and creative responses to hopes and needs, we have faced real limitations. Since 2015 L'Arche has continued a moratorium on development in new countries. To move beyond this moratorium L'Arche will need a stable funding base as well as structures and resources that support communities throughout the Federation to fully live the values of L'Arche and established standards of care.



Go within

Evaluation and Learning

L'Arche is now a significant organization, but its systems have lagged in development, especially on the international scale. These systems, which include knowledge management and a database, do not contradict our mission and the importance it places on interpersonal relations. On the contrary, these necessary systems allow us to better serve our mission, to consider its qualities, but also its limits, and to report on it in a more detailed and objective way.

During this mandate we have worked to close the gaps that exist in data collection practices across the Federation, and we have adopted technology to hold the information that people in international roles need. The first iteration of the database was opened in late 2022 for 30 users with international roles. We are gradually gathering data about our communities (particularly in terms of human resources or financial capacity) so that we can report internally, but also externally to our various public or private partners. The database will help us to know such things as the number of people, with or without disabilities, who live or work in our communities and provide an up-to-date mailing list to ensure the quality of our communications.

The Evaluation and Learning Team has worked closely with the International Delegates to develop the methodology and tools to better assess and understand the health and challenges of our communities. A 2-year process has been launched to support International Envoys and the National Leaders of "middle" countries to make formal assessments of communities.

This work of Evaluation and Learning impacts our culture and stimulates our professionalization. It is long-term work that must continue if we want to improve our decision-making based on an evidence-based approach. Ultimately this work brings greater credibility and legitimacy to our organization while providing a better service to our members.



Communication

The raison d'être of L'Arche International communications is to be at the service of our communities and countries by increasing the visibility of L'Arche and highlighting the universal character of our mission in diverse contexts across the world.



This communication is not possible without close collaboration with the communication leads throughout the Federation. Our presence on social networks, our annual activity reports, our impact reports, and the production of videos are all tools for our internal and external communication and support recruitment and fundraising efforts. For each of our local communities, highlighting their membership in an international movement strengthens and gives credibility to their own communication messages.

Our international website has been transformed and there has been development of the visual identity of L'Arche, which is now being deployed in the Federation. In parallel with the visual identity, work was undertaken on what is known as 'messaging,' in other words our way of talking about L'Arche, explaining it, and presenting it. This work should be finalized considering the messages contained in the new Charter and the lessons about our history. This history we will of course have to learn to tell, while also remembering that the history of L'Arche is the history of each of us.

Stimulated by the constraints of the pandemic, and that of confinement, we have developed initiatives to foster connections and increase awareness of our international reality: the L'Arche Light Festival to honor L'Arche's family day on the first Saturday in October, the "open calls" several times a year to exchange news or gather reactions on a variety of topics, and our first online Federation Assembly.

Membership



We celebrate and welcome the new projects, probationary and confirmed communities that have joined the Federation since 2017:

12 new Confirmed Communities, 9 new Probationary Communities, and 19 new Projects. In other words, 40 new groups in this Mandate!

We also acknowledge that several communities left the Federation. Both the process of welcoming member communities and of disaffiliation have brought conversations about what it means for a community to be a member of L'Arche and a recognition that there is a lack of shared understanding regarding accountability and the mutual expectations of membership.

The International Membership Committee is developing its efforts to support the welcoming of projects and communities and taking the necessary time to dialogue when needed in the process. A Regulatory Committee has been formed to support efforts to stay in enough alignment with what is essential in our belonging across countries and communities while respecting diversity and cultural adaptation.

Improving Support

In 2018, we evaluated our support to single communities.

One of the outcomes of this evaluation was restructuring the roles of International Delegates to improve the supervision and supports for Federation Representatives and improve coordination and management of resources for single communities and some countries. The International Delegates have helped to foster increased collaboration among national leaders and international envoys.

The pandemic prompted innovation in our formation program. Oline sessions have given us the opportunity to reach more people across the Federation including those who in the past could not participate in international sessions because of visa issues, political situations, distance, or cost.

We recommitted ourselves to safeguarding and have implemented a Code of Conduct as well as a framework of common standards and objectives that are to be met or exceeded across all levels of the Federation. Our work in safeguarding is an important example of holding common values and standards across the Federation while respecting subsidiarity and adapting to local and cultural contexts. The Safeguarding Task Force, comprised of members from various parts of the Federation, continues to work guided by the imperative of the protection of all persons. It remains a work in progress, and the audit being undertaken this year will help us continue to identify areas that need improvement and support.

Sustainable Funding

In any organization, there are issues of power and money.

The ways in which we share and exercise authority, the ways in which we collect resources and distribute them are the subject of a necessary and healthy debate.

L'Arche International has some financial reserves and we are in a more stable situation than six years ago, but this does not solve the long-term need to ensure sustainable funding. In fundraising, much of the work at the level of International is about supporting country and community fundraising efforts, but also about combining the efforts of our teams around the world to move away from a competitive logic and into a collaborative dynamic. Since 2022, there has been an international group of fundraisers whose core is made up of fundraisers from the 'confirmed' countries and to which fundraisers from other countries are joining. Although this group is recent and still developing, its international composition expresses the motivation to team up, to share good practices, to decompartmentalize our fundraising spaces, to carry out joint initiatives.

There has been a gradual maturing in our financial aid process. We have progressed from a system based on the charity model towards one of greater partnership and empowerment. While there are various levels of capacity in each of our communities, some of our communities in the most challenging contexts have made progress in integrating fundraising into the mission.

The goal is not necessarily for communities to be self-sufficient but for us to develop a stronger sense of responsibility for one another and to assist each community towards greater sustainability.



Constitution/Governance

A priority of the next mandate is to clarify rules of governance and lines of authority. The Study Commission report addressed some of the historical issues regarding authority and governance that can contribute to the work on this topic.

It is not surprising that after losing the symbolic referent that was our founder, part of the glue that held us together has crumbled. This is also a time when the charism of our mission has a chance to assert itself if we manage to replace this lost symbolic reference point with an even more profound one of our common practices and values that characterize our identity and our mission. This is what we hope to be able to do, not least with the help of our new Charter.

The Constitution which was approved by the Federation Assembly in 2012 is a second instrument at the service of this structuring, since it names the Federation's aims, the principles that govern it and certain governance methods to achieve them. However, during our six years in leadership, we have found that the details of the application of this constitution have not been sufficiently developed and that it may be subject to contradictory interpretations or not be considered a meaningful reference document.

There are different models of federal organization, each with its advantages and disadvantages. Many of the questions raised regarding governance are relevant, but we need to be more familiar with and respectful of the provisions of the 2012 Constitution, even if it means adjusting or clarifying them. If we do not do this, we will not have the needed stability to eventually revise them and decide together on the rules of governance that are most consistent with our mission's profound nature.

We need a Charter and a Constitution that are recognized and respected. We cannot claim one and neglect the other without introducing confusion into ways of operating that are detrimental to all our communities around the world.

For the first time in our history, there will be no successors immediately after our departure. While this absence presents significant risks, this interim period can also be used to revisit the basis of our common rules to ensure that the next international leaders and their teams can better meet the Federation's needs.

In Rome in March, we shared with the leadership of the Federation the challenges of this unprecedented situation and worked together to ensure the conditions for our transition.



Conclusion

Recently a member of the International Stewardship Board told us with great emotion about his meeting several years ago with the L'Arche Carrefour community in Haiti.

His emotion stemmed from the contrast between the very precariousness of the country, the reality of the disability experienced by the members of the community and the joy he had witnessed. Ultimately, it is this joy that underpins our commitment to L'Arche. A joy that we did not expect and that we did not hope for, and which is part of the precious contribution that we can make to the world to which we belong. Although we are all affected by what we have learned about our founder and our history, this joy is not lost.

Membership of the Federation is the free choice of each of our communities. It is no longer with reference to the figure of our founder or to our history that this belonging can be justified, but only by the recognition of a common experience, of practices and values that are the basis of this belonging that recognizes itself as organically connected to others in some kind of larger community, a community of destiny.

This mandate was demanding, but it remains one of the privileges of our lives to have been called to this mission at this time in our history and to have served L'Arche as best we could. We wish to express our gratitude to the Leadership Team, the Support Team, and the Stewardship Board for their contributions to the work of this mandate and responding to the unanticipated demands of the inquiry and the pandemic with care and deep commitment. We also thank each of you, members with and without disabilities, for these years of co-creation and for taking responsibility together in mission.



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