

Mandate for L'Arche Ireland December 2023 - December 2028

*Come on we're going! **



A painting by artist Angela Burchill inspired by the discernment and CEO nomination process.

Context: The purpose of this Mandate is to emphasise the values and expectations that underpin the work of L'Arche Ireland in support of its communities in Cork, Dublin and Kilkenny. It should be read in conjunction with the Strategic Review and Plan of L'Arche Ireland - Time To Reflect (TTR) - for a wider appreciation of the opportunities and challenges facing L'Arche Ireland and its stakeholders in delivering on those values and expectations.

Introduction: The Mandate¹ and nomination of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and National Leader of L'Arche Ireland is a joint process that began in spring 2023 and will reach its conclusion in autumn 2023.

The Mandate reflects the key themes that emerged from the week-long consultation and listening process that took place in the 3 communities – Cork, Dublin, Kilkenny - in May 2023.

The Mandate is supported by the Strategic Review and Plan of L'Arche Ireland - Time To Reflect (TTR) December 2022 and it will provide the key themes to build upon from Dec 2023 to Dec 2028.

¹ The Mandate provides the key points from which a strategic plan is developed.

Method: A team composed of members of Dublin, Cork and Kilkenny communities and a representative of L'Arche International conducted the process: Angela Burchill (core member); Margaret Basteed (long-term staff member); Chris Hayes (community leader); Brendan Collins (board member); Marion Courtney (board member and chair of L'Arche Ireland) and Patrick Corcoran (on behalf of Manca Kastelic of L'Arche International). Members of each community were invited to share their views on current issues and their aspirations and dreams for the future.

The team is very grateful for the quality feedback received which they condensed into four major guiding principles to be used as a shared vision towards a common purpose guiding us into the future.

No. 1: L'Arche Ireland is called to foster a community environment where people feel secure and at home.

“L'Arche is my home, I love it. I do!”*

The sense of connectedness, of belonging to a family structure is an experience shared by all members of L'Arche Ireland, whether core members, staff, assistants, board members, friends or visitors. Many expressed the joy of being welcomed from day one into L'Arche Ireland, and the experience of being accepted as they are. This is quite unique in the world of social care and should be nourished, promoted and protected as a great gift for everybody both inside and outside L'Arche Ireland. This is particularly true for most core members whose vulnerability prevents them founding their own families and who would lose so much if L'Arche Ireland disregarded this fundamental aspect of its ethos.

L'Arche Ireland needs to continue to be communities where people find a real home - a place of acceptance and belonging. This requires maintaining and sustaining relationships with the families of core members; with people previously involved in L'Arche and with other L'Arche communities. Special attention should be paid to maintaining the relationship with L'Arche Belfast. As one core member in Cork put it, *“I'd like to go to L'Arche Dublin because they're part of my family.”**

Links with L'Arche International² need to be developed to deepen and broaden our vision of L'Arche as our family of international communities. Embracing “The Charter of the communities of L'Arche” would be a critical part of developing these links, as would increased interaction between communities in Ireland and the potential of twinning with L'Arche communities outside of Ireland.

**Citations from core members during the CEO nomination consultations*

² L'Arche Ireland is part of the international federation of L'Arche- please see www.larche.org

Nº2: L'Arche Ireland is called to claim and deepen its Christian roots and ethos, whilst remaining open to all religious or non-religious traditions.

“People in L'Arche are good and caring, they believe and practise what Jesus says and does.” *

The identity and mission statement of L'Arche Ireland states that *Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together* (L'Arche Ireland Governance Handbook).

The sense of equality between core members and staff is a shared and priceless experience. It is a source of deep joy for people and empowers core members whose prior life experiences may have been very disempowering. As one core member in Dublin put it, *“I'm the longest here... I could do the job running L'Arche Ireland.”** As another core member in Cork said, the CEO should be a *“popular woman like me or my mum... I'd like to be a leader of L'Arche.”** This experience of each person feeling equally valued not only leads core members to believe that they could run communities, but it also invites all members of L'Arche to explore the roots of this experience and how to express it in a meaningful way. L'Arche Ireland is called to claim and deepen its Christian roots and ethos while remaining open to all other religious, or non-religious traditions that give meaning and purpose to community life, time for reflection and spirituality. In our secular world the importance of living and sharing faith in community is seen as vital by many members of L'Arche Ireland. As one core member in Cork put it, *“Prayers and Mass and celebrations, I love that”.* *

Nº3: L'Arche Ireland is called to foster an environment that responds to the changing needs of its members.

“I'm here for good now...”*

For members³ of L'Arche, living or working in community can be a life-changing experience. Many core members feel that L'Arche Ireland is their home for life. We live in a changing world and our needs change over time. The identity and mission statement of L'Arche Ireland states that *“Our mission is to... Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members...”* (L'Arche Ireland Governance Handbook).

There is a shared consciousness and understanding in L'Arche Ireland of the many challenges and changes that have occurred over the past years and how L'Arche needs to adapt to those changes.

³ Members refers to all in L'Arche – core members, the teams in the day projects, houses and administration, the board and local committees.

Key areas spoken about were:

- increased funding - a strong understanding of the funding sources, context and systems required and how to engage in the funding system to the maximum advantage of L'Arche Ireland, which is a Section 39 organisation, part-funded by the HSE,
- more paid staff, and a rebalancing of the responsibilities of assistants,
- a lighter workload for managers at all levels,
- additional senior management,
- more structural training and support for all staff,
- specific medical care,
- housing needs for ageing core members,
- development of digital/IT systems.

Actively using the Strategic Review and Plan of L'Arche Ireland - Time To Reflect (TTR) is an excellent tool to move L'Arche Ireland forward, while taking into consideration that it does not address all issues concerning funding and the day programmes.

There is a shared feeling that L'Arche Ireland is very innovative by nature and by bringing people together through cross-country working groups, we could share knowledge and make small, yet significant steps forward.

N°4: L'Arche Ireland is called to develop and deepen mutually enriching relationships with its environment.

“I'd love to go to London sometime. Its' part of L'Arche” *

L'Arche communities are rooted in their local environment where enriching relationships are developed. The feeling of belonging which so many members of L'Arche experience grows organically over time to a desire and a need to belong to a wider environment going from local community to a worldwide community. A member of staff in L'Arche Dublin referred to a quote from the new Chair of the Board **“L'Arche is Ireland's best kept secret.” *** We are called to share this secret, to make known our mission and identity, to get our name known, to develop a form of greater visibility, of social and public recognition for the good work being done in our communities and their meaningful social impact. This type of outreach enriches our relationships and nourishes a sense of achievement and pride so fundamental for core members for whom such experiences are often lacking. It is also very helpful for the integration of communities into their local environment and for fundraising opportunities.

*We invite you to read and reflect on this Mandate together with the Strategic Review and Plan of L'Arche Ireland - Time To Reflect (TTR), which provides **key recommendations for 2023 to 2028** for L'Arche Ireland, and “The Charter of the Communities of L'Arche” (L'Arche International June 2023). This Mandate was ratified by the board of L'Arche Ireland in June 2023 and will be adopted by the General Assembly of L'Arche Ireland in November 2023.*