At L’Arche, adults with and without intellectual disabilities share life and friendships in community. We welcome difference and celebrate the gifts of all people. L’Arche works toward a more human society by inspiring individuals, communities, and the world.

**GROWTH**

*“A community cannot remain static. It is not an end in itself.*

*It is like a fire that must spread even at the risk of burning out.*

*A moment comes when a community can only grow through*

*separation, sacrifice and gift…That is the meaning of life. Life*

*reproduces itself. Growth means the appearance of flowers*

*fruits, which carry the seeds of new life.“*

Jean Vanier, *Community & Growth*, pp. 152-153

Thank you for your participation in the recent discussions around the Growth Initiative Paper. You will find a compilation of your feedback [here](https://www.larcheusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ELT-1709-Growth-Feedback-170914.xlsx).

**Why do we talk about Growth?**

Before we address the questions at hand, let’s rearticulate why we are talking about growth. The National Assembly and National Board have adopted our current mandate and strategic plan:

* L’Arche USA’s 2015-2020 mandate named growth as a priority. We are to: “Design and implement a strategic plan for new growth and development of L’Arche in the USA…” (IV,1)
* L’Arche USA’s Strategic Plan, under the category Innovate, Project #8: Expand with 10 new communities in the next five years.

Nobody can deny the need of people with I/DD for services and community. Needs are obvious all around the country and in all populations. Yet, founding a L’Arche community based on our traditional model of residential care is not always the obvious response. Current emerging communities adopt alternative models, often at the intersection of the Independent Living and Community Models.

More practically, L’Arche USA and communities are solicited by numerous individuals and groups interested in founding a L’Arche community. Our charism is alive. Organic growth is happening. Yet, we are only now developing a strategy that swiftly, effectively and consistently responds to, supports, affirms – or not – these founding groups and emerging L’Arche communities.

50 years of experience have taught us valuable lessons about the founding process. We know what it takes to found a healthy and resilient community that lives the four dimensions of a L’Arche community: spirituality, mutuality, service and outreach. We owe it to current founding groups to offer our expertise in a much more systematic way to help them on their journey.

Last but not least, the mandate calls us to not only grow in the number of communities, but also in depth and in visibility. Additional communities will create economies of scale and a critical mass (with regard to national services and inter-community life) that will allow the national organization – and us all – to sustainably meet our aspirations and that will help existing and emerging communities live the mission of L’Arche as a global movement.

None of this is new. The 2011 McKinsey report encouraged growth, new models and engagement with the external world. Our 2008 Mission & Identity statements encourage our engagement in diverse cultures. The new Federation Mandate invites us to: “Respond creatively to existing and emerging hopes and needs of persons with an intellectual disability, especially those in situations of distress in our world today.”(2.2)

**Reminder of the Process**

In 2015, based on your input, the strategic growth team was put together: Anita Maroun, (chair), Curt Armstrong (Founding CL, L’Arche Atlanta), Cheryl Emory (Richmond Project Board Chair), and Lori Vaanholt (Growth Coordinator, L’Arche Canada). The Growth Initiative Report was sent to the National Board in May 2017.

After careful consideration of the challenges and drawbacks of growth, the National Board committed L’Arche USA to new growth and called the L’Arche USA team to analyze the situation, propose founding groups that are ready to move toward project status and engage local communities in the conversation. The National Board has been very clear in requesting that 1) new growth fulfill L’Arche’s mission in today’s context, 2) contribute to L’Arche USA’s sustainability and 3) that sufficient skills and resources be developed for L’Arche USA to invest in areas or populations that might require different approach and skill-sets.

Earlier this summer, Community Leaders received an analysis of the different questions. We asked for feedback, which you provided.

**Questions that need to be discussed further:**

The question of growth is complex, touches on many aspects of L’Arche and should be tackled on different levels. Based on your feedback, the following questions will be discussed in the coming months. In St Louis, we will discuss two questions that are relevant for all of us at this point.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Question | Input | When | Note | Decision |
| How does our L'Arche culture understand and manage growth (organic - strategic, sign - solution, internal - external drivers, ...)? | ALL | ALWAYS | This seems to be an underlying question that will be at play as long as L’Arche exists and evolves. |  |
| The purpose of Regions, the notion of Clusters, the difficulty of "isolated communities", the possibility of inter-community life | ELT – Stewardship Group | St Louis September 2017 and Atlanta, November 2017 | Conversation has happened for many years, recently triggered by Regional Reconfiguration. A proposed definition of Regions was sent in Draft Constitution. | National Assembly |
| Development of the Regional Leader Role | RLs and National Team, ELT 2018 | Clinton, OH, March 2018 | Communities will give input and make recommendations once we have consensus on the purpose of Regions.  | National Leader |
| The need of people with I/DD in our society today and the intersection with L'Arche's mission | Interaction with founding group | Ongoing | National Board has clearly indicated that L’Arche USA needs to build up its capacity and skills prior to exploring emerging communities in areas unfamiliar to us. Following the principle of subsidiarity, each group is called to inculturate L’Arche’s mission in its context and time. | NB, Founding Groups & Regional Leaders  |
| Public Policy and Disability trends: development of alternative and innovative models by emerging communities and response to current trends by existing communities | ALL & Interaction with founding group |  | Communities asked L’Arche USA to develop public policy expertise; simultaneously RLs take into consideration federal and state legislation in their accompaniment and evaluation | Existing Communities, Founding Groups & Regional Leaders  |
| Expectations, criteria and resources for a “mentoring community” | ELT | St Louis September 2017 and ongoing | Mentorship will not be mandatory. Existing communities will be invited and will make their choice | Existing Communities + Vice NL |
| Challenges to growth: palliative care, retired individuals, assistant recruitment and retention, complex needs individuals | ALL & Interaction with founding group |  | Seems to be a question that does not only concern emerging communities | Existing Communities, Founding Groups & Regional Leaders  |

**Expected Outcomes of the St Louis ELT Meeting Session**

Regions: build a joint understanding and leadership consensus on the purpose of L’Arche regions in the U.S. (We seem to have consensus on the proposed configuration of four regions in 2018, knowing that additional communities will continue to shift regional boundaries in the coming years. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1WJOg_RHZ8U-cHuoD4LWy203WINc&usp=sharing>)

Mentorship: understand and own expectations, possibilities and limitations for a mentoring community. (A current image of founding groups: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1H-pcfz8gfAGFHYL6vgj-6Smsz2I&usp=sharing>)

**Next Steps**

The National Board will review applications for *Pre-foundation Reflection*, *Pre-foundation Seed Group* and, if appropriate, *Project* status in November / December 2017.

Existing communities – many of which already mentor founding groups – will be asked to formally enter a mentorship relationship.

The National Board will discuss and approve the new regional configuration in November / December 2017, effective as of July 2018.