



## Glossary of Common L'Arche Terms

*Note: This glossary lists the terms commonly used by L'Arche communities across the US that may be helpful for those new to L'Arche. When appropriate, we've listed multiple terms with similar meaning together, to account for some differences in language between communities. A perusal of the full document may help you find a term. Our use of words is not always common and evolves as we as individuals, communities and a federation do. If you see a discrepancy or inactive link or if you have a suggestion, please feel free to contact L'Arche USA.*

- **Accompaniment** This term refers to “walking with” a person or community in the different facets of community life by listening, caring, clarifying, affirming, mentoring, challenging. The accompaniment relationships is stronger and healthier when those who accompany others are accompanied or supervised. Accompaniment takes many forms:
  - **Community Accompaniment** Each community is accompanied by a representative of L'Arche USA, a Manager of Community Support and Learning (formerly Regional Leader), who assesses the health and development of the community, provides support, recommendations, and consultation to the community and acts as a liaison between the community and the national team and federation.
  - **Functional Accompaniment / Role Accompaniment** A synonym for this in broader society is “supervision”. Functional accompaniment should be provided on a scheduled ongoing basis for all members with a functional role in the community. A person’s role description indicates to whom the person reports, and that person is the one to provide functional accompaniment, consisting of training and support for the role, regular assessment of performance and potential, and encouragement for on-going development.
  - **Personal / Communal / Member Accompaniment** This is individual accompaniment where a person with experience of community and L'Arche supports someone in their membership in the community; this is a commitment to regular conversation. The role is not one of counselor, but of listener and encourager. This is a person outside of the community and may be local to the community or part of L'Arche elsewhere (via video calls). It is a place for a member to explore their relationships and journey in L'Arche and to find support for sustaining themselves and growing in their membership and service of the mission.
  - **Spiritual Accompaniment** This is also individual accompaniment where a member is offered support in exploring their spiritual life or faith life via regular conversations with someone trained and experienced to offer such support. It is also called “spiritual direction.” The spiritual accompanier is usually someone outside of the community. Leaders and long-term members of community are often helpful in locating a spiritual accompanier for a member seeking this type of support.
  - **Core member/assistant accompaniment** Many communities also pair a core member with a particular assistant in an accompaniment relationship. This facilitates a deepening of their relationship as they walk together in daily life, often including special attention by the accompanying assistant (with support from others on the team) to the core member’s health, finances, family connections, retreats/vacations, work/day programming, special events, and other aspects of life as they arise. The core member supports the assistant by helping them learn the culture and practices of L'Arche, orienting the assistant to routines and expectations and inviting them to explore their own and each other’s gifts.

- **Alternate terms for “working” and “not working”** Because people in L’Arche are creating home and relationship together and some are living daily life together, L’Arche uses language that reflects mutuality and relationship in place of more typical work language (on/off, shift, scheduled)
  - **Days Away / Rest days** Refers to a day when an assistant is not on the schedule (preferred over “days off”). Typically, assistants have two days away each week, though they may not always be weekend days.
  - **Sharing time / Being Present** Refers to when an assistant is responsible in the home or center (preferred over “working” because it offers a sense of mutuality and relationship-building).
  - **On routine** Refers to time when an assistant is scheduled to be responsible in the home or center (preferred over “shift”). A “routine” may also refer to a particular time of day or aspect of personal care where an assistant is supporting a core member.
  
- **Assistant** An individual without intellectual disability who shares daily life with core members. Assistants typically provide professional services, but in some cases the term “assistant” also includes people in supportive roles. Assistants may live in or out of a community home.
  
- **Board of Directors** Those who carry the legal responsibility of the organization, set policies and budget, oversee community finances, hire the community leader (in cooperation with a Federation Representative and Discernment Team), etc. Each community has its own board of directors and L’Arche USA has a board.
  
- **Celebrations and Gatherings** L’Arche communities celebrate! We celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and farewells and holidays and new homes and new vans and... Some of these celebrations happen within a house and some happen for the community as a whole and some invite outside friends. Some happen regularly and some are spontaneous. They are a wonderful part of L’Arche life; those new to a L’Arche community should ask about the community’s celebration traditions and rhythms - and should try to take any celebration invitations they can to know the community more fully – and to experience the joy!
  
- **Charter of L’Arche** International document that outlines the fundamental principles and philosophy of the Federation of L’Arche. This has shaped the culture and practices of L’Arche. An international process to revise the charter began in 2018 and will involve inclusive consultation with communities over several years ahead.
  
- **Core members / Core people** Individuals with disabilities who form relationships in the community that are at its heart. The word “core” is derived from the word “heart” in both French (*cœur*) and Latin (*cor*). This is a term of respect that indicates the centrality and place of honor for these members and relationships within the community.
  
- **Councils and other groups** L’Arche often calls representative groups together to work on common goals and issues within a community and at regional and national levels. Here are some current examples, which is not intended to be exhaustive:
  - **Community Council** – A body of members who are a source of wisdom, counsel, and support for the Executive Director/Community Leader of a community. The community formulates the composition and terms of the council; they meet together on a regular basis.

Communities are encouraged to have diverse representation on the community council (i.e. someone in formal leadership role, assistant, board member, core member).

- **Council of Community Leaders** (formerly referred as *Regional Council*) – This group is made up of a number of Community Leaders and chaired by the Manager of Community Support and Learning (formerly Regional Leader). This collection of communities has traditionally been arranged geographically, but may be arranged with a different common focus in the future. They are a leadership and consultation council for each other and for national concerns.
  - **National Council** – The National Council consists of the National Leader, Director of Community Support and the Managers of Community Support and Learning.
  - **Extended Leadership Team (ELT)** – The Extended Leadership Team assists the National Leader(s) to develop and maintain a common vision, process new developments and questions, and ensure unity, coherence and solidarity across L'Arche in the United States. This is a team is comprised of the Community Leaders from all L'Arche USA communities and the National Leadership.
  - **National Leadership Team** – L'Arche USA's management team, currently consisting of the National Leader, Director of Community Support, Director of Finance and Operations, Development Director, External Affairs Director and Director of Member Development and Learning.
  - **National Team** – The National Team is the full staff of L'Arche USA. In addition to the National Council and National Leadership team, it consists of others in roles that support the ongoing national work of finance, operations, fundraising, external affairs and member development. This team is responsible for L'Arche USA's on-going work in support of its member communities and for implementing the national mandate and strategic projects.
- ◆ **Covenant Relationship** Covenant is a term that has sometimes been used in L'Arche to describe a depth of relationship and a "way of the heart". It is also sometimes referred to as *relationship of commitment and belonging*. It is a relationship of love, of trust, of mutuality that members may discover over time, lived out in the concrete reality of L'Arche community. It refers to a deep call of belonging to relationships and in a broader sense the mission of L'Arche.
  - **Discernment** A process of listening and openness, prayer and reflection, in the practice of many spiritual and faith traditions; it is utilized to discover direction, decisions and understanding related to the life of the community, its leaders and its members. Discernment can happen at an individual or communal level. This practice is used widely in L'Arche as we believe decisions made through discernment - made reflectively, prayerfully, and inclusively – are deeper and wiser.
  - **DEI** Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – L'Arche USA has an aspiration and commitment to growing into a diverse, inclusive and equitable organization. Leaders from the national team and across the country have been part of ad hoc committees to explore how to best do this. We have efforts to build it into our curriculum, resources, policies and practices to progress this work and we are working with others to build an effective strategy.
  - **Faith and Light/ Faith and Sharing** Prayer groups for people with disabilities, their families and friends. They meet regularly for prayer and fellowship. Faith and Light sponsors pilgrimages; Faith

and Sharing sponsors retreats. They are separate programs from L'Arche but L'Arche core members often also belong to these organizations. <http://www.faithandlight.org/>

- **Formation** An ongoing process wherein one first learns about the philosophy and mission of L'Arche with subsequent deepening, being “formed” in the mission and call. It usually involves both reflection and learning and happens via retreats, accompaniment, reading, trainings, etc. It is important that all community members receive regular formation as a way of deepening their understanding of L'Arche and growing personally, spiritually and vocationally. Some L'Arche events are also called “formations” and usually include intentional time for both reflection and learning.
- **Founding Stories** Because a sense of home, tradition, story and belonging are so important in L'Arche, we value the founding stories of each home and community. New members should look for opportunities to hear community elders share the early days of the community via stories and photo albums; listen closely for the roots of the gifts of the home or community today. In addition, we honor the story of the first community in the village of Trosly-Breuil, France in 1964, where a small group of people with and without disabilities formed a community of daily living and friendship; a founding in mutuality and compassion. A close listen to our founding stories often grounds us in our roots and can encourage us towards a new call or direction.
- **Inclusion** L'Arche seeks to be a place of witness to inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities. We seek to live inclusion to its fullest sense, recognizing that “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” (L'Arche Charter). All community members are invited to participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.

L'Arche USA is also committed to growing communication and engagement practices, resources, structures and a culture that develops greater inclusion and equity for people with intellectual disabilities and people of diverse races, cultures, abilities, spiritual backgrounds, etc. It seeks to support the national team and local communities with the tools, training and formation to be better able to live that commitment more deeply.

- **International Federation (or “The Federation”)** All the L'Arche communities around the world belong to the International Federation. The role of L'Arche International, as a unifying organization, is to support its members administratively, legally and financially and help them live out the mission. L'Arche International also seeks to promote cultural and religious diversity within its communities, as well as practical international solidarity. Each community in the US is a member of L'Arche USA, which is a member of L'Arche International. Visit the websites of L'Arche USA ([larchusa.org](http://larchusa.org)) and L'Arche International ([larche.org](http://larche.org)) to learn more.
- **L'Arche** *From L'Arche International website:* “L'Arche, the French word for “the ark,” as in Noah’s Ark, was the name given to the original home in Trosly-Breuil, France in 1964. It hearkens to the way Noah’s ark was a place of welcome in stormy times. As other houses and new communities founded around the world, they decided to join together in the International Federation of L'Arche Communities, better known today as L'Arche International. This term has also commonly come to refer to the international structure set up to support the communities.

- **Live-In Assistant** An assistant who resides in a community home sharing life with the other members who live there.
- **Mandate** A visioning and planning document drawn up and ratified by members of a body which summarizes the key issues and opportunities to be addressed in the next three to five years. The implementation of the mandate is separate from the daily administrative tasks within the community and it often concretized in a **strategic plan** that outlines goals, tasks, teams and timeframes. Mandates are drawn up at the community, national and international levels. Community, National and International Leaders are discerned for the gifts that serve a particular mandate with the expectation of serving that role for the length of the mandate.
- **Member** When referring to an individual as a member, we describe someone who has a place of belonging in L'Arche; often through a particular community. L'Arche is in a process of building guidance around membership, aiming to make it simple and inclusive. The formal document defining membership is [here](#); the main elements are that a member is everyone with or without an intellectual disability who has asked to be part of L'Arche in whatever capacity; who has successfully fulfilled requirements of a formal or informal trial period; who has been formally welcomed to L'Arche by the appropriate leader or council; and who engages in ongoing dialogue with L'Arche.
- **Membership Agreement (Community)** Formal agreement between each community and L'Arche USA as representative of the Federation. The agreement outlines the obligations of both L'Arche USA and the community and provides processes to enact and support the agreement.
- **Mutuality** At the heart of L'Arche communities are relationships. *Mutuality* implies that these relationships are lived in mutual respect, with each person both giving and receiving. Interactions between individuals is marked by honesty and care. These relationships foster the growth and development of each person. They create the possibility to truly appreciate each person in their uniqueness, vulnerability and giftedness.
- **National Assembly** L'Arche USA has a National General Assembly at least once each 5-year mandate. The National GA brings together all the Community Leaders and Board Presidents from across the US. There is also an International General Assembly every 5 years. The purposes of such assemblies usually include approving mandates, confirming discerned leaders, discussing and approving policies, formation, celebration, and deepening relationships across communities and across the federation.
- **National Leader** This is the chief executive of L'Arche USA, supported by and accountable to the member communities through the National Assembly for leading the national mandate; to the National Board for the legal and fiscal integrity of L'Arche USA and for leading the national mandate; and to the international leaders for the integrity of the Identity and Mission of L'Arche within the country.
- **Region** The communities of the US are currently divided into regions so that a smaller grouping of communities (usually 5-7 communities) can support each other and progress towards common learning and goals at the national level with greater ease. As of 2021, there are 4 regions (North East, South East, Midwest, West).

- **Regional Gathering** A 2-3 day gathering communities of a particular region, with the invite going out to all in the community (core members, assistants, leaders, board members, etc.). The gatherings help community members to establish and deepen bonds with one another and provide a larger experience of L'Arche community. These are festive and interactive days, most aptly compared to family reunions where old friends reconnect and new friends are made. Regions decide the frequency of such gatherings based on capacity and needs within the region.
- **Manager of Community Support and Learning (MCSL)** Also known as the Federation Representative and formerly known as Regional Leader. A member of the L'Arche USA national team who is liaison between L'Arche USA and the communities that they accompany. They offer coaching and consultation and shepherd the mandate and community leader discernment processes.
- **Sacred Story** In L'Arche, there is a tradition of inviting members to share their sacred stories. This may take different forms, but usually involves sharing important moments and relationships from their lives that have helped to shape who they are, what brings meaning, how they see themselves, others and the world and where their spiritual journey is taking them.
- **Solidarity** Refers to relationships of care, commitment and mutuality, where we express our interdependency as persons sharing a common humanity. Solidarity calls us to cross social, cultural and religious frontiers to deepen our understanding and experience of the human family. There are multiple ways of engaging in acts of solidarity. Communities may invest in relationships that allow cross-cultural exchange. Individuals may be called for a short- or long-term service engagement with another community. Communities and individuals may offer financial aid to communities in need via L'Arche International. To learn more, see the [Global Solidarity Album](#).
- **Spirituality in L'Arche:** Volumes can and has been written about the spirituality in L'Arche. In L'Arche, spiritual life and practices can call us to find the sacred in the ordinary, to reflect with gratitude on experiences and relationships that deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, and to grow through joy, vulnerability and forgiveness. It is lived in daily life, in discovering giftedness, in reflection and pray and play, in traditions and rituals, in mealtimes and in sabbath. We strive to live a spirituality that is inclusive of people from any faith tradition or no faith tradition. The most recent iteration of L'Arche Spirituality in the US is in a [Summary White Paper](#) and a [Guide to Practices that Provide Meaning](#), both from an ad hoc spirituality committee in 2017.

Helpful links:

L'Arche USA website [larcheusa.org](http://larcheusa.org)

L'Arche USA [member meeting ground](#)

(contact [memberdevelopment@larcheusa.org](mailto:memberdevelopment@larcheusa.org) at L'Arche USA for username and password)

L'Arche USA [Governance Documents](#)

L'Arche International website: [larche.org](http://larche.org)

L'Arche International [meeting ground](#); follow steps to create a user account

If you have questions, not errors or broken links or want to offer input or other terms to be considered for this glossary, please contact [memberdevelopment@larcheusa.org](mailto:memberdevelopment@larcheusa.org).