

Overview of Servant Leadership in L'Arche



Servant Leadership is one of eight defining governance principles that L'Arche seeks to embody. It applies to all members and structures in L'Arche in a spirit of mutuality:

- Servant leadership as described in the USA Constitution: *Roles and structures of the Federation are at the service of the mission. People are called to leadership for limited terms after discernment processes. Those in authority gain wisdom through listening and taking counsel.*
- Key to this is that, as leaders, we are **servants of the mission of L'Arche**.
 - *Our Mission is to make known the gifts of people who have intellectual disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships; to 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; and to engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society.*
 - In so far as the leader is helping the group or individuals to fulfill its mission, the leader is serving that group or individual. Service to the group or individual never takes precedence over nor can it be separated from, service to the mission.
 - Leaders need to be grounded in that mission, particularly at times when they are called to take a make a difficult choice or action that doesn't meet everyone's needs or desires; that grounding can both help the leader discern and support the leader in implementing the decision.
- The other seven **Principles** named in the L'Arche USA constitution are guides to this leadership: Partnership, Subsidiarity, Accountability, Participation, Inculturation, Solidarity, and Stewardship. (from L'Arche USA Constitution approved 31 May 2014)
- The **foot-washing** ritual has been significant in L'Arche in representing that we are all servant leaders. It represents both belonging and service. We belong as we engage in mutual relationship and offer and receive each other's vulnerability. And we are each called to be able to both serve and be served.
- Servant Leadership was coined in modern times in 1970 by **Robert Greenleaf**, whose premise was that servant leaders begin with a desire to serve and from that choice comes the aspiration to lead, a reversal of the norm. Consider the [10 characteristics of servant leadership](#) (listening, empathy, healing awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, community) that grew from his work.
- **Four quadrants** of servant leadership in L'Arche (from L'Arche International draft doc 2016) in service to mission:
 - **Heart** – developing gratitude, acceptance of gifts and limitations, awareness of our own and others' growth and well-being, grounding in sustaining relationships, mission, story of L'Arche
 - **Hands** – developing skills and behaviors necessary for the role: capacity for listening and communicating well, competency in tasks, understanding of responsibilities, operations
 - **Head** – working with others to ensure there are effective strategies, structures, processes, and resources; looking for and implementing improvements.
 - **Spirit** – supporting L'Arche culture of inclusive hospitality, mutuality, celebration and engagement with the world around us; visioning to move us forward.

Principles of L'Arche

From L'Arche USA Constitution approved 31 May 2014

L'Arche USA seeks to embody the following governance principles, which apply to all members and structures in L'Arche in a spirit of mutuality:

1. **Servant Leadership:** Roles and structures of the Federation are at the service of the mission as lived out in our communities. People are called to leadership for limited terms after discernment processes. Those in authority gain wisdom through respectful listening and taking counsel.
2. **Partnership:** Trust and collaboration operate freely within L'Arche. The structures are to foster that dynamic and embrace the partnerships among the spiritual, legal, financial, and communal elements.
3. **Subsidiarity:** Matters affecting L'Arche are dealt with at the most appropriate level, closest to the people affected. Only when they cannot be solved there are they referred to another level.
4. **Accountability:** When given a responsibility in L'Arche and the authority to go with it, accountability is to report back to those who gave the authority. Accountability is about being responsible and being linked to the wider body. It is also about taking responsibility for the consequences of one's actions.
5. **Participation:** Effective communication is essential in L'Arche. Processes are defined, published, and open. Wherever practical, they involve the people who implement and are affected by the decision. They include people with and without intellectual disability.
6. **Inculturation:** L'Arche communities live in different cultures. L'Arche embraces this diversity, while engaging in an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction, adaptation and challenge between the community and the culture.
7. **Solidarity:** All in L'Arche share a common humanity and a fundamental equality. We have a shared responsibility for each other and are committed to the common good.
8. **Stewardship:** Out of grateful hearts, L'Arche seeks to care responsibly for its people, resources, time, and environment. (Note that this additional principle is not part of the 7 principles in the *L'Arche International Constitution*)