

### HOMEmatters

**BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF FAITH AND** LIFELONG HOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

#### **GET INVOLVED**

L'Arche Greater Washington, DC accepts applications on a rolling basis for assistants in Washington, DC and Arlington, VA. We're also looking for volunteers! If you're interested in these opportunities, having dinner, or praying with us and more, check out:

larche-gwdc.org/get-involved

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Help support the mission of L'Arche GWDC. Consider making a one time or recurring donation to L'Arche GWDC.

www.larche-gwdc.org/donate

#### **CONTACT US**

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www.larche-gwdc.org

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### Sharing Our Stories for a New Charter By Lauren Palmer, Home Life Leader

Take a moment to think about your life, your story. How has your understanding of who you are changed over time? What have you discovered about yourself that you needed and wanted to share with others?

Similarly to our individual stories, the stories of communities and organizations deepen with time. L'Arche is no different in this regard. Our collective understanding of the essence of L'Arche has grown over the years and we find ourselves as a federation in need of more clearly naming what we believe and what unites us. Enter: The Charter.

Charters are fundamental documents to any group. L'Arche's current charter was written in 1993 by assistants (people without disabilities). Later, L'Arche revised our identity and mission statement. This process helped us deepen our understanding of who we are; including naming that mutual relationship - between people with and without disabilities – is at the center of L'Arche. Our charter now needs to catch up to that re-centering, as well as other

developments in who we are and in our understanding of L'Arche.

Embarking on a 3-year journey, L'Arche communities all over the world – all 154 of them and our 21 projects – will work together to develop our new charter. We are entering a period of individual and communal reflection. The people and communities at the margin, whose voices weren't always taken into account in the past, are leading us as a body in this process. For example, we are starting the charter process in June, the start of the winter season and a typical time to launch projects in the southern hemisphere, where communities like L'Arche Zimbabwe are located.

This new charter will be written by community members: core members, volunteers, friends of L'Arche, assistants, chief financial officers... anyone finding belonging in L'Arche who is willing to share their story. Using tools for accessible communication, everyone will have a chance to lend their voice and their story.



The charter process uses images and other tools to facilitate discussions for everyone.

Credit:
Lauren Palmer



#### Continued from cover >

As Rachel Wangui, a member of the charter process team puts it, "I liken the charter process to making a necklace; beautiful but fragile. In a Kenyan Samburu necklace, different colors symbolize the diversity of our federation. The fragility of the necklace is that it's joined by a single thread. As a necklace maker, I listen to all voices (beads) and bring them together (thread), supporting the thread where it's weakest" (L'Arche International Charter Process Website).

The first year of our charter process (May 2019-April 2020) involves surfacing our stories. Whose stories? Yours! Mine! Everyone is invited to share together about our experiences. What gives life? What doesn't give life? We as L'Arche GWDC will decide together what insights of the ones we surface need to be shared with L'Arche International. Communities all over the world will go through this process in a manner that best suits them.

Whether we have known each other for 12 years or 12 days, we invite you to share your L'Arche story. We recognize the busyness of our lives here and hope that you can share your experiences in ways accessible to you: casual conversations when you're over for dinner, regular meeting times, a phone call or e-mail to your local charter resource person (see below!). We will be hosting a Charter Work Day on Saturday, October 12th, providing a set apart space for people to share their stories and for us to sit with these questions. Mark your calendars now – more details to come.

"...My hope for the charter process is that it is a time when we get to hear stories of truth," writes Pádraig Ó Tuama, facilitator to the charter process team. "That truth will include pain and promise, harm and hope, and our deepest hope is that the charter can be a document that is more fit to hold the love that L'Arche practices and yearns for" (L'Arche International Charter Process Website).

How can we honor the past and welcome the new? We will discover together.

### SHARE YOUR L'ARCHE STORY!

Contact Lauren Palmer: charter@larche-gwdc.org And join us for Charter Work Day: Saturday, October 12 from 10-2pm at the Festival Center, 1640 Columbia Rd NW, Washington, DC 20009

### Freedom to Try

By Eva-Elizabeth Chisholm, Human Services Leader

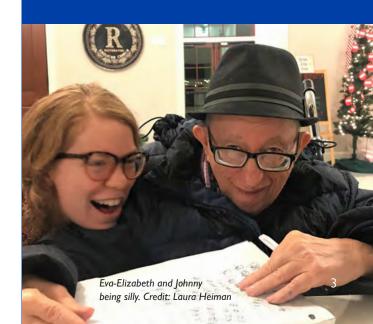
The first time I remember truly meeting Johnny Schofield was at the Halloween party my first year in L'Arche. It had been a long day - my "introverted self" was feeling a wee bit tired and I retreated to the dining room of Highland house for a snack and some quiet while dancing and games continued in the living room. I sat down at a table near Enrique (former assistant) and Johnny, and was met with the question "hablas español?"

Johnny's question and my subsequent response in a few broken sentences marked the start of a relationship that has shaped my last eight years in L'Arche. Both of us lovers of quieter spaces and decaf cafe, his is a presence I often seek when I need a pocket of stillness. Quiet times with Johnny have helped me find my voice.

I often tell people that when it comes to learning Spanish, he has been my most patient teacher — honoring my efforts, filling in the blanks when my vocabulary comes up short, and occasionally answering my questions with an honest "No sé. No importa." ("I don't know. It doesn't matter.") Perfection has never been the expectation.

My friendship with Johnny highlights two things for me - the importance of trying, and the importance of patience with the one who is trying. We encounter these lessons in the dailiness of life - in the welcoming of a new housemate, in the office of the physical therapist, in the passing of the peace on a Sunday morning. Each of us learning...each of us guiding.

What a gift to say yes to this journey.



## NEW L'ARCHE OPPORTUNITIES WITH GEORGETOWN

L'Arche GWDC is continuing to build our longstanding relationship with Georgetown University. We are excitedly in the process of establishing the L'Arche University Life Program at Georgetown University which will include day activities, student ministry and reflection opportunities, volunteer engagement for Georgetown students, and times for prayer and celebration. Georgetown has welcomed a DC Mission Integration Coordinator, who will create touchpoints, both on-going and one-time, between L'Arche and a wide range of Georgetown University departments and experiences.

With the L'Arche University Life Program, members of L'Arche will engage in a variety of day activities on Georgetown's campus. These will include providing student ministry opportunities and supporting experiential learning opportunities focused on both L'Arche and cultural understandings of disability inclusion and diversity. The program will facilitate volunteer opportunities within the community for Georgetown University students and will set aside time to celebrate the partnership between L'Arche and Georgetown with outings to events, such as live sports or concerts.

Our current and well established monthly prayer nights will be a central focus of the program. (For more information regarding L'Arche prayer nights at Georgetown please see the back page of the newsletter.)

L'Arche GWDC looks forward to growing our relationship with Georgetown University as we build a more inclusive society together!

### Sandcastles & Transformation

By Luke Smith, Community Leader/Executive Director

I recently returned from the beach. One of my favourite activities at the beach is to dig and build sandcastles. It's playful and reminds me of my need to be more childlike. As I sat covered in sand and watched my boys running through the surf and scraping away sand as it was washed into the freshly dug hole, I was reminded of how both futile and life-giving my actions were.

The sandcastle was going to be washed away, the power of the waves destroying what we had created, but the memories, the transforming impact of the encounter of people stopping and watching, playing in the sand, they would remain.

We live in important times in L'Arche, as a community and a federation, the post-founder era is a tender and special one. The impact of Jean Vanier cannot be understated: we are L'Arche GWDC due to his calling to a group of us at Georgetown in 1977. We are living a life in L'Arche because each one of us was called to belong to the community, inviting each other daily into mutually transforming relationships.

Over the months since Jean's death, we have taken time to celebrate, to mourn, to share stories, to recall memories, and in doing so we have and continue to build community. We've rekindled the elements of our shared life that remind us to be more childlike. Like Jean in Trosly throwing orange peels after dinner, we continue to throw napkins at one another after dinner, playing in the water, singing songs, each and all much-needed elements in our dailyness.

As has been shared, Jean was not a saint to be put on a pedestal. Jean, like many people in our daily lives, helps point each one of us to a deeper way of living, a more intentional way of sharing our lives and including those around us; a way of living acknowledging our fears rather than living out of them, of honoring our vulnerabilities rather than hiding them.

We, like my sandcastles, are vulnerable. We are as a community, shaped and formed by experiences outside of our control and moreover, we are shaped by our awareness and trust in God in knowing that there are waves. And like the sand, our way of living is at times uncomfortable, it refines and takes the sharp edges, it softens, and brings the childlike out of each one of us. It is transformative, and the impact of our lives together will outlive each of us.

I wonder if what Jean, Raphael, and Philippe began some 55 years ago, what our Dottie, Michael, Gene, and others started in 1983, didn't also feel a little like building sandcastles. At L'Arche GWDC, we look forward to many more years of building, playing, and growing together.



### Research for a More Beautiful World

By Alice Felker, Summer Assistant

Growing up, my favorite book was Ms. Rumphius, the story of a girl (coincidentally named Alice) who always kept in mind that whatever adventures she undertook, her life would not be complete until she did something to make the world more beautiful. It made me wonder what I would do to make the world more beautiful.

It wasn't until my first summer at L'Arche that I finally discovered it. Eight people, of varying ages and ability levels, eating dinner together every night is beautiful. Eileen meticulously picking up trash on her walk to work is beautiful. Fritz singing "Barbara Ann" after prayer totally spontaneously is beautiful. Seeing Hazel sitting tall and forward in her chair, arms outstretched, yelling "COME HERE MAN" is beautiful. Being invited to get ice cream with Kelly three times in one week is beautiful. Living L'Arche is beautiful.

But, just as importantly, I learned in that first summer that L'Arche is not just a place of beauty. It is a place of challenge, heartbreak, and frustration – core family members' stories often include histories of pain and exclusion. Living L'Arche revealed to me the immense chasm between inclusion and exclusion, between my L'Arche community and society. Even though our nation has made great improvements in services for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), I knew that the high quality of care received by core members at L'Arche was not guaranteed for all people with IDD.

After my first summer at L'Arche, I knew I was called to share the beauty of inclusion and community. In addition to that, I felt called to discover and announce the barriers to inclusive service provision that I was beginning to uncover in day service programs. With the help of L'Arche GWDC and the Notre Dame psychology department, I began a research study to investigate day programs in the DC area.

I came back for a second summer at L'Arche to conduct my research study in May of 2018. For a month, I worked with core family members to collect their opinions and self-reports about activities and relationships at the day programs. With the support of assistants, I also recorded mood, energy, and behavior data. I talked to area day programs to hear about their successes and the programmatic elements they hoped to improve. After a lengthy data analysis period, I found that core family members were more likely to talk about an activity at their day pro-



Top: Alice and Hazel take a selfie! Credit: Alice Felker

Left: Alice and Francene at the dinner table. Credit: Dmitri Ignatenko

gram unprompted and display less negative behavior if he or she attended a community-based activity at their day program. I found that being out in the community, or bringing community members into programs, matters and makes a positive, measurable difference in the lives of people with IDD.

## ALTHOUGH MY PROJECT HAS CONCLUDED, MY WORK IS FAR FROM OVER. TO MAKE THE WORLD MORE BEAUTIFUL, I NEED IT TO BE MORE BEAUTIFUL FOR MY FAMILY MEMBERS WITH IDD.

I plan to advocate for more community-based outings and future research initiatives so that the voices of people with IDD can be amplified. I also plan to continue to live a life in L'Arche GWDC communities for as long as I possibly can because living L'Arche continues to be the most beautiful way of being I know. I will forever be grateful to the core members who have led me and the assistants who have walked beside me in my three years in community with L'Arche GWDC. Together, I am confident we will leave the world much more beautiful, more loving, and more inclusive than we found it.



Laurie, Eva-Elizabeth, and Luke at the Special Olympics panel. Eva-Elizabeth remarked on the power of watching disability advocates be transformed by listening to core member Laurie.

# Talking Inclusion with the Special Olympics

By Mary Ellen Dingley, Communications and Outreach Coordinator

The conference room was quiet in the offices of the Special Olympics in Washington, DC, as everyone around the table listened to Laurie describe her experiences at L'Arche GWDC. Laurie is a core member (adult with intellectual disabilities) at L'Arche where, she explained, everyone can be themselves and live as a family.

L'Arche GWDC was invited by the Special Olympics to speak on their webinar on self-advocates entitled "Intentional inclusion of people with Intellectual Disabilities." Laurie, Luke, and Eva-Elizabeth were part of the expert panel with fellow panelists from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, and The Arc of the United States. They discussed tips for finding self-advocates and integrating meaningful inclusion into organizations and projects.

From that discussion came strategies, stories, insight, and laughter as well as a few major pieces of advice.

#### **PLAN**

Being deliberate is key. Get clarity on your intentions. Why does it matter to you and your organization to be inclusive? Second, include people with intellectual disabilities from the beginning of your projects — don't just bring them in at the end to "sign off" on your work. Weave inclusion into your organization or activity from the very start.

### INCLUDE MULTIPLE AND DIVERSE VOICES OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Make sure you're not just checking a box or bringing someone on board as a "token": include more than one person with intellectual disabilities and include them throughout the process (see above). Ensure that you have diverse voices as much as possible. As Laurie said, people are different and have "different styles" and need space to follow their hearts and be themselves.

### **DECISION-MAKING AND LEADERSHIP**

The panelists all elaborated on meaningful inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities, as opposed to a shallow "check the box" approach, and that meant being aware of decision making, leadership, and power. Are self-advocates with intellectual disabilities in valued roles and do they have input? This requires building relationships with self-advocates. Luke explained that L'Arche is founded on relationships: "the recognition that we need and accept the other" as well as learning from one another and appreciating each other's gifts.

Eva-Elizabeth advised looking for opportunities for co-leadership with people with intellectual disabilities and Luke agreed, emphasizing the "importance of recognizing our personal authority" and ability to lead and grow our organizational competence.

#### **HAVE COURAGE**

The panelists emphasized that practicing inclusion is difficult, and everyone will make mistakes. Laurie said to "have courage" and other panelists agreed that you must not be afraid to acknowledge your mistakes, learn from your errors, and try again. One way we can be brave is by presuming competence. While we may feel anxious about causing discomfort by asking people with intellectual disability for something, we should start with the presumption of competence, even if we must modify approaches later. Change takes time – know that you won't always get it right the first time.

Together, we can build a more inclusive society.

### Welcoming Summer Volunteers

Every summer we welcome Summer Volunteers to our four homes from all over the country and the world. This year's group of 8 summer volunteers included a volunteer from France and students from Duke Divinity School, Notre Dame, and other universities. Volunteers bring their enthusiasm, skills, and hard work to support our community, and leave transformed by the relationships they've made.

Volunteer Joe, who recently graduated from Virginia Tech, noticed L'Arche's focus on relationships. He wrote:

"When I arrived and over the first weeks, this community turned out to be just as amazing as I thought it would be. And what made it that way? The people I met. These people were on fire for relationships with one another. Some were older than others. Some had more energy than others. Yet everyone lived for relationships with each other. And I could tell that on the very first day."

Volunteer Lucas flew over from France to join us for a month and enjoyed getting to know DC core members. He wrote about his first couple of days meeting everyone:

"Eileen has organized a yard sale for her DVDs and I see her interact with different potential clients, as the very good saleswoman she is. I accompany Michael and Daisy, an assistant, to Virginia to a pug meet-up: Michael has a passion for those dogs, understandably. We then grab a coffee at "Micky-D's", which I learn is a long-time tradition for Michael. Back at the house, I watch TV with Debora, which I learn later is often playing either Sanford and Son or I Love Lucy. Johnny then starts talking to me in Spanish while writing his name on a piece of

paper: even though I have no knowledge of Spanish,
I begin to understand that what he's talking to me about
is poverty in countries where they don't have air conditioning,
which I find extremely interesting. And so in as little as
two days, I have already had many interactions with
every core member, which I am grateful for."

The summer volunteers help L'Arche via all sorts of tasks – from supporting core members to deep cleaning to organizing kitchen cabinets. They set us up for success with their efforts in tackling needed projects and daily chores. And chores in community can be a joy! Joe writes:

"Some of my favorite moments in community this summer were making adventures of the most ordinary things. Whether it was planting things in the front yard to making a trip to 7-11, there was an innocent joy that went along with each of these activities, no matter how simple."

Lessons in L'Arche are carried far beyond the summer – the volunteers we welcome can take the skill sets they've gained working in a high demand field and the wisdom they've learned from core members back to college classrooms and careers. And for us at L'Arche, summer volunteers are vital members of our community.

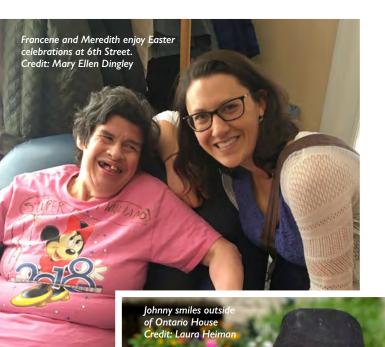
#### SHARE YOUR SUMMER WITH L'ARCHE!

If you or anyone you know is interested in being a summer volunteer at L'Arche GWDC, email Crisely Melecio-Zambrano at criselymz@larche-gwdc.org.

Joe speaks during Regional Gathering about being welcomed to L'Arche as a summer volunteer. Credit: L'Arche USA



### Photo Album

























### Strengthening Bonds: Northeast Regional Gathering 2019

By Brooke Lacock-Nisly, Administrative Assistant, and Mary Ellen Dingley, Communications and Outreach Coordinator





Top: Meredith and Lauren pose as they run the napkin toss game at the Solidarity Fair. Credit: Laurie Pippenger

Center: Laurie makes a new friend. Credit: Mary Ellen Dingley

Bottom: Mike shows off his temporary tattoo from the Solidarity Fair! Credit: Laurie Pippenger On a sunny Thursday morning in June, members of L'Arche GWDC loaded up vans full of community members, foregoing the usual routine of heading to work. Instead, with a custom playlist of everyone's favorite songs, thermoses full of coffee, and much excitement, we made our way to Scranton, PA for Northeast Regional Gathering 2019! L'Arche GWDC joined other northeastern L'Arche communities - Boston North, Erie, Syracuse, Cleveland, Long Island, and L'Arche Project Frederick - in a weekend full of celebration, prayer, catching up, and making new friends.

The gathering was a shining example of community in action. While the structure of the event and theme of "Seasons of Love" was planned by the Regional Gathering Committee, each community lead different elements of the weekend including prayer times, a Solidarity Fair, and more.

At the Gathering, every community shared an update of what's been going on in their community, putting their own creative spin on tales of new projects, new homes, birthdays, and welcomes. Our community shared about our love of coffee, trips we went on, and updates on core members who transitioned out of our homes, among other news. The presentations left many laughing and feeling a deeper sense of connection to our greater L'Arche family as we saw echoes of our own experiences in each other.

Another time to share the gifts of community members was the Talent Show! Eric, Laurie, Charles, Fritz, and John Cook all participated in separate singing acts. During the talent show, L'Arche GWDC couldn't keep themselves from getting out of their seats to dance. Eric started a conga line and invited others to join him, while Deb and Clemence twirled gently. The dancing continued throughout the Gathering until the grand conclusion of the weekend – the dance itself! L'Arche GWDC danced all night long with friends, many remarking that it was their favorite event of the weekend. Charles Clark said he "Had a lot of fun, did a lot of good dancing..." at the Gathering.

At the end of the weekend, we said our goodbyes and started the journey home with our regional bonds strengthened and our hearts full.

### An Unexpected Protest

By Meredith Gursky, Home Life Leader

I started my L'Arche journey in the community in Mexico City in July of 2016. I felt drawn to L'Arche's mission to make known the gifts of individuals with intellectual disabilities and found a sense of purpose in saying "yes" to an invitation to learn from and walk alongside people who are different from me. Community life was what one would imagine it to be — messy, beautiful, difficult, and blessed. Encountering community in Mexico City provided me with a vibrant and complex culture within which to experience L'Arche's spiritual themes of celebration, forgiveness, and welcome. I lived into relationships and wrestled through my experiences at the intersection of Mexican, L'Arche, and my own culture and beliefs.

After a year in Mexico City, the prospect of transitioning to L'Arche Greater Washington, DC was attractive for a number of reasons. In addition to being located closer to family and providing an opportunity for me to continue utilizing the Spanish language to grow in relationships with core members Johnny and Walton, I felt that moving to Washington, DC would be an impetus for me to become more civically engaged and aware. Having spent November of 2016 in Mexico frantically watching YouTube videos explaining the electoral college and shamefully admitting to friends that I did not pay much attention during my high school civics class, I was ready for a change. Surely, living in our nation's capital and having a visible reminder via government buildings and organized marches and protests as I went about my routine would motivate me to live a more civically aware life, right?

While this may be true and I feel I've grown in my understanding of L'Arche's relationship with government partners and my personal responsibility to advocate, core members and community mates in DC have invited me to live a "protest" that is unlike any I expected to be participating in.



### I LIVE A DAILY "PROTEST"; A PROTEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

I live a daily protest where relationships reveal truth, beauty, giftedness, and pain in the face of a world, a society, a people who would rather close their eyes tight and plug their ears.

I live a daily protest where the most implausible group of friends becomes family – where we silently, but never subtly, fight for dignity.

I live a daily protest where our dinner tables become pulpits for the most unlikely of prophets and doctors' offices, courthouses, and coffee shops are transformed into landscapes in which we encounter the Holy. Voices unite

and stories are shared across language differences. A simple handshake and smile have the power to transport straight to the heart of it all – so mysterious, yet suddenly so clear.

We live a daily protest and are blessed, broken, and grateful. Sometimes, showing up and being fully present to this protest is more than enough.



### JOHN COOK'S CELEBRATION PASTA

Initially created as a colorful, vegan, gluten-free entrée and served for 2014 L'Arche GWDC Easter dinner at Ontario. Notes: Delicious, beautiful, and scalable! Good hot, warm, cold. Leftovers are great: Cold with avocado is good. 8-12 servings | Prep about 1 hour

#### **Ingredients**

1 lb extra-firm tofu, cut in 1/2 in cubes Gluten-free tamari (soy sauce)

3/4 lb Asparagus, cut in 1-inch pieces, with woody part removed (broil thicker stems)

1 lb Crimini or Baby Bella mushrooms, sliced thinly

6-8 oz pitted Kalamata olives, halved or chopped

1.5 pints Grape (or other sweet) tomatoes, whole

Colorful sweet mini peppers sliced in thin circles (the kind often sold in bags)

Garlic, lots, minced

1/4 cup olive oil

Salt

16 oz Gluten Free pasta rotini (not rice, gets gooey, especially with large batches)

#### **Directions**

- 1. Marinate tofu in soy sauce for 30 minutes.
- 2. Drain tofu and set aside.
- 3. Sauté garlic in olive oil. Add salt. There is a lot of olive oil because this becomes a warm, garlicky dressing.
- 4. Broil thicker parts of asparagus (small, tender tips will cook enough in pasta, without prior cooking).
- 5. Cook pasta, with some olive oil to prevent sticking, and drain well.
- 6. Mix everything together while the pasta is hot except tomatoes, unless serving immediately, so they remain relatively cool and crisp and bright, smooth red. Raw mushroom slices will cook and become dark; raw small asparagus tips will become bright green and slightly crunchy.

7. Serve.



### L'Arche Greater Washington, D.C.

P.O. Box 21471 | Washington, D.C. 20009 202.232.4539 | www.larche-gwdc.org

### **Upcoming Events**

### **OPEN HOUSES:**

October 13th 2-4 p.m.

Ontario House 2474 Ontario Road NW Washington, DC 20009

November 3rd

2-4 p.m.

Highland House 413 S Highland St Arlington, VA 22204

Sixth Street House 3008 S Sixth Street Arlington, VA 22204

#### **PRAYER NIGHTS:**

### Arlington Homes

First Tuesday of the Month 7-8 p.m. Ends with a snack and fellowship. Location: Our Lady Queen of Peace 2700 S 19th St Arlington, VA 22204

### L'Arche Prayer Nights at Georgetown

Second Monday of the Month

7-8 p.m.
Location: Pedro Arrupe
Residence Hall
Arrupe Multipurpose Room 6411
Tondorf Rd
Washington, DC 20007

#### D.C. Homes

First Tuesday of the Month 6:15-8 p.m. Begins with a potluck dinner. Location: Pastoral Center 5001 Eastern Ave Hyattsville, MD 20782

#### **COME TO DINNER!**

Find a time to join us for dinner at one of our homes or arrange to bring dinner for a house by contacting info@larche-gwdc.org.



Eileen, Laura and Dave lead community in a song. Credit: Ryan Donnell