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How many socially distant birthdays and anniversaries do you think we've celebrated during Covid-19? Find the answer to this and more inside!



Eileen waters flowers. Credit: Ryan Donnell

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Fritz and Lauren enjoy a Jeep drive to a park.
Photo Credit: Lauren Palmer

Surprises, Sacrifices, and Silver Linings of Staying Home By Mary Ellen Dingley

The screen is black. Then Eileen's smiling face appears and it's time for another Zoom meeting. We used to see each other in person several times a week - now this is as close as some of our community members can get.

When we started taking precautions in March, canceling in person events, having some staff work from home, we thought the precautions would last a few weeks. Here we are, 6 months later. Our four homes are staying safe at home, with only select people going in and out.

Assistants and Home Life Leaders have gone from coordinating dinner guests and volunteers to coordinating video calls. Instead of core members going to work or day programs, we're all at home during the day. Necessary health guidelines have caused a huge shift in our daily lives.

Our new normal isn't always easy, but it is still good. As we say at L'Arche: "we belong together." That's true in the hard times and the easy times. It's true as we celebrate Christmas in July and play Uno and it's true as we sanitize multiple times a day and don our masks.

The COVID-19 pandemic causes significant risk for people with disabilities and the group homes where many of us live. While L'Arche has a very different model than most group homes - using a communal, family-style model rather than a top down "provider-client" one - we share those risks. Following the current health guidelines, assistants now wear masks (even inside) and we no longer have dinners around the same table or gather in a circle for prayer - everyone who can must remain 6 feet apart. Even in their own homes. For dinner time, people in the homes are getting creative: one house created a map, using measuring tape, to figure out how people could all be eating at card tables six feet apart but still in the same room.

As Lauren Palmer, the Home Life Leader of Highland House in Virginia said, "we found a routine, we found a new normal, but I don't want this to be normal."

She pointed out that providing support and activities during the day (instead of core members being at work) has been one of the biggest transitions. "Overnight we became a day program."

Continued on page 3 >

Joseph hangs out with Don's new kitten.
Credit: Maryanne Henderson



Michael enjoyed his in-house visit to "McDonald's."
Credit: Maryanne Henderson



Laurie and Sarah out for a walk.
Credit: Sarah Sweeney



Continued from cover >

That is a huge deal." It raised many questions: "How do you engage them (core members) in their work-life like Laurie's weaving? How do we do what day programs did?"

Laurie Pippenger works at Arlington Weaves. Her workplace has closed and they told her to "be patient, stay at home all day..." she reports. Instead of heading to work now she spends her days hanging out, calling people, doing crafts, and watching movies. She enjoys sleeping in and makes sure to encourage other people in her house to go on walks. "We are having a lot of fun and beautiful friends around you," she said. Even now, months in, she says that quarantine makes her "so happy."

There is certainly joy to be found in the new normal. Laura Heimen, Home Life Leader of Ontario House in DC, reported excitedly that "I saw Debora actually paint a canvas for the first time in my life!" Debora Green is a prolific artist but usually paints at her workplace, Art Enables. This strange time has given Laura "less of a human doing type of mindset and more of a human being mindset." "I feel like we are able to be present to one another more in the time we spend together at home," she explained.

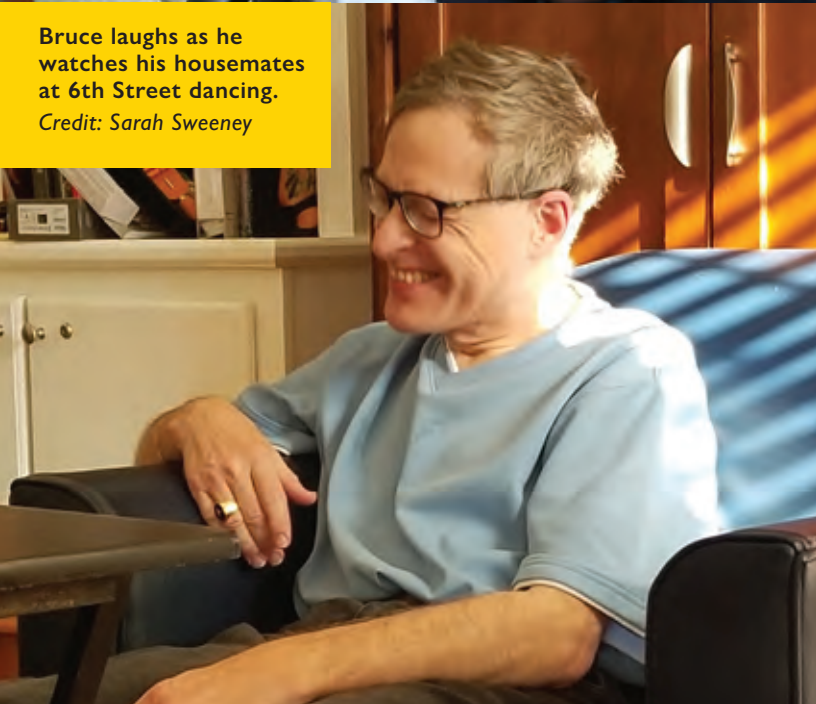
Everyone is still feeling how the virus is restricting our choices—"It's really a shame," says Lauren, speaking about how the virus demands we give up some of our usual activities and connections. "And I'm really thinking of people with disabilities here because they are already much more limited in these areas than I am—as someone without a disability—and those pre-existing limits are only magnified in this pandemic context."

It's also been a struggle for the disability community to receive the recognition and support they need during the pandemic. The disability community and direct support professionals were "overlooked in the initial planning and response around coronavirus" says Eva-Elizabeth Chisholm, Human Services Leader at L'Arche GWDC. Support organizations and professionals had to "really fight" to be recognized as essential workers, she explained.

Through it all we are finding ways to connect and finding joy. Johnny is working on paintings for an upcoming art show. Francene and Maggie give concerts on Zoom for their house-mates. Eileen does virtual outreach to students.

"There's no way that we could do this without Kelly making people laugh and Eric naming so clearly what we are all feeling," says Lauren. "Yeah we're quarantining together ... that's the whole point of all of this. L'Arche doesn't exist without core members."

Bruce laughs as he watches his housemates at 6th Street dancing.
Credit: Sarah Sweeney



Gloriose, Debora, and Laura express thanks after our virtual fundraiser!
Credit: Maryanne Henderson



Johnny shares one of his newest pinturas (paintings) and smiles.
Credit: Laura Heiman



Andrew makes a new friend while on his walk! He's signing "how are you."
Credit: Iniobong Onah



Our Executive Director and Community Leader, Luke Smith, has been working hard to ensure we have the PPE needed to provide and receive care safely. Credit: Lauren Palmer

COVID-19 By the Numbers

From March 15th to August 31st we...

Received **1,350 cloth masks** and **75 face shields**

Hosted **104 "TED Talks" at Ontario House**

Celebrated **31 socially distant birthdays and anniversaries**

Welcomed **16 new assistants**

Trained 72 people on new health measures

Held over **50 Zoom house meetings**

Hosted **5 virtual prayer nights** attended by around **60 people** each time

Wednesday Volunteer

By Brian Healey, Volunteer with L'Arche GWDC



Brian (far right in blue) lends a supportive hand to Bruce as they pose with 6th Street house members in 2018.

Credit: Brian Taylor

At the L'Arche home on South Sixth Street in Arlington, VA I am simply known as "The Wednesday Volunteer."

"Hello, Wednesday Volunteer" is how Father Tim Malone usually greets me. He is an Episcopalian priest and a devoted supporter of L'Arche.

"Here comes the Wednesday Volunteer" chimes in Lauren Palmer, a community leader.

When new assistants arrive and I introduce myself, they often reply "Oh, I've heard of you. You're the Wednesday Volunteer."

So how did it all start?

Ten years ago, this month, L'Arche opened a new house in Arlington. I had been a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps International Board, which was merging with the U.S. Board. Since the merger meant we had more than enough members, I offered to leave. So, I volunteered to leave since I was soon retiring from my day job. My fellow board member Fr.Tom Gaunt SJ said "Not so fast."

He invited me to an open house for a new L'Arche home opening in Virginia. I went. And the rest is history.

So, with a few exceptions for holidays and vacations and the current global pandemic, each Wednesday I drive the 23 miles to South Sixth Street.

I clean the main floor toilets with Bruce Weaver, who lives at the house. We bonded at an early outdoor concert at Pentagon City when we both started singing when the band played "Africa" by the rock group Toto.

I wash the windows—sometimes with the help of Charles Clark—the acknowledged elder statesman of the house. We also play cards, argue about baseball and politics. Mostly, hang out.

Occasionally I get to take a walk with Francene Short. Francene also loves to drive in my car with me to monthly prayer meetings. She likes to listen to the music I play. Once someone else tried to get in and Francene left. That drive is ours.

I occasionally cook—my curried chicken salad is popular. So are my enchiladas. Charles likes the wine I bring.

So why? At first, my thought was to help some faceless, nameless folks with disabilities. An act of Christian charity. But soon they had names—Eva-Elizabeth, Francene, Laurie, Bruce, Charles. And then Hazel and Fritz and Eric and Linda and Kelly from Highland House. Michael and Sonny and Eileen and Debora and others from the DC houses. Names with stories. Stories they wanted to share. Soon, they were friends. And part of my life.

What volunteers offer is our presence. As Woody Allen once said: "Eighty percent of life is showing up." We show up! We enter into friendship. We become, as Charles Clark likes to say, "family members."

And there is more. I have come to know and admire and love dozens of L'Arche assistants. I have seen them grow and marry—four times to other assistants—and have children.

Yet, since March, volunteers are not allowed to visit. Covid 19!

We meet on Zoom—but, in all honesty, it is a poor replacement. I pray for the end of the virus for an endless list of reasons. On that list, is my odd prayer that soon I can return to simply cleaning the toilets with Bruce. I miss being the Wednesday Volunteer.

VIRTUAL PRAYER NIGHT

Join us for our virtual prayer nights on the first Tuesday of the month! These are lovely times of prayer, reflection, and connecting with friends. One great part about virtual gatherings is that people can join from across the country and the world. Our friend Dorothy Copps has joined from Arizona and said it was so great seeing everyone's faces at prayer night and that it "stirs up good memories of all those prayer nights I attended over all those years."

Find the zoom link on our website's events page or get in touch at info@larche-gwdc.org.



Sculptures of Diversity at L'Arche by community members

Diversity Commission listens, grieves, and calls for activism on racial justice

By The L'Arche GWDC Diversity Commission

Among the incredible losses of 2020, this summer brought a particular communal grieving and mourning for the deep racial injustice in the US. The death of Breonna Taylor and too many others, and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on African American communities, led to a widespread awakening for white people. White people are opening their eyes to the privileges of being white and to the fear faced by Black people and other people of color.

The summer of 2020 was a summer of racial reckoning. With this reckoning has come grief; which is hard to name, does not have an order or a timeline, and can include anger and hope.

And so, what do we do?

"What do we do?" is a question, on repeat, in the minds of many members of L'Arche GWDC's Diversity Commission.

First, we look back at what we have done. While our Diversity Commission has done hard and beautiful work, it is only a beginning. We lead storytelling, celebrations, and assessments and trainings on anti-racism, cultural competence and inclusion. Together we unpack our individual and interpersonal identities through *Where I Am From* poems, learning languages, and breaking bread with our cultural dishes. We ask questions with wide sweeping topics, "What statutes do/don't represent us?" "What are the roles held by, and needed from, adults with intellectual disabilities in the fight against racism?"

But even with our active Diversity Commission, we are not yet fully addressing the way white dominant culture is a part of our bodies and our daily lives at L'Arche.

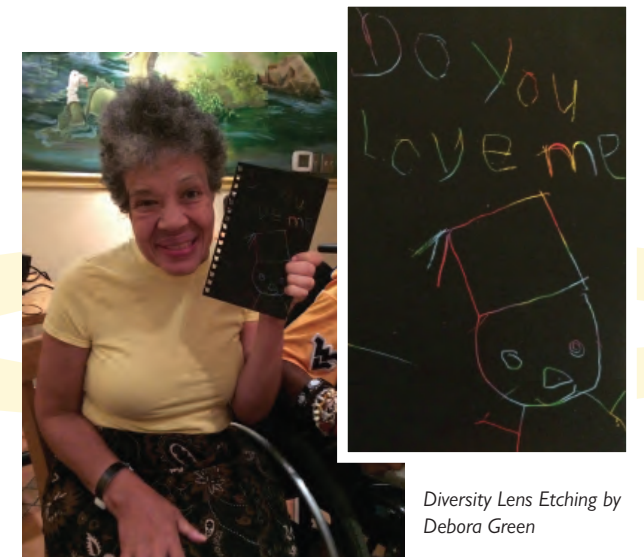
And so, what do we do, now?

As Tina Bovermann, National Leader of L'Arche in the United States, affirms: "Our path is to listen in pursuit of justice and inclusion, of love and care, of belonging and

unity." This listening work, inspired by our grief, is what is calling us to action, to take our stand against racial injustice. Our activism is rooted in L'Arche's identity to "celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need for one another." The work is to acknowledge and act upon the spaces where white culture systematically and institutionally undermines celebration and interdependence, for all people.

Through our celebration of every person, and in our need of one another, L'Arche GWDC's Diversity Commission is humbly confronting the challenge of racial justice; doing the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and in doing so grieving and hoping for a just future.

Join us in listening: *On Being* with Krista Tippett Episode 855: Robin DiAngelo and Resmaa Menakem In Conversation and in work: Diversity Commission Virtual Meeting November 14th, 2020 at 10am (email info@larche-gwdc.org for Zoom link and information).



Diversity Lens Etching by Debora Green



Left to right: Eileen with some of her art. Debora creating.
Photos by Laura Heiman.

Debora and Eileen at Art Enables

Before we began staying safe at home, core members would spend their days at work, volunteering, or at various day programs. With our “new normal” core members fill their days in different ways, including working from home!

Debora Green and Eileen Schofield work at Art Enables, an art gallery and vocational program for artists with disabilities to learn, create, and sell their work.

Debora and Eileen continue creating with Art Enables but now from their own desks and dining room tables. Art Enables stays in touch and sends art supplies. Eileen and Debora are both still immersed in creating drawings and paintings, but Eileen says she misses seeing her friends. “I like Raymond, I like Tony [Tony Brunswick, Art Enables Executive Director], and some other people I like.”

When she could go to Art Enables she would “paint and we help others,” said Debora. She usually helps set the tables for other people.

I asked Eileen what she liked about working at Art Enables: “I do my art and I like it there. And I do all my own art and they sell it. And I get a check for it.”

Debora mentioned how she will sometimes sell her art and use the money to help other people. She occasionally combines writing and drawing or painting together, telling stories through both the text and imagery.

Eileen’s paintings are known for their bright, bold colors. She said “I don’t like all white. I like colors in them. I like something with color in it.” The color “makes me feel happy.”

The vibrant art of L’Arche core members has made many people feel happy through the years, as they lead us in creativity and personal expression!

Check out more about Art Enables at art-enables.org.

Staying at Home Doesn’t Mean Staying Silent

By Mary Ellen Dingley

Recently, I caught up with Charles Clark, an active advocate around many issues and a core family member at 6th Street. He regularly speaks about pressing issues with nonprofits and Virginia representatives. Charles started his advocacy work when he joined L’Arche and since then he’s gotten involved in all sorts of ways. Lately he has been helping support people to get into college, to go to high school and get a diploma.

He’s passionate about raising the minimum wage to \$15. (Current minimum wage in Virginia is \$7.25.) “That’s what I’ve been advocating for all these years, you know. I’ve been advocating for that every time I go to Richmond.” Charles has been to the Virginia State Capitol with the Arc of Northern Virginia to advocate on issues impacting people living with disabilities. Charles also recently spoke to delegate Alfonso Lopez via video chat about disability issues.

I asked him, with all the different advocacy work he did, which is the problem he cares the most about? He immediately answered: “Black Lives Matter.” The issue of racial justice is so important to him because Charles is passionate about good law enforcement and also, he explained, “I just want to help people.”

I asked Charles “Why do you care so much about helping people?” He replied it’s “my civic duty to do it and it’s what God wants me to do.” So a mixture of civic duty and faith? “Uh huh, both.”

Other issues near to his heart are job creation, raising teachers’ salaries, and remembering that students are our “future leaders.” Charles also takes part in work on the L’Arche GWDC Diversity Commission. “We talk about different cultures and everything and how people live and want to be free,” Charles explained.

What advice do you have for people who are new to doing advocacy work? “Start out and join the Arc and the Alliance.” (A Life Like Yours’ Self Advocacy Alliance.)

Charles is currently staying safe at home due to the pandemic. He’s “frustrated up to the ceiling” with the virus, but is planning for the future, including a camping and fishing trip! Charles is also excited to vote in the 2020 election. He wants to remind people that we have the right to vote.

What is his favorite thing about all of his advocacy work? “It helps other people.”

Charles at the Arlington County Board for a meeting.
Photo Credit: Mary Ellen Dingley



Hazel practices a safety procedure. Credit: John Cook.

ALL FOR SAFETY & SAFETY FOR ALL

Back in March, Highland House led an emergency and safety preparedness training for everyone in the home. They made sure that this training wasn’t a typical one; it was adapted so that everyone, including core members, could engage in and understand the materials. Accessible emergency training like this isn’t common – instead, emergency training sometimes can be a “check the box” type of activities, with inaccessible documents and unengaging processes. There may be a poster on the wall or drills to follow, but trainers might not discuss the procedures with people with intellectual disabilities to ensure understanding and people with disabilities might not have been invited to help with the initial design of the emergency plans.

COVID-19 puts a magnifying glass to this disparity. People with disabilities are facing limits, oppression, and lack of choices every day. When it comes to natural disasters, a house fire, or a pandemic, this is only exacerbated as people with disabilities are often the most vulnerable in the wake of a crisis. And often, no one talks to them about it. People, including people with disabilities, should know where emergency equipment is in their own home and the safest way to react.

When Highland House members thought about what they wanted to do with their emergency training they considered how emergency situations would actually look like “on the ground.” They created accessible content themselves, including creating or finding images and videos for the training. Hazel (core member) and Lauren (Home Life Leader) discussed how to make a plan for fire safety for her. Together they wrote down “if x happened, what do you do?”

At the end of the day, accessible emergency training and planning benefits everyone! For example, having a script by the phone for what to say in different situations if you need to call 911 is useful to all of us in the middle of an emergency. “When we’re talking about inclusive practices it’s always better for everyone, not just people with disabilities,” says Lauren.

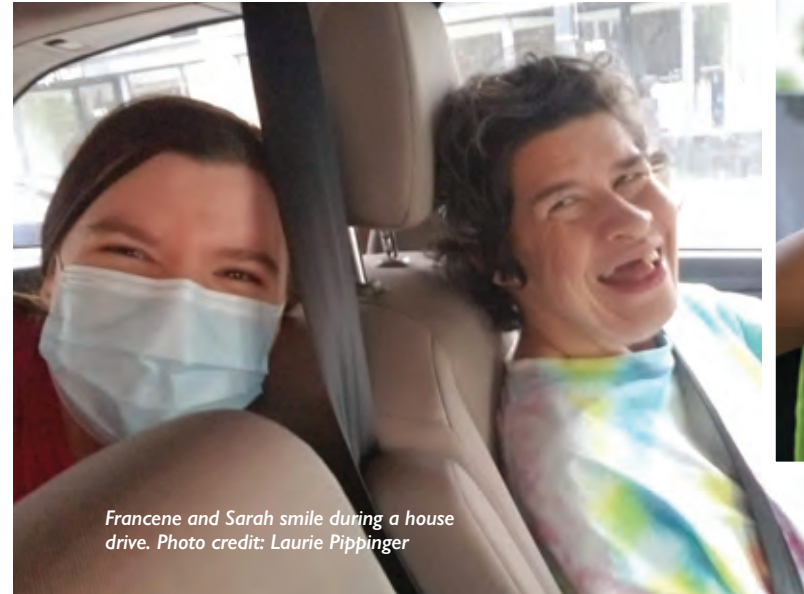
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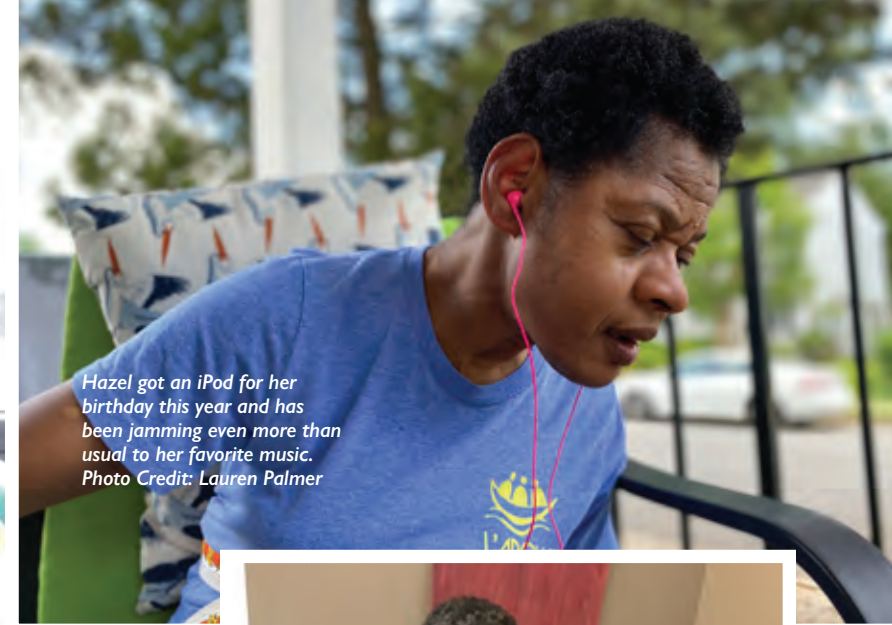
Ontario House at Maryanne's performance of "Perfect Arrangement" before social distancing guidelines began.



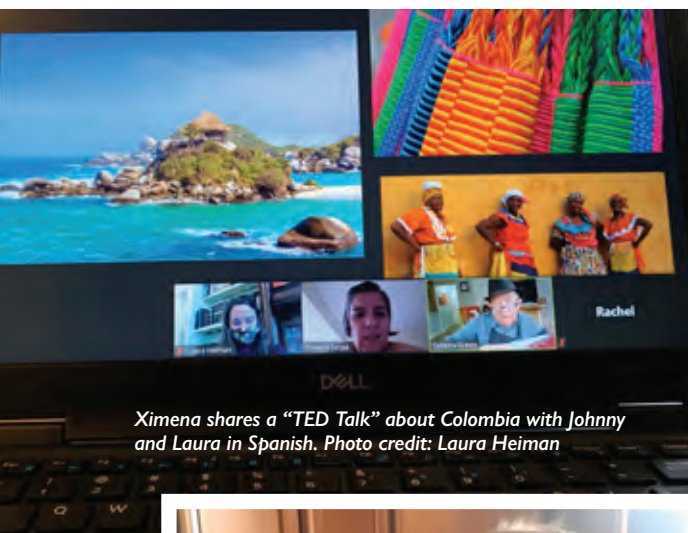
Highland House got a tent for the backyard because why not? Kelly, Fritz, and Alice enjoy it! Photo Credit: Lauren Palmer



Francene and Sarah smile during a house drive. Photo credit: Laurie Pippinger



Hazel got an iPod for her birthday this year and has been jamming even more than usual to her favorite music. Photo Credit: Lauren Palmer



Ximena shares a "TED Talk" about Colombia with Johnny and Laura in Spanish. Photo credit: Laura Heiman



Andrew received new headphones from his sister for his April birthday. Photo Credit: Maryanne Henderson



Highlanders gather around their desktop to celebrate Charles' birthday. Tuesdays once meant eating together and now it means zooming. Photo Credit: Lauren Palmer



Joseph makes sweet tea for Euclid. Photo Credit: Maryanne Henderson



Eric cooks dinner. Social distancing brings a lot of new things, but we're still making good food. Photo credit: Lauren Palmer



Iveta and Eileen pose with a plate of creepy cookies for Halloween in June at Ontario House! Photo credit: Laura Heiman



Yellow Submarine Party at Ontario House!

Reflections from a Virtual Summer Intern

By Collin Flake, 2020 Intern

In February of this year, the Field Education office at Duke Divinity School paired me with L'Arche GWDC for a summer internship. I was ecstatic. I've been a fan of L'Arche and its vision for several years now, so I was excited to join in ... as soon as COVID went away. But then it didn't. As it became clear that my time with L'Arche would be fully online, my initial excitement was mixed with disappointment. Instead of being in Washington D.C., I was going to be at home with my parents in Georgia over the summer for the first time in five years. L'Arche is, more than anything else, a community. And living in community requires the daily interactions I've come to think of as a "ministry of presence." How do you practice a ministry of presence when you can't be present?

But L'Arche GWDC found a way to welcome me anyway. Core members and assistants invited me into their daily, weekly, and monthly routines. I found myself looking forward to prayer nights, birthdays, house meetings, and especially to regular FaceTime conversations with Hazel. Hazel, more than anyone else, has taught me what it looks like to welcome, to stay connected, to listen, and to just be in the midst of a pandemic.

I originally thought that doing "L'Arche from home" would be a contradiction. And that held true to an extent—FaceTiming is no substitute for the richness of doing each day together. And yet, doing "L'Arche from home" has caused me to grow in unexpected ways.

L'Arche embodies many things I've come to value since leaving home. So, bringing those values into conversation with my hometown and family has helped me integrate disparate pieces of my life in new ways. I've come to greater appreciate the beauty and complexity not just of L'Arche, but also of the place and the people who shaped me long before I had ever heard of L'Arche—and I've come to love both all the more.

As part of my internship through Duke, I was asked to consider what L'Arche contributes to a community's understanding and experience of "The Good." The following are three ways L'Arche has shaped my idea of what it is to be good, starting with the most tangible and ending with the most abstract, though I believe all three are deeply interconnected.

1. L'Arche has shown me what community with and for persons with Intellectual Disabilities looks like.

Before this summer, I'd had very limited interactions with persons with disabilities. But L'Arche is at the cutting edge of the Disability Rights Movement, and my new friendships there have taught me to care about this topic. In the past, families who lacked the resources to care for those with severe intellectual or developmental disabilities would often send them to an institution where they could receive specialized care, but these institutions were (and are) often prone to abuse and neglect. So, there's been a growing call for de-institutionalization in favor of smaller-scale models like L'Arche.

2. L'Arche Renews the Church's Imagination

The more time I spend amongst intentional communities of faith like L'Arche which place the marginalized at their center, the more I come to believe they will play a key role in renewing the Church in the 21st century. L'Arche provides for the Church what monastic renewal movements have in previous eras. For those who may have felt excluded their whole lives, L'Arche is a place of love and welcome. For lonely young professionals busy trying to save the world, L'Arche offers a space to slow down and through prayer or celebration or a meal to remember why the world is worth saving in the first place. In the words of L'Arche's liturgy for celebrations: "In the midst of the busy schedules and the buzz of city life, we pause to celebrate." And for the wounded and the doubting L'Arche offers a glimpse of the Kingdom of God, a sign of the beloved community we might have come to believe wasn't possible.

3. L'Arche Challenges Problematic Cultural Paradigms

Our culture is obsessed with the myth of the autonomous individual. The myth of the autonomous individual ignores how interdependent we all are, and it makes us uncomfortable around those who don't fit its narrative, like persons with intellectual disabilities. The reality is that every person depends for their existence upon other people, upon the earth, and upon God.

L'Arche reminds us that it is only possible to be good in community. It is in community that we discover both our greatest gifts and our deepest wounds. To quote L'Arche's charter, we become more human.



Home Life Meeting at Highland house has gotten creative with virtual interns and new assistants joining electronically due to COVID precautions. Collin joins on video chat! Photo Credit: Liddy Grantland



Rebecca and her family enjoy spending some holiday fun with L'Arche, including sharing Christmas decor viewing with Fritz!



Reaching Out with L'Arche

By Rebecca Grady, Friend of L'Arche

My first encounter with L'Arche was at St. Mary's in 2016. I sat directly behind Charles Clark, Fritz Schloss, and Sarah (Clemmer) Moore. When the hymns were being sung, my friend Colleen opened a second hymnal and stepped toward the well-dressed gentleman and offered it to him. He smiled and took the hymnal and sang along. Because she first reached out, she taught me how to be a friend to Charles.

A few weeks later, I greeted Charles and met his fellow Core Member, Fritz, and the Home Life Leader at Highland House, Sarah. Sarah told me more about L'Arche and on May 26, 2016, I brought my family and dinner to share with Highland House. Over the next four years, Fritz, Charles, and Sarah introduced us to many L'Arche traditions and we met so many new friends!

Before Covid-19 halted gatherings five short months ago, I attended what turned out to be my last service at St. Mary's. When L'Arche entered, Danny, an assistant at Sixth Street House, and Francene and Bruce, Core Members from Sixth Street House, sat across the aisle from me. But Fritz did something he had never done before — he came across the aisle and sat next to me. During the prayers, he reached across and held my hand, which he had also never done before.

As time has passed and the physical distancing guidelines remain, I often remember that moment and it gives me strength. In that moment, I felt the compassion and friendship I'd known since childhood in my relationships with my brother and father who had intellectual disabilities, the friendship I found again the first time I stepped foot inside Highland House. Although I didn't know that it would be months or years before we could hug or hold hands again, God used that moment, creating an act of love to sustain me, Fritz, and hopefully you during this time of physical distancing and separation. I know our L'Arche family will all be coming over for a big party when it is safe to do so!

During this time of physical separation, my first friend at L'Arche, Charles, and I have maintained a weekly check-in on Fridays where we do a video call and talk for an hour. Sometimes during our video chats, we reminisce about growing up, other times he plays the harmonica and I play the piano. But we never end a call without planning the party we will have when "Coronavirus is over". A party where we will serve beer and wine, square dance, and sing!

L'Arche has continued to teach me how to live and breathe in a time of much change and upheaval. It is our attitude and support of others that carry us through the hard times. And somewhere along the way, we realize the hard times are actually...good times. Because we are still together right now and supporting each other - just in different ways.