

Host a L'Arche Party!



The fundraising team is looking for folks who would be willing to host a wine and cheese party for L'Arche. These can be small to large gatherings. We can help with invitations, which would include a request for a donation, and provide a speaker. You won't even have to leave your home. If you are interested, please contact Talley Wells at ctwells@alumni.duke.edu or 404-627-6756.

SunTrust... Helping You Help Us



Open an account and SunTrust will donate \$100 to Friends of L'Arche Atlanta! SunTrust has made community involvement an important part of their relationships with the community. Now, They are offering a special opportunity that can help you help Friends of L'Arche Atlanta.

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IDENTITY OF L'ARCHE

We are people, with and without developmental disabilities, sharing life in communities of faith. Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our life together. We seek to build a world that recognizes the unique value of every person and our need of one another.

The MISSION OF L'ARCHE is

To make known the gifts of people with developmental disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships;

To engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society;

To foster community that is inspired by the core values in our founding



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A sign of hope in a broken world...

**Make donations
online!!
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H(A)R(K)!

A Sign of Hope in a Broken World

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A Sign of Hope for Atlanta

"And this shall be a sign for you, a child, lying in a manger"

David Jenkins

President, L'Arche USA

Five years ago Atlanta hosted a retreat with Jean Vanier. A few months later, Jo Anne Horstman, our L'Arche Regional Coordinator, returned to Atlanta to meet with a handful of us at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, mostly those who had attended the retreat and who had shown an interest in starting L'Arche in Atlanta. She reminded us that there would be years of work ahead of us before we could open our first L'Arche house, years of fundraising, meeting, organizing, lobbying, announcing, praying, planning, traveling to other L'Arche communities. Why, she asked, would we be willing to devote ourselves to years of slow, demanding, often frustrating effort, only to open a house for only three or four people with intellectual disabilities and their assistants? L'Arche is so small. In a huge city with so many people with disabilities, L'Arche would be a small sign.



Russell, a Work & Progress student at Bobby Dodd, holds his new friend, Julia. Julia is the daughter of Laura Magistro Wells.

Jo Anne's question lingers in the hearts of all who love L'Arche. So much care, money, and work for such a small sign. Yet people of faith understand and believe in the significance of these small signs. The holiest of signs are always embodied in the ordinary, humble human experiences: someone's dream, a newborn in a barn, a few loaves of bread and some fish, a glass of wine. These signs fill us with hope as they lead us into God's future.

In India, where L'Arche homes bring together Muslims, Hindus, and Christians, as well as people from many castes, a little L'Arche home is a sacred sign to a diverse culture of a billion people. In Africa, where people with disabilities are locked in closets or abandoned in forests, L'Arche is a radical sign of what it means to be human. In the Mideast, a simple L'Arche workshop with Palestinian Muslims and Christians shines in the darkness of hate and revenge. Throughout Europe and North America, where our worth is measured by bank accounts, degrees, and accomplishments, L'Arche is a sign of profound value, of the giftedness of every child of God.

So can we imagine together how L'Arche can be such a sign for Atlanta, a city still divided by race, politics, religion, and class; a city (like many) which resists diversity and fears the stranger? Can we trust those with intellectual disabilities to do what signs always do - locate us, point the way, guide us in a pilgrimage of joy?

Inside this issue...

**What you
can do...**
page 2

**President's
Message**
page 2

**Atlanta
Needs Us**
page 3

**Thank You
Donors**
page 3

Giving and Receiving Come Join Us As We Grow

Being in a L'Arche community for any period of time is not about doing things for other people, rather, it's about being together and sharing in the simple moments of life. The Friends of L'Arche Atlanta board of directors is charged with the task of doing the behind the scenes work that will make it possible for the core members and assistants who come to live in L'Arche to live out this vision. A well-laid foundation is necessary so that we can welcome community members for life into a place where they can have meaningful relationships, work, social activities and worship. As we move closer to our goal of opening a home by the beginning of 2010, we are in need of a few more people to join our committees and board.

Do you have any of the following gifts that you can share:

*Experience working with government agencies particularly related to Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, transportation, recreation, employment?

*Knowledge of real estate, property, zoning, or mortgages?

*Human Resource experience with hiring, salary, benefits and payroll?

*Experience with fundraising, development, foundations and grants, budgets?

Even if you are not an expert in one of these areas but are the kind of person who can assist a committee in finding out the answers, we can use your help. If you are interested in discussing how you can help be part of this groundbreaking work, please contact Laura Magistro Wells, Board President, at (404) 627-6756 or info@larcheatlanta.org.

Reflections from the Playground Called Life

Today I took my two children to a local park in a neighborhood not that far from my own. As I was chasing my 14 month-old around the playground, I noticed a woman in scrubs pushing the wheelchair of a young girl about 9 or 10 years old. The young girl had a beautiful smile and spoke very clearly to her companion. She also seemed to have cerebral palsy that limited the use of her arms and legs. It made me smile to see her at the playground—braving the hot and humid summer day like the rest of us.

A short time later I went to sit at the picnic table in the center of the playground and I watched as the woman carried the little girl to the nearby swing and put her on it. The woman then walked away from the swing and sat in the young girl's wheelchair, opened a book, and started reading. My heart sank. The young girl could not make the swing go by herself and so she sat there staring off into the distance. Her companion continued to read for the next fifteen minutes. Then, I heard the little girl ask her caregiver if she would move her from the swing to the slide and the woman responded in a stern voice: "I will take you but you need to make up your mind...you are too heavy for me to have to keep moving you."

I do not know for sure, but I am almost certain that this woman dressed in uniform was not this child's family member. If my assumption is true, someone employed this woman to be this young girl's *caregiver*. Yet, the woman I observed was not really interested in providing much care to this child beyond the very basic provisions. Observing this interaction today, I was reminded of why Atlanta needs L'Arche so badly. People with developmental disabilities, like the girl I saw today on the playground, deserve a full life where they are not just tolerated but are embraced for their giftedness. But even more than that, all people need L'Arche as a witness and a sign of hope of how all of the broken places in each of us is made more whole when we share our lives with each other.

When I lived in L'Arche in Scotland, we regularly went out to the shops, restaurants, and pubs with the core members. Unfortunately, there were many times when I became angry at how the core members were treated with disdain or disrespected by others we encountered. Yet, there were also many times when people in the town of Inverness took the time to engage us in conversation and other small kindnesses. I saw how the town was transformed one person at a time as these people opened themselves up to the infectious laughter of Tracey or the charming inquisition they received from Mark. The bus drivers, the local firefighters, the shop owners and the neighbors, once they opened their minds and hearts to my friends in L'Arche; they suddenly found themselves drawn to the community to eat dinner, to visit with core members, and to invite some of the core members to their homes and lives. As a result, I witnessed how many of these same townspeople were inspired to live a more full and meaningful life of connection in the greater community.

L'Arche is a place that people can really call home. There are good times and bad times, and relationships aren't always easy, but they are real. L'Arche in Atlanta will be a sign of hope to us all because people of different abilities, ethnicity, and faith backgrounds can live real relationships of love and respect together. And this will change lives, one person at a time.

Laura Magistro Wells, Board of Directors President

Now is the Time for L'Arche in Atlanta

Talley Wells
Fundraising Chairperson

Front-page headlines in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC)* during the last two months show that now is the time for L'Arche in Atlanta. In fact, more has happened, and more promises have been made, for adults with developmental disabilities (DD) in institutions in Georgia during this time than ever before. The key promise is that all adults with DD living in institutions in Georgia will be given the opportunity to live in community placements with appropriate support. Unfortunately, this promise is only a promise until it happens.

This is why L'Arche in Atlanta is so needed. L'Arche will be a sign of the enormous potential for community, fulfillment, and hope for people with DD in institutions and nursing homes.

So, what has happened?

In late May 2008, the U.S. Justice Department came out with a scathing report about the grave danger people who live in mental health institutions in Georgia face to their lives and safety due to problems with conditions, care, and supervision. The report described specific situations where people died, were injured, or suffered neglect. While the majority of people in state institutions primarily have mental illness, there are still many adults with DD in institutions.

Just before the Department of Justice was to issue its report, a state mental health taskforce appointed by the Governor issued its own report about what the needs were for adults living in institutions. The problem with the report, as discovered by the *AJC*, was that it was copied almost word for word from a report by a Michigan task-

force. After this was discovered, the taskforce promised to reconvene and issue its own report.

At the end of June, the state entered an agreement with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In the agreement, Georgia promised that it would move all of the people with DD living in state institutions into community placements in the next five years. Georgia has acknowledged that it will need to devote more resources to make this happen.

Unfortunately, the OCR agreement does not cover the 1700 people with DD in Georgia who live in nursing homes. The agreement does state that Georgia will not move people from institutions into nursing homes. The state did agree to create a plan for community support for all individuals with DD who are at risk of institutionalization.

While L'Arche in Atlanta will only be able to welcome a small number of people to our first home, L'Arche will serve as a witness that adults with DD can thrive outside of institutional living. The state's commitment will also provide additional funding opportunities for L'Arche in Atlanta. Georgia's past history leaves a lot of room for cynicism about the state's commitment, but now is also the time for faith, hope, and action. Now, is the time for L'Arche.

Looking for a gift idea for someone who has everything?

Want to give a gift that keeps on giving?

Postage rates too high to ship presents?

You can make a donation to L'Arche in someone's honor!

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