

STATEMENT OF CHAIRPERSON FOR L'ARCHE BELFAST AGM

9th December 2008

Introduction

A warm welcome to you all to this our seventh Annual General Meeting of L'Arche Belfast, as always it is good to see so many friends of L'Arche and so many familiar faces and you are all very welcome.

I want to thank Wilfred Orr, the Minister of Saint John's Church, the Church Elders and Scott Guiseley for the use of the tremendous facilities here. I know the Community has continued to make regular use of them and found them to be most accessible.

As usual, we will endeavour to keep the formal part of our meeting to a minimum and this will commence with the approval of the minutes of our most recent AGM from December 2007, the receipt and acceptance of our annual report and financial Statements for the year ended March 2008 and approval of the re-appointment of our accountants.

I would now ask Mr Fonsie Corr, our Treasurer, to give his report and to provide an update on our Auditor's report for 2008.

General Report

In terms of an overall update, Maria will give us her report shortly, which will cover some of the key developments over the past year and some of the plans for development in the future.

The Ember, continues to provide a place of acceptance and growth for our core members living there and sharing their lives with each other and those assistants who have chosen L'Arche as a way of life they wish to experience and live.

Again, as I have previously said, I think it important for us to acknowledge the hard work that goes into making The Ember a home for those who choose it.

Reflecting on this year, I think we have all felt something of a turning point with a sense that after seven years of struggle we are moving into a period of time that will see real fruition of some of our plans and aspirations. That said, this in no way underestimates the very hard work done by Maria and her team in keeping L'Arche Belfast, not only going, but also growing and evolving.

Our team of assistants who contribute so much, and give so much of themselves to the development of our community continues to be supported by Maria and our more senior assistants in promoting and ensuring The Ember continues to grow and develop into a true home and a real place of welcome. I know I speak

for all the Board of Directors in thanking each of them for their commitment to L'Arche and the care they provide to Larry, Gillian, Thomas and Helen.

I particularly want to mention and acknowledge the commitment of Scott and Megan over the years to the Community and the fact that they have now decided to make Belfast their long -term home is a significant blessing for the Community.

Our Board of Directors have continued to meet regularly. This year has seen the resignation from our Board of Directors of Billy Hirst, who was also the Board Secretary. I want to thank Billy for always giving such reliable advice and for his thoughtful and considered counsel over the years. I know I will particularly miss Billy's support and want to extend to him particular thanks for all he brought to the development of the Community. Michael Shiels has agreed to take over this important role and we hope that his appointment can be confirmed later this evening.

We continue to seek new Board members and will hopefully identify other people with talents that will enhance our existing Board's skills. I am delighted to welcome Shelagh Caldwell here this evening, Shelagh has gone through a 'probationary' period as a member of our Board and her nomination as a full member will hopefully be confirmed this evening.

Our webpage, is now well established and provides accurate and timely information to all those interested in the life of the Community and its' members.

This coming year, fundraising will be a vital activity that we hope will enable us to develop as we wish and want to, rather than as our statutory funding allows.

Community members work tirelessly at promoting L'Arche to a wider group of people at church, school and other events and whilst this does assist in our fundraising activity, this has never been the primary purpose of these activities and importantly, word of L'Arche is spreading far and wide through these events.

Our administrative team continues to support Maria and the Community in general and they are a vital and valued resource. Lesley Gould and Henri Harpur have taken over work within our admin team to assist Maria with managing the increasingly complex world in which L'Arche tries to operate. Not least, the increasing level of statutory and regulatory obligations placed on us by legislation, which now includes a requirement for checks to be made, via a new body called AccessNI, regarding the suitability of people to work with vulnerable adults.

In conclusion, we have fulfilled our requirements under Health and Safety legislation and our finances have been maintained properly. Our annual accounts are produced in accordance with legislative requirements and have been presented and approved by our Board.

I know Maria will expand on our proposals for the future and reflect on some of the key developments and challenges overcome in the past year.

Once again, thank you for being here this evening and showing so tangibly your ongoing support.

Many thanks.

John Black
Chair, L'Arche Belfast
9th December 2008