

An Inquiry into the Theology and Practice
of Covenantal Living in L'Arche

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Synopsis

This study is an inquiry into the charism of L'Arche and its basis in the notion of covenant. It has reflected upon the theology of covenant and community of the founder, Jean Vanier, his life experience in community with people with learning disabilities, and the vicissitudes of the embodiment of covenant in the structures and practices of the communities of the Federation of L'Arche.

The inquiry has sought to understand the meanings attributed to covenant in the life history of L'Arche both corporately and individually, and to examine in what way it is a determinant paradigm for the ongoing life of L'Arche. It has sought to hear the questions arising from within L'Arche as well as from contemporary society and the impact of secular encoded practices.

The inquiry is grounded in a series of interviews with committed long term assistants living with the community members with learning disabilities in small community houses, who are not a part of the founding generation. This group is a necessary witness to the transition from the founder, and in their life choice represent something of the mystery of the original vision. Through these conversations it has been possible to articulate the particularity and importance of their vocation for L'Arche, and to identify a 'gap' between the word and the action concerning commitment, in particular what happens to them beyond their 'working life'.

The study concludes that covenant is core to the original vision and if deepened corporately could provide a challenging language and frame for addressing the serious questions facing L'Arche as a result of a process of secularisation.

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