

Mgr lic. Anna Szemplińska

L'Arche Wrocław as an exemplification of the community according to Jean Vanier

Summary

In my dissertation, I present my research on the communities of L'Arche (Eng. an Ark). L'Arche is an international federation focused on creating spaces of living and working together with people with intellectual disabilities. L'Arche promotes the empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities and aims to give them their just place in society.

L'Arche was founded in 1964 when Jean Vanier started to live with two disabled men in a small house in Trosly-Breuil in France. Initially, he did not expect that his initiative will be recognized as meaningful, but quickly many followers joined him. Today L'Arche is scattered all over the world. It is said that Jean Vanier has done a Copernican revolution. The significant change is that people with intellectual disabilities can be seen as those who can give. They are not only objects of care and help. They are gifted by God. They can give if we let them to do that. L'Arche as a pioneering movement facilitated them and their families to come out of the shadow.

The subject of my thesis is: *L'Arche Wrocław as an exemplification of the community according to Jean Vanier*. The supervisor of my thesis is prof. Kazimiera Jaworska from the Department of History of Education, therefore, I use the historical method in my research.

In the first chapter, I discuss the problem of people with disabilities in the historical perspective. Then I introduce the figure of the founder – Jean Vanier and I present the historical development of L'Arche communities around the world.

In the next chapter I analyse Jean Vanier's ideas, especially his concept of community. Based on Vanier's publications I describe core principles of L'Arche: fidelity to the Gospel; the central place of the poor within a community; interpersonal bonds as a basis of human development and unity of all members in a common humanity.

In the third chapter I describe the story of L'Arche community in Wrocław in four stages: the first step - the Moomins' groups; the second - the founding group, the next - the first community house as the beginning of the community and the forth step: the further community development towards two houses and supporting living flats.

In the chapter four I focus on the institutional dimension of L'Arche Wrocław. I provide description of the structures of the community; the financial means and the accountability of L'Arche to the social structures of the State and legal regulations.

The last chapter includes a description of everyday life of the residents of L'Arche Wrocław. In the first part I describe a group of assistants, people without intellectual disabilities who support L'Arche residents. I present methods of their work and types of support offered them within L'Arche. Finally, I introduce residents with disabilities, because all activities in L'Arche are dedicated to them and lead to them.

I focus mainly on the characteristics of residents with intellectual disabilities and on methods of support developed in L'Arche.

The work is indexed with the documentation on which my_monograph is based and an_extensive bibliography.

The intention of my research was to present the complete process of implementing the community principles as_well_as to indicate errors that appear in this process. I tried also to investigate to what extent it is possible to implement the Jean Vanier's idea of community in the reality of everyday life in the city of Wrocław and Polish society.

Till now no author has explored L'Arche communities in so many aspects. There are some works: articles, book chapters, master thesis, PhD dissertations concerning L'Arche written from pedagogic, theological and philosophical perspective. These publications contain mainly case studies concerning people with disabilities or they analyse Jean Vanier's writings. There_was_a lack of reflection on a practice of a community life. This kind of analysis is important because it can serve to different organisations, including L'Arche. Nowadays there is still a need to create inclusive living spaces for the adults with intellectual disabilities. What's more this work can be a voice in the theology of disability, which develops slowly in our country.