



It is confirming and encouraging that I can begin this year's President's Report in the same way that last year's report began; that is, by describing the significant growth of Willow Tree Community. This year saw an increase in the number and diversity of folks attending our monthly gatherings, glimpsed WTC featured in the media on several occasions, and witnessed a growth of interest in our mission and vision as evidenced by new names on our email list, new followers on social media and personal connections made.

2017 began on an exciting note as we celebrated the awarding of an Impact Grant from the Fredericton Community Foundation. This allowed us to begin planning our Needs Assessment study, which was advertised publicly beginning in March. The details of the study and its results are detailed elsewhere in this annual report; suffice it to say that designing the study, working alongside the researchers as it was carried out, and reporting the results to the wider community took a lot of energy from our volunteer board. This was a new and unfamiliar endeavor for most of us, and I am proud that our board members were up for the challenge!

The process and results of the study provided us with greater insights into the needs and desires of folks with intellectual disabilities and their families in the Fredericton area. Armed with this new information, supported by our friends and partners, and rooted securely in the mission and vision of L'Arche, our board was able to draft a five-year Strategic Plan that we feel is a responsible, achievable and creative response to the realities of our community. In the final few months of 2017, we presented our plan to L'Arche Canada in a

second bid for Official Project Status. They supported our plan, commended us on the prayer, reflection and work done to develop it, and approved Willow Tree Community as an official Project of L'Arche!

As already mentioned, this milestone could not have been achieved without the support of so many. Our board members, past and present, have worked tirelessly to see the vision of L'Arche brought to Fredericton. Community partners, including NBACL, OPAL and Jobs Unlimited, have taken time to meet with us and share their wisdom and expertise. We are grateful to those in the department of Social Development who have also met with us and demonstrated a willingness to work toward more equitable funding for those with disabilities who wish to live in a home with other people. We extend sincere gratitude to St. Thomas University and Dr. Clive Baldwin and Michelle Gleason, who took on our research project with competence and compassion, and of course to the Fredericton Community Foundation for funding the project. We also remain grateful to The Honourable Jocelyne Roy Vienneau for her continued patronage.

It is easy to become mired in the "business" doings of our community, but it is important not to lose sight of the heart that drives this business. It is during our monthly gatherings that we are reminded why we are working so hard to bring L'Arche to Fredericton. Immense appreciation is extended to those on the Community Engagement Committee who plan and orchestrate our gatherings and events. So many people and organizations support these gatherings – this year, we must thank St. Dunstan's

Parish and Christ Church Cathedral for providing us with space to meet, the Hall, Fetter and McMath families for hosting gatherings throughout the year, the Abony Family Tennis Centre for welcoming us for an afternoon of tennis once again, and Katie Hall and the Oromocto Training and Education Centre for inviting us to join them for their Hallowe'en Dance. We also appreciated the connection formed with the Nguvu dancers at our first (annual?) talent show.

There are always more people to thank. We remain grateful to L'Arche Atlantic Regional Coordinator Jenn Power for her continued support, and to the community of L'Arche Saint John for assisting and supporting us in so many ways. Thanks are due also to Lori van Holt, L'Arche Canada Growth Coordinator, for showing her support by travelling to Fredericton to attend the presentation of our research project results. Continued thanks to David McMath for sharing his time and expertise to provide invaluable legal advice. Last but not least, I must acknowledge all our board members who work incredibly hard in their various roles to keep things running smoothly and to make my job easier! Special thanks this year to Patricia Dineen, our indefatigable secretary who resigned from the board in August to attend to her family, and to Rodney Savidge, who finishes up his term as Treasurer (and Webmaster). Most notable thanks to Margaret Savidge, who called the first meeting of those interested in L'Arche back in 2010, has been a board member and executive member since our incorporation in 2013, and is leaving the board this year. We are so grateful that she will continue to be involved with the Hub Planning Committee and, I'm sure, in many other ways. I personally will miss her quiet wisdom, determined faith, and passion for L'Arche that have graced our board discussions and deliberations.

2018 sees us working on the first stage of our Strategic Plan: the opening of a Community Hub for adults with intellectual disabilities, their friends, families, caregivers and other interested individuals. We envision a gathering space of welcome and celebration – a highly visible, community-integrated place where adults with disabilities can belong and thrive. To this end, we are working to hire our first employee to coordinate the visioning, organizing and day-to-day functioning of this Hub. We are also working to determine an appropriate location,

and are planning a public launch of our Project Status in the next couple of months. We are actively looking for individuals to assist us in these new endeavours as we continue to grow and strengthen our community. We are always looking to meet and get to know new folks of all abilities who are moved by the spirit of L'Arche.

During the writing of this report, I was moved to reflect again on the Identity Statements of L'Arche:

We are people with and without intellectual disabilities, sharing life in communities belonging to an International Federation.

Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our journey together.

We celebrate the unique value of every person and recognize our need for one another.

Our mission is to...

Make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships.

Foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members, while being faithful to the core values of our founding story.

Engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society.

These are words I have read over and over again, and they never cease to inspire in me a desire, and sometimes even an urgency, to make this vision known and true in my community. Now, as Willow Tree Community becomes L'Arche (in) Fredericton, as we continue to grow in mutual relationships within our community and beyond, and as we work to make the vision of L'Arche a reality in our day-to-day lives, I am filled with gratitude for how far we have come since that first meeting in 2010. I look forward with faith and anticipation to the year ahead as we work, pray and play together to help build a world where everyone belongs!

Catherine Schmidt, President
20 April 2018