

Letter from Pierre Jacquand to the friends of L'Arche

Dear friends of L'Arche, hello!

Because this is a place that has meant a lot for many of us, I felt it was important to inform you of the process and decisions we have had to make in order to give new life to La Ferme.

During the Tournée des Copains, following the celebration of L'Arche's 60th anniversary in Sainte Anne d'Auray, the community of La Ferme chose to place a shell in the famous treasure chest that was passed from community to community. A shell that, when you put it to your ear, allows you to hear the movement of the waves, the breath of the swell, the silence of the ocean... Throughout this process, this is what we have tried to do: to listen, to welcome the call of the open sea and to catch the right wind. And today, the time has come to echo this call.

In September 2024, the national council, the governing body of L'Arche in France, took the decision to bring to an end the ministry of welcome offered at La Ferme de L'Arche. It did this for two inseparable reasons:

- The major and ongoing financial deficit of a place where both its size and geographical location do not give any grounds to foresee a return to economic equilibrium and viability
- The shadow side of its history, which overshadows its reputation as the 'spiritual centre of L'Arche'.

La Ferme's board of directors has confirmed that its activities will cease at the end of July 2025, and a redundancy plan will be offered to employees unable to find alternative employment within the communities of L'Arche in France. Others will be retiring. This is the case for Tim Kearney, whom I would like to thank especially for agreeing in 2024 to extend his term of office by one year so as to lead the La Ferme community through this sensitive period. 'La Ferme de L'Arche' will cease its activities as a charitable foundation, finally, on 31 December 2025.

At the same time, L'Arche in France has recognised all the work done by the team at La Ferme in recent years to bring this setting to life and make it truly fruitful. A project team has therefore been set up with the aim of re-deploying the three present-day 'gems' of La Ferme in a different way in the service of L'Arche:

- Project 1: Find a different way to continue to offer retreats
- Project 3: Strengthen the communion of prayer in L'Arche
- Project 2: Co-construct the conversion of La Ferme's site

This team was made up of Christian Petiteau, head of the community in Sénévé, and François-Xavier Choutet, an external consultant. Together, they conducted a very broad consultation between November 2024 and March 2025, the conclusions of which were presented to the national council in April 2025.

As a result, the following decisions were taken:

- L'Arche in France will create a 'Spiritual Life Team' under the leadership of Joseph Krysmann (regional leader for the Mediterranean) with the following objectives:

- Respond to requests for spiritual support from communities
- Continue with and consolidate all the projects launched in recent years in this area (the spiritual laboratory, etc.)
- To continue organising spiritual retreats for members of L'Arche and, more broadly, for the general public who are interested in the L'Arche experience
- To support a network of Christian prayer within the L'Arche communities

A discernment team has just been set up to write a mission statement for the Spiritual Life Team by the summer. The latter will include the pastoral ministers of L'Arche in France.

- L'Arche in France will conduct a study on the conversion of the site of La Ferme into a shared housing project under the responsibility of Jessica Ryckebusch (deputy regional leader for the Hauts-de-France - Normandy region).

To this end, Jessica has just appointed a team of two people to carry out this study. It will consist of Matthieu Delmotte (director of L'Arche's ESAT workshops in the Oise region) and Etienne Guillaume. Etienne is currently in charge of the ecological transition of L'Arche in France. He has agreed to increase his working hours to carry out this mission, which is due to be completed by the end of December 2025. Together, they will have to assess the practical feasibility and evaluate the viability of a project that is unprecedented for L'Arche: through it, we are decisively breaking new ground. The framework for this project will be as follows:

- The purpose of this place will be in line with L'Arche's mission and values, especially its commitment to the dignity of each person and its ecological dimension (see the Charter of L'Arche Communities).
- The project must be firmly rooted in the local community and closely linked to L'Arche in the Oise region.
- The property under consideration for this conversion project is centred on the 'heart' (the central buildings) of La Ferme and possibly also 'Maison Lazare'. It therefore does not include the Loc Maria and L'Enclos sites. These may, however, be included in the project if appropriate.
- This housing project must operate without paid employees.

Undoubtedly, and despite the difficult 'transition' that the closure of La Ferme represents for all of us, these new prospects are, in a way, a true extension of the community of La Ferme, a continuity in the midst of change. While we symbolically chose to 'turn the page' on our 60th anniversary in 2024, we are together resolutely looking to the future in order to continue to live with enthusiasm and boldness what is unique to the intuition of L'Arche.

I am very grateful to all those who have made this new path possible. It is the fruit of honest dialogue, mutual respect, and a collective search to engender new life, elsewhere, and in a different way. We will, of course, keep you informed of the next steps. For those who feel so called, we count on your prayers to inspire this new adventure which is filled with promise.

Yours, in friendship
Pierre Jacquand