

Adapted from—An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche by Jean Vanier; Appendix 1, Charter of the communities of L'Arche; pp. 117-120; Novalis/Geoffrey Chapman/Crossroad; copyright 1995 For educational purposes. Unlike Vanier's, this document, as a modified and reconstructed version, is specifically directed toward the Protestant sector of the Church which is meant to further inclusive attitudes and actions for and with people of all disabilities within the Protestant Church and society.

What the Access and Inclusive Mission Program [AIM] Is Saying to the Church

THE PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS ARE CALLED TO....

Acknowledge the distress of people who suffer injustice and rejection because they have a disability and to respond by doing all they can to defend the rights of people with disabilities, to support the creation of places of welcome for them and to call our society to become more just and respectful towards them.

AIM OBJECTIVES

- 1 To create religious and civic communities which welcome people with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual handicaps. By doing so, AIM seeks to respond to the distress of those who are too often rejected, and to give them a valid place in society.
- 2 To welcome the gifts of people with various disabilities who belong at the very heart of communities and who beckon others to come into relationship.
- 3 The AIM Program is not a solution, but a sign; a sign that a society to be truly human must be grounded in welcoming and respectful attitudes towards the weak and downtrodden.

AIM MAINTAINS THAT....

- 1 Whatever our gifts or our limitations, we are all bound together in a common humanity. Each of us is unique and of sacred value and are to be treated with dignity as those who have rights, including: the right to life, to receive care, to a home, access to education and to meaningful work.
- 2 Since the deepest need of a human being is to love and to be loved, everyone has a right to friendship, to communion and to a spiritual life.
- 3 If human beings are to develop their abilities and talents to the full, realizing all their potential as individuals, they need an environment that fosters personal growth. They need to form relationships with

others within families and communities. They need to live in an atmosphere of trust, security and mutual affection. They need to be valued, accepted and supported in real and warm relationships.

4 People with a mental handicap and other disabling conditions often possess qualities of welcome, wonderment, spontaneity and directness. They are able to touch hearts and to call others to unity through their simplicity and vulnerability. In this way they are a living reminder to the wider world of the essential values of the heart without which knowledge, power and action lose their meaning and purpose.

5 Weakness and vulnerability in a person, far from being an obstacle to union with God, can foster it. It is often through weakness, recognized and accepted, that the liberating love of God is revealed.

6 In order to develop the inner freedom to which all people are called, and to grow in union with God, each person needs to have the opportunity of being rooted and nourished in a religious tradition.

THE CHURCH IS CALLED....

1 To be places of hope. Each person, according to his or her own vocation, is encouraged to grow in love, self-giving and wholeness, as well as in independence, competence and the ability to make choices.

2 To secure for their members various forms of education, work, in service to God, and spiritually therapeutic activities which will be a source of dignity, growth and fulfillment for them.

3 To provide their members with the means to develop their spiritual life and to deepen their union with God, and love of God and other people.

4 To invite people with disabilities to participate, as far as possible, in decisions concerning them.

5 To enable people with disabilities to serve in various capacities within the congregation, believing that work is an important means of integration.

6 To work closely with: Families and guardians of people who have disabilities; and with all those who work in a spirit of justice and peace for and with those who have disabilities.

The Church is to be in solidarity with the poor of the world, and with all those who take part in the struggle for justice.