

Eight St. Norbert College students, Dan Brunelli, Cristi Burrill, Ed Dusel, Katie Flood, Allie Harvey, Libby Hauser, Garrett Lancelle, and Bridget Zach, had a goal to travel to the L'Arche Community in Clinton, Iowa, and become aware of what the L'Arche community represents and what they stand for. At The Arch in Iowa, there are three houses and six apartments. The Arch belongs to the international community that was founded by Jean Vanier. The people with developmental disabilities are known as "core members," and the people who share their lives with them are the assistants. The Arch allowed eight of us to become part of their family when we became part of their lives for one week in January. During the week we were there, we did many things with the members. We helped out with a pancake breakfast, cleaned houses, celebrated a resident's birthday, and received a wonderful send off from the L'Arche community.

Each day, the eight of us went to each of the Arches and the 5th Street office and spent time cleaning the houses and offices and making the homes the cleanest and best they could be. Another part of the experience was being able to spend time with the core members before they went to work and after they came back until they went to bed. Throughout those times, we connected with the core members while learning how the lifestyle of The Arch works. It was an experience that changed every person's life and really showed our group that The Arch is an amazing place!



## **L'Arche USA:** ***A place to be and become***

### **Personal reflections:**

**Bridget:** Seeing how all the core members interacted and how they loved and supported everyone was amazing. The group dynamic was something that you don't find in most communities, and it was such a blessing to be a part of.

**Eddy:** Getting a hug from Johnny was a really good moment because he always said "guys shake hands," and his hug showed that he saw me as a close friend.

**Dan:** When the core members returned from work, it was really nice to help them and talk to them.

**Katie:** The send-off really showed the connection that we had made with all the core members and the assistants. They taught us that family is not about blood relatives, it is about the connection we have with one another.

**Cristi:** My favorite memory of the week was when George (61-year-old with Down Syndrome) sang "How Great Thou Art" on the stairs of Arch II. His passion brought tears to my eyes. He was so willing to sing in front of all of us, while any of us would have hesitated and worried about what others would think. George did not sing to please us; he sang because he loved the song.

**Garrett:** The genuine compassion everyone showed to us was absolutely amazing. Never have I felt so welcomed into a place I had never been to. My experience with L'Arche was so much fun, and will continue to influence me the rest of my life.

**Libby:** Spending a week at The Arch taught me a lot, but what I will forever remember is the impact that kind words have on people. I have learned to not hold my feelings in, but to share positive feedback with whomever I am with. I can't imagine how wonderful it must feel to be part of such a caring and embracing family like The Arch - it is truly an inspiring place.