



L'ARCHE CANADA

L'Arche Canada offers this "thought sheet" as a contribution to the public conversation about values and the shaping of the social ethos in which we live. Our perspective comes from two broad sources: (1) from thirty-five years of living together in community as a diverse group of people, differently abled and from various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds; and (2) from contemporary thinkers who are open, fresh and responsive to the human spirit and are reflecting deeply on the individual and society today.

The vision and confidence to create a healthy Canadian society lies in the nexus where humanistic thinking and spirituality cross-fertilize. Indeed, today the best spiritual thinking engages contemporary culture with a view to the good of human society and the best humanistic thinking integrates spiritual values. We believe it is possible to live consciously in the gap between an ideal society and everyday reality and to make choices that contribute to the closing of that gap. It is a hopeful view, based on human and spiritual values embodied in daily life.

A Human Future

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Public Service – It's a Vocation An Interview with Lloyd Axworthy



Dr. Lloyd Axworthy is President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg. Formerly he headed the Liu Institute for Global Issues. During his 27-year political career he held various Cabinet posts including Minister of Foreign Affairs (1995-2000). He is internationally acclaimed for his advancement of the human security concept, his work establishing the International Criminal Court and the Protocol on child soldiers, and the global treaty banning anti-personnel landmines. For this he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. He has also received numerous other honours.

I spoke with Lloyd Axworthy from his office at the University of Winnipeg. Formerly United College, it is my alma mater as well as his. I recall him as a young professor, deftly sensitizing a group of us graduating students hired to take the census in the inner city where we would encounter illegal immigrants, people squatting, and others fearful of anything to do with government. It was an early example of his compassionate commitment to people and human security, for which he has become so known. Beth Porter, ed.

A Human Future is a free e-quarterly. We invite you to read back issues and to subscribe at: www.larchecanfoundation.org.

Beth Porter: What were the experiences, ideas, values that led you into public service?

Lloyd Axworthy: Attending the Youth Parliament and debating ideas, discussing social issues in a very active young people's group—these were eye openers. Roy and Lois Wilson, who were ministers at my family's church, influenced and encouraged me. And I had tough but enlightened teachers at public schools in Winnipeg's North End. My history teacher insisted I hear Lester Pearson, and his talk helped me understand that being a Canadian had a certain vocation to it – that Canada has a role to play in the world. That experience alone was

striking. University was equally a turning point. I moved from a wannabe football player to thinking about philoso-

"Rights are not simply a protection issue. They are also a participation issue."

Hon. Lois M. Wilson



Commitments to human rights in this country are still tentative.... [Since 9/11] there is a danger of racial profiling even more and that will inevitably spill over into issues of housing and employment.... An increasing number of people live in poverty (usually women and children.) Currently “social condition” (meaning poverty) is not included in Human Rights Codes, although the Senate Standing Committee has recommended that it be included as a prohibited ground of discrimination in human rights legislation....

It is important that civil society pulls together and demonstrates leadership. We must build a broad coalition for human rights and democracy... of politicians, NGOs, women, aboriginal peoples, [faith groups, others]. Richard Gwynn of the Toronto Star posed the question, ‘What will we tell our children and grandchildren we most regret about the things we have neglected? – The gap between the rich and the poor and the demise of democracy.’

From an address to British Columbia Human Rights Defenders, Dec. 9, 2003. The Very Rev. the Honourable Lois M. Wilson, and her husband Rev. Dr. Roy Wilson, were ministers of Atlantic Avenue United Church in Winnipeg. Lois Wilson later served as Moderator of the United Church of Canada and in the Canadian Senate. She has worked tirelessly for human rights in Canada.



phy, history, political science, English. And there was an atmosphere in the 60s – a sense that young people could change things. So public service just seemed appealing.

To fast forward, I’m trying to bring the same elements now at the University of Winnipeg that I experienced. We’re opening opportunities in the inner city and we’ve founded a global college so students learn through direct experience in Africa, Latin America, elsewhere. We want to produce global citizens.

Politics can be nasty and disheartening. You kept your integrity, persevered and achieved important things. What sustained you?

What’s most important is feeling what you’re doing has meaning. I believe politics is an honorable profession. A vocation, if you like. You’re there because you can make a difference. It’s related to having a set of core values. My family certainly had a lot to do with that. And you have to laugh at yourself at times. Having a wife and kids, and three brothers who are completely skeptical about ones great achievements helps. We’ve always had a family thing of dissing one another, which is fun.

What advice would you give people entering political life today?

Political life is like any commitment; you have to work at it. I’m a skeptic when it comes to instant political leaders. You learn your craft – how to work in parliament and with constituents and in the party. And you need to know where you want to go. Otherwise, when you hit a few bumps you’ll get thrown off course. Start early, whether in a party’s youth wing, or in one of the many organizations working on issues.

I am concerned about the increasing disconnect among young people with regard to politics. Maybe politics has changed and now looks like it’s dominated by ‘what’s in it for me?’ thinking. The image of political life as an opportunity to help shape our country and global society needs to be restored.

Please say more on this and what we can do about it?

One problem is that political parties seem to have lost their value as a vehicle for discussion or expressing ideas and commitments. They seem taken over by too much technology, too many

Hon. Al Graham



“...democracy is a goal, not a starting point. The continuing challenge facing all democracies, no matter what the state of their development, is how to build political cultures of fairness and equity and respect for people. That is true for Canadians as it is for Chileans. We must never forget that trust and belief in one another are the moral ingredients....

Elections are defining moments in the lives of men and women in transition states... they are the means of advancing and securing the value systems which anchor the pluralist institutions so critical to the successful consolidation of democracy. First-time elections embolden people to believe that the dream is possible. They are the important first steps in the long journey towards a new law on earth. The global community cannot afford to let those defining moments slip away.”

Extracted from *Seeds of Freedom*, (Canadian Peacekeeping Press, 1996). Senator Alasdair Graham had a decisive impact on Canadian domestic and foreign policy for over 30 years. Recently retired, during his career in public service his work to promote democratic reform included chairing and serving on internationally sanctioned election observation missions in countries around the world.

Of Note: L'Arche Canada is pleased to announce that Senator Graham recently became a Patron of the L'Arche Canada Foundation.



consultants, too much money. They turn into pure election machines. Coming up in the Liberal party, I always felt I had a voice. I'm not sure today many people involved in political parties feel the parties give them much voice.

In my old riding of Winnipeg South Centre I discovered during the last federal election that they no longer had major canvasses. It was all done by call centers. I think you lose something very intrinsic with this. What I always found most enjoyable was meeting the voters, listening to their stories and understanding what's going on. I spoke recently to two large Canadian cultural groups – one Islamic and one African Canadian. They have a huge appetite to become involved but there's a feeling that it's hard to break into the system. At the same time, a lot of people are coming together to work on issues. They don't know how to translate this into the main-stream political discourse yet, but I believe that will happen.

You talk about the gift of diversity in Canada and our success in living together. Are there things we have to safeguard?

The most important event I ever participated in was the establishment of the Charter of Rights, which under Section 15 gave people group rights. It's almost unique in the world. It's created a culture of human rights in this country. Our younger generations are the real beneficiaries. Difference is not an issue for them, whether its gender or sexual or cultural difference. They are much more tolerant of a diversity of behaviors, not just a diversity of rights. That is something that is so precious.

We suffered a major set back because of 9/11. Using security concerns to increase the power of the state and to take away liberties is a real challenge. It could cause us to lose something distinctively Canadian and something we can give to the rest of the world. It's one reason I feel very passionate about talking to different ethnic groups. I say, “Look! You, perhaps more than any, can give voice to this.”

There are responsibilities that go with rights. But responsibility is equally incumbent upon the society to understand that

rights are not simply a protection issue. They are also a participation issue. If we want a lot more diversity in participation, our society needs to change. You can't just say that those who came over on the Mayflower still dominate.

In L'Arche we know that people who have developmental disabilities can have a humanizing influence on society. Can you relate this to your experience with others who are easily marginalized?

I think this understanding starts personally. Our son Stephen has a blood disease that periodically erupts in major joint inflammations. Watching how he has to cope and still go to school and plan an occupation has given us a sense of the enormous effort people who have various liabilities make to keep going.

I'm impressed by how many people actually build on a liability. I recently met with 25 of the "lost boys" from Sudan, refugee kids who have been traumatized by war for the last 10 or 15 years and are coming to Canada. I was struck by the powerful will and energy – belief, if you like – that it takes to overcome that kind of handicap and to still feel committed to doing something worthwhile. That, to me, is an important lesson: it's not a matter of having it all.



The L'Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 130 communities of L'Arche on five continents, 26 in Canada. In L'Arche, people with developmental disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

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FOR YOUR INTEREST

Intercordia: A service-learning program

L'Arche Canada partners with **Intercordia Canada**, a university accredited program that promotes cross-cultural understanding and moral responsiveness in students and encourages them to discover a more compassionate worldview. Intercordia began in France under the inspiration of Jean Vanier and was brought to Canada in 2003. Canadian university student participants take courses in Social Justice, International Comparative Studies or Religious Studies, participate in a seminar program, and live and work for three months in a part of the world that is, culturally and materially, radically different than their own. This summer, students have placements in Ecuador, Belize and Honduras.

www.InterCordiaCanada.org

- Lloyd Axworthy, *Navigating a New World: Canada's Global Future*. Vintage Canada, 2004. www.nav-new-world.ca/
- University of Winnipeg's new Global College web-site: globalcollege.uwinnipeg.ca/index.shtml
- Video: Global Television Interview with Lloyd Axworthy, May 21, 2005: rtp://uwatch.uwinnipeg.ca/axworthy-mp4.mov
- "Desperately Seeking Ideas" by Allan Gregg, in *The Walrus*, June 2005, pp. 36-41. An election on *ideas* may be coming!
- Hon. Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development, in conversation with Ray Cohen in *Abilities*, Summer 2005, discusses the impact of Section 15 of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms on its 20th anniversary. www.abilities.ca/abilities/current.html?showabilities=1
- *It's a Matter of Rights*, (March 2005), a comic-form 27 page teaching book and CD for people with developmental disabilities is obtainable from Community Living Essex County: www.communitylivingessex.org/new.shtml
- *More Than Inclusion: Honouring the Contributions of People with Developmental Disabilities* (2005) www.larchecanada.org/documents/English/BestPractices.pdf (Book can be ordered from the L'Arche Canada office.)
- Canadian Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation, Ottawa, Oct 27-30, 2005. Info: <http://c2d2.ca/main.cfm?cid=187>

A Thought: We cannot do everything, and there is a sense and a liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

Archbishop Romero.