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### **JEAN VANIER WINS 2015 TEMPLETON PRIZE**

Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, a revolutionary international network of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers, has won the 2015 Templeton Prize.

L'Arche encourages people toward mutually transformative relationships, where those who help are transformed by those they encounter. Vanier discovered that those people who society typically considers the weakest enable the strong to recognize and welcome their own vulnerability.

What began quietly in northern France in 1964, when Vanier invited two intellectually disabled men to come and live with him as friends, has now grown into 147 L'Arche residential communities operating in 35 countries, and more than 1,500 Faith and Light support groups in 82 countries that similarly urge solidarity among people with and without disabilities.

Vanier, 86, has extended his advocacy of belonging and social justice, with years of leadership efforts across the globe to nurture dialogue and unity among Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and other faiths through lectures, conferences and retreats around the world. His scholarship includes more than 30 books translated into 29 languages.

Valued at £1.1 million (about \$1.7 million or €1.5 million), the Prize is one of the world's largest annual awards given to an individual and honors a living person who has made exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. The announcement was made at a news conference today at the British Academy in London by the John Templeton Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. The Prize is a cornerstone of the Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to human purpose and ultimate reality.

Vanier's five decades of living with deeply vulnerable people have led him to an understanding of weakness and common humanity. This learned wisdom reflects the essence of the *Big Questions* that have become a hallmark of the Prize and continue the legacy of its founder Sir John Templeton, the late global investor and philanthropist, in encouraging and recognizing spiritual progress. In videos available on the Prize website, [www.templetonprize.org](http://www.templetonprize.org), Vanier examines topics including the potential transformative power revealed through the practice and struggle of love, and "What does it mean to be fully human?"

"To become fully human is to let down the barriers, to open up and discover that every person is beautiful. Under all the jobs you're doing, responsibilities, there is you," Vanier answers, adding, "And you, at the heart of who you are, you're somebody also crying out, 'does somebody love me?' Not just for what I can do, but for who I am."

In remarks prepared for today's announcement, Vanier made a plea for global peace. "Before being Christians or Jews or Muslims, before being Americans or Russians or Africans, before being generals or priests, rabbis or imams, before having visible or invisible disabilities, we are all human beings with hearts capable of loving."

Jennifer Simpson, the daughter of Foundation president and chairman Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr. and granddaughter of Sir John Templeton, noted that Vanier brought a much-needed perspective to how the power of love can advance spiritual progress in the world. "By recognizing the importance of every individual, regardless of their station in life, Jean Vanier underscores how each of us has the ability not only to lift up others, but also ourselves," she said. "His powerful message and practice of love has the potential to change the world for the better, just as it has already changed the lives of countless individuals who have been touched by this extraordinary man."

In nominating Vanier for the prize, John Swinton, Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care in the Divinity School at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, compared Vanier, a philosopher by training, to a rigorous scientist. "One can conceive of L'Arche and Faith and Light as living laboratories where Vanier essentially exposed his ideas to the most challenging test of all – real people, real problems, and real life."

Jean Vanier joins a distinguished group of 44 former recipients, including Mother Teresa, who received the inaugural Prize award in 1973, Rev. Billy Graham (1982) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1983). Last year's Templeton Prize recipient, Czech priest and philosopher Tomáš Halík, followed Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2013 and the 2012 Templeton Laureate, the Dalai Lama.

Vanier, who continues to live on the grounds of the original L'Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, north of Paris, will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize at a public ceremony at the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London on Monday, May 18.

### Notes to Editors

- Further information including biographical information on the 44 previous Templeton Prize Laureates is available at [www.templetonprize.org](http://www.templetonprize.org)
- Videos of Jean Vanier answering several Big Questions and highlights of the press conference are available at [www.templetonprize.org](http://www.templetonprize.org) and [www.youtube.com/user/TempletonPrize/](https://www.youtube.com/user/TempletonPrize/)
- Follow the Templeton Prize on Twitter using @TempletonPrize and the hashtag #templetonprize2015

### Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier was born on September 10, 1928 in Geneva, Switzerland, the fourth of five children of Canadian parents, Major-General Georges Vanier (1881-1967) and Madame Pauline Archer Vanier (1898-1991). His father was a highly decorated soldier in World War I and later a diplomat who served as First Secretary in the Canadian High Commission in London and as Canadian Ambassador to France. In 1959 he was appointed 19<sup>th</sup> Governor General of Canada, the first French Canadian in that post.

Jean received a broad education in English and French, living in England, France and Canada. At age 13, he informed his parents of his intention to leave Canada to join the Royal Navy in Great Britain. His father gave his answer: "I don't think it's a good idea, but I *trust* you." He now insists that his father's trust in him touched him deeply and gave him confidence in his inner voice throughout his life.

Vanier entered the Royal Navy at Dartmouth Naval College in 1942. From 1945 to 1950, he served on several warships, including accompanying the British royal family in 1947 on their tour of South Africa aboard the HMS Vanguard. He transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy in 1949. During this period he began to pray during long stretches of solitude serving watch on the ship's bridge and came to realize that his future would move beyond the life of a naval officer.

He resigned his naval commission in 1950 and from 1950 to 1962 devoted himself to spiritual and theological studies and enquiry, obtaining his doctorate in 1962 from the Institut Catholique in Paris with a widely praised dissertation, "Happiness as Principle and End of Aristotelian Ethics."

Also in 1963 Vanier visited psychiatric hospitals in France where many people with disabilities were living, and concluded that they are among the most oppressed people in the world. Jean's understanding of their need was crystallized when an institutionalized man asked him simply, "Will you be my friend?"

In 1964, after briefly lecturing in philosophy at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto, and deeply affected by his experience the prior year, he left academia and invited two men from an institution, Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux, to live with him in a small house in Trosly-Breuil, a village north of Paris. He named the house L'Arche (French for "ark and "arch"), to symbolize both Noah's Ark, a "boat" to which he could invite people in pain, and an "arch" or bridge connecting heaven and earth.

Vanier returned to Canada twice a year to lecture, give retreats and talk about his new life, often to university students, some of whom come to Trosly to live and work. In 1969, two Canadian students who had lived at L'Arche returned home to start Daybreak in Richmond Hill, Ontario, the first L'Arche community in North America. Additional L'Arche communities were organically founded over the next 20 years in the UK, USA, France, Denmark, Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Japan, Ukraine, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Syria, Egypt, Argentina and Bangladesh. They rapidly became ecumenical or inter-religious and now form the [International Federation of L'Arche](http://www.international-federation-of-l-arche.org).

In 1971, Jean and Marie-Hélène Mathieu, the founder of OCH (Office Chrétien des Personnes Handicapées), organized 12,000 people including 4,000 with disabilities to travel together to Lourdes in small groups on pilgrimage at Easter. These groups became the foundation of [Faith and Light](#), a spiritual and mutual support movement for people with developmental disabilities, their families and their friends.

Vanier has traveled extensively throughout the world to establish and support L'Arche and Faith and Light communities, to give talks, lectures, and retreats especially to young people and those at the margins of society, including in prisons, and to further his commitment to reach out across religious differences among Christian denominations, and among Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and people of other faiths.

During presentations, Vanier sometimes includes the [Liturgy of the Washing of the Feet](#), wherein people wash each other's feet as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper, as a powerful tool for interdenominational communion. He has done this at, among other places, the ecumenical "Festival for Peace" in Northern Ireland in 1995, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury during a retreat at the Lambeth Conference for 800 bishops of the Anglican Communion in 1998, and when he addressed the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, where some 230 different churches were represented.

In March 2014 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of L'Arche, Vanier met with Pope Francis along with people from L'Arche communities around the world. In January 2015 he spoke at the House of Lords in London on "Why do the Strong Need the Weak?"

Jean Vanier is the author of more than 30 books, including the bestseller, *Becoming Human*, which have been translated into 29 languages. Currently there are 147 L'Arche communities in 35 countries on five continents, and more than 1,500 Faith and Light communities in 82 countries.

## **The Templeton Prize**

The Templeton Prize each year honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's breadth of spiritual dimensions, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.

Established in 1972 by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the Big Questions of human purpose and ultimate reality.

The monetary value of the Prize is set always to exceed the Nobel Prizes to underscore Templeton's belief that benefits from discoveries that illuminate spiritual questions can be quantifiably more vast than those from other worthy human endeavors.

Everyone is a potential nominator for the Templeton Prize. Visit <http://www.templetonprize.org/nomination.html> for nomination details.

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