

Jean Vanier of L'Arche communities wins Templeton Prize

by [Chris Herlinger](#) in the [April 15, 2015](#) issue

Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche network of communities, where those with and without developmental disabilities live together, has won [the 2015 Templeton Prize](#).

A Roman Catholic layman, Vanier, 86, began L'Arche, French for “the Ark,” in northern France in 1964 when he invited two intellectually disabled men to live with him as friends. L'Arche has evolved into 147 communities in 35 countries. In addition, a support group for families of people with disabilities, known as Faith and Light, has spread to 82 countries.

“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,” said John Swinton, a professor at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland Divinity School, in nominating Vanier for the award.

Vanier wrote in a statement that those with intellectual disabilities offer spiritual lessons and gifts to a world too driven by success and power:

When they meet others they do not have a hidden agenda for power or for success. Their cry, their fundamental cry, is for a relationship, a meeting heart to heart. It is this meeting that awakens them, opens them up to life, and calls them forth to love in great simplicity, freedom and openness.

When those ingrained in a culture of winning and of individual success really meet them, and enter into friendship with them, something amazing and wonderful happens. They too are opened up to love and even to God. They are changed at a very deep level. They are transformed and become more fundamentally human.

Exposure to that openness can make those in mainstream culture embrace their own weaknesses and vulnerability, he said.

The John Templeton Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, awards the \$1.7 million prize honoring “exceptional contributions” to affirming the

spiritual dimension of life.

Vanier, who continues to live on the grounds of the original L'Arche community in Trosly-Breuil, north of Paris, said he will donate the money to his charities so they can expand their work. —Religion News Service

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "People: Jean Vanier." The online version was edited May 8, 2019.