



## **REPORT ON ABUSE BY JEAN VANIER**

**February 2020**

With thanks to Loren Treisman National Leader L'Arche UK for her input into this letter and guidance and support at this time

Faith and Light in the UK is thoroughly shocked and saddened by this news. Jean Vanier was an admired figure and the findings of this report will cause pain for many.

The inquiry spoke with 6 adult, non-disabled women who all revealed that Jean Vanier coerced them into a sexual relationship, often under the context of spiritual guidance. This took place from 1970-2005, in Trosly-Breuil, France.

Jean Vanier abused his power. These were emotionally abusive relationships that resulted in a lasting impact and harm. We now understand that Jean Vanier lied about this behaviour and misled public opinion about this aspect of his life.

Faith and Light fully trusts the findings in this inquiry. L'Arche commissioned a respected independent body specialising in abuse prevention and reporting systems to conduct the investigation and this was carried out in a thorough and robust manner. There is no evidence to suggest that anyone with learning disabilities was involved.

When L'Arche International received the first testimony they took it very seriously and immediately launched an internal investigation. Jean Vanier was still alive at the time. They later received a second accusation, and it was at this point that they appointed an independent body specialising in abuse prevention and reporting systems to investigate further. By this time Jean Vanier had died. It is purely coincidental that this report is being published after his death, it would have been preferable if he were alive to have taken part in the inquiry himself.

Previously in 2014, L'Arche learned of historic allegations that Fr. Thomas Philippe, who served as Jean Vanier's spiritual mentor, had committed acts of sexual abuse against multiple adult, non-disabled women in 1970s to 1991. At the time L'Arche called for a canonical inquiry, and immediately and publicly condemned these acts of abuse. There was no evidence at that time to indicate Jean Vanier was involved. It is clear now, however, that Jean Vanier and Fr. Thomas Philippe were colluding in their sexual abuse.

The findings of this report relate specifically to historic events that took place in Trosly-Breuil, France and in no way relate to anything here in the UK. In the UK there have been no incidents of sexual abuse of this nature.

The summary of the Report is available on the Faith and Light UK website. The full report has not been made available so as to protect the identity of the women, however you can confidently be assured that there has been no cover up. Only GCPS knows the identity of all of these women. They have been made aware of the outcome of the investigation and have been offered external support.

We have only just received the final inquiry findings, and we are sharing these with you now. There has been no delay or cover up. The summary of the report has been certified as accurate by GCPS who wrote the full report, and by an Independent Oversight Committee who were appointed to oversee the inquiry. It includes

a factual overview of the findings in the GCPs inquiry and the conclusions of the historical research. The summary report sets out the main conclusion of these two works, and you can be assured that nothing is being hidden. The full report has been only been shared with the International Leadership Team and the Stewardship Board of L'Arche International.

Faith and Light unreservedly condemn Jean Vanier's actions. They are in total contradiction to the values that he claimed and are contrary to the fundamental principles of our organisation, which affirm the unique value in every person.

We want to acknowledge and thank the victims for their courage and express our heartfelt regret for the trauma they had to endure. We are devastated that one of our founders abused his position of power and caused deep hurt to some of his victims.

We commend L'Arche International for undertaking this inquiry. We wholeheartedly agree with their wishes that we act with full transparency. We are reassured that the inquiry did not reveal any evidence that Jean Vanier harmed people with learning disabilities in any way, although this of course does not diminish the gravity of the findings.

While these historic events did not occur in the UK, they affect us deeply. As you are aware we take the wellbeing and safety of our members as the highest priority. We have comprehensive safeguarding procedures in place to ensure our members are protected from any abuse or harm within or beyond our communities. In 2019 we introduced the Essentials of Good Practice and these have been rolled out at training sessions across the UK.

While we process this extremely upsetting news, we remain united in our mission to build a world where we celebrate the unique gifts of every individual. Here in the UK we will continue to build community with people with learning disabilities and in doing so, create places of belonging where some of the most vulnerable people can lead full lives and contribute to society.

Faith and Light is deeply shocked and saddened by the findings of the investigation and understands how difficult it must be to absorb, particularly for those of you who knew Jean Vanier personally and whose lives have been influenced by his teachings.

Many of us are having to come to terms with Jean Vanier's historic actions and the consequences of them and it will take time to process this. If you have questions, or you want to talk, then please speak to your Community leaders, Chaplain or any member of your Community. You can, of course, speak to your Vice Provincial Co-ordinator, Provincial Co-ordinator or any of the Trustees of Faith and Light.

We thank our friends at L'Arche International for taking the hard but necessary step to launch the investigation. They have handled it with integrity and sensitivity, out of respect for the victims, but also in the painful knowledge of how hard this will be for so many people inside and outside Faith and Light and L'Arche.

It will take us time to reflect on what we have learned and consider how it impacts our understanding of our history, and how we view Jean Vanier. There is still much to admire in what he taught, but we have to condemn Jean Vanier's actions. His behaviour contradicts the values that he taught and claimed to live by, but for now, let's focus on supporting each other through this difficult time and on reminding each other of all the things that make Faith and Light and L'Arche special.

Liz Neame

Chairman Trustees Faith and Light UK

