

Paris, 30 January 2023

Dear friends,

Mandated by L'Arche International in 2020, the Study Commission has published its report today. You will find our press release on the [L'Arche International website](#)¹ and the link to the Study Commission page where you will be able to access the full report and the summary of the report. The full report is available in French and in English, the summary in English, French and Spanish. We would like to stress that reading these documents is challenging and time consuming due, on the one hand, to the nature of its content and, on the other hand, to the size, both the full report and of its summary. To those of you who will only read the summary, we recommend that you also read the introduction and the conclusion of the report for which of themselves are significant.

After the death of Jean Vanier, with the publication of the [inquiry results](#)² in February 2020 and now with the communication of the Study Commission's conclusions, we are going through a time in our history we never would have imagined. We have discovered an aspect in the life of our founder which is in profound contradiction with what we knew of him and a story of the foundation context of L'Arche that disturbs our previous understanding of it.

We are appalled and we once again condemn, without reservation, the actions of Jean Vanier and Thomas Philippe, his spiritual father, which are in total contradiction with the fundamental rules of respect and integrity of persons, and contrary to the fundamental principles of our communities. We sincerely ask for forgiveness from the people who were the victims of this abuse. We again express our gratitude to those who, a few years ago, broke the silence about Father Thomas Philippe and then about Jean Vanier and thus helped others to free themselves from an intolerable burden.

We recognise our institutional responsibility for failing to spot these abuses, report them and stop them. At the same time, we feel that our founder's adherence to the doctrines of Thomas Philippe and the reproduction of his practices, their concealment and the lies that followed, constitute a serious breach of trust towards L'Arche and its members.

We are convinced that bringing to light what until now had remained hidden is a choice we owe not only to those people directly harmed by the facts described in the report, but also to each one of us, members of L'Arche. For those who were harmed, as well as for L'Arche, we hope that this undertaking opens up possibilities for the future that would otherwise have been hindered by silence, secrecy and lies.

Below you will find a number of points that do not summarize the report but that to us seem important to share with you:

- The report confirms what L'Arche made public in 2020. Jean Vanier adhered to the deviant theories of Father Thomas Philippe from the early 1950's. This relationship with Father Thomas, his doctrine and the practices related to it were structuring elements of Jean Vanier's personality.
- We learn that 25 women of legal age, single, married or consecrated adult women, and without disabilities, have been identified as having experienced situations involving sexual acts or intimate gestures at some point in their relationship with Jean Vanier between 1952 and 2019. Some presented

¹ <https://www.larche.org/about-larche/news/study-commission-2023/>

² <https://www.larche.org/about-larche/news/inquiry-statement-test/>

themselves as victims of an abusive relationship, others as consenting partners in a transgressive relationship. Several of these women are now deceased. In their diversity, these relationships, sometimes concurrent, are all part of a continuum of confusion, control and abuse.

- The report relates in detail the circumstances in which L'Arche was founded in 1964 and points to the existence of a sectarian core around Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier. This core formed a microsystem at the inception of L'Arche but did not spread beyond a very small circle of people whose situations are widely documented in the report. Within L'Arche there was no proliferation of these abuses stemming from this sectarian core.
- There is no indication either in the Commission's work, or in the interviews with people with disabilities led by a psychologist, that Jean Vanier initiated abusive relationships with any of them. No indication that people with disabilities may have been exposed to such abuse was found in any of the various investigations.
- The Commission does not identify any individuals - beyond those associated with this microsystem - who could be accused of deliberately covering up these abuses, although fragmentary information did circulate. The report analyses in depth how a blend of certain institutional dynamics within L'Arche, the charismatic personality of Jean Vanier, the absence of a reliable mechanism allowing victims to be heard and the shortcomings or errors of the ecclesiastical institution, made possible decades of silence.
- At our request, the sociological section of the report takes an unprecedented look at the relationships of authority and the methods of accompaniment or supervision that were in use at one point in our history. It highlights the pitfalls which, to varying degrees, have created a favourable breeding ground for abuse and the silence surrounding it.

This will fuel a critical review of some of our practices, even though they have largely evolved over the decades with the growth of L'Arche. This review is part of a long-term project that is already included in the next mandate of the International Federation of L'Arche.

Despite the many clues in the report that help us understand, and despite the fact that some essential observations that reassure us are mentioned, we cannot but remain appalled by the gravity and the time span covered by the abuses initiated by Father Thomas, their outrageous justifications and the scope of their ramifications well beyond L'Arche.

We have lost the image we had of Jean Vanier and we cannot be complacent about his behavior; yet at the same time, there is no doubt that Jean Vanier has his place at the origin of L'Arche, he is an important element in its growth and thousands of people have found inspiration and comfort in his presence, his words, his writings.

The reality of these contradictory statements continues to trouble us profoundly. The Commission did not write a biography of Jean Vanier, but it has researched an aspect of his life that had so far remained inaccessible to us, and which evidently played an essential part in his life. It remains difficult to conceive how we can span the different aspects of his personality, the facets we knew with the one we are now discovering. As for his thinking, a critical reading of his works in the report is an important contribution to our request for reference points which will allow us to distinguish what deserves to be either preserved, further studied, or discarded. In any case, his work can no longer be considered without taking into account what we know today.

Following our commitment in 2020, we have undertaken a thorough Federation-wide evaluation and a redesign of our safeguarding measures for people with and without disabilities. All Federation representatives and Community leaders have been involved in and committed to this process. This work has led to the establishment of [reporting units](#)³ and the creation of a [framework](#)⁴ of Standards and Objectives, drawn up in

³ <https://www.larche.org/about-larche/prevention-and-safeguarding/i-report/>

⁴ <https://intranet.larche.org/documents/10181/2407959/DI-370-02-Safeguarding-standards-and-objectives-March2022-EN.pdf/61943b5c-90d3-4ead-8712-0e044e118348>

collaboration with an external consultant and inspired by British safeguarding standards. The framework was finalized in 2022 and its translation into 17 languages is being completed. The deployment of these measures is still on-going, in accordance with the specific modalities of each of the 37 countries in which L'Arche is present. A new audit will be undertaken in 2023 in all our communities to measure their level of compliance with the standards defined in the reference framework.

We are grateful to the members of the Study Commission and to the members of the Scientific Committee who supported them. Since the report sheds remarkable light on the mechanisms of control set in motion by a narrow circle of people, it can be read as a contribution to the understanding, and therefore the prevention, of abuse in the most diverse contexts. As such, we trust that it may also prove useful to organisations other than our own.

As we have been doing since 2020, we will continue learning how to integrate these realities in the telling of our story, which is far from being reduced to these facts. Though the report describes an origin stained by the existence of this sectarian core, it also emphasizes that L'Arche was not fundamentally defined by this origin. This is an essential acknowledgement.

In closing, we once again want to honour the persons who were the victims of these abuses, all those who suffered from these acts, and those who decided to speak up when it was so difficult to do so and thanks to whom we can now have access to a more complete narrative of our story and can take on the responsibility and the liberty of facing up to it.

Arriving just a few months before our next Federation Assembly and the launching of our new Charter, this report marks an important moment. By losing a specific image we had of our founder and our history, we have lost a specific image we had of ourselves. If there is something we have learned in the nearly 60 years of our existence, it is the talent people with disabilities have to shake up images and help us access a truer part of ourselves. This certainly adds to our vulnerability, but also makes us more just and more free.

What justifies L'Arche is not its founder, but the life of its members, with and without disabilities, at the service of a more human society. This task of re-reading our past, will help us remain faithful to this commitment.



Stephan Posner



Stacy Cates-Carney