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PRESS RELEASE



Following the broadcast of the Arte documentary on sexual abuse in the Church, L'Arche would like to reiterate its profound compassion for the victims of père Thomas Philippe. We know that without these testimonies and the awareness that they provoke, the victims would have continued to be trapped in silence. We pay tribute to these women's courage to make their voices heard.

Père Thomas Philippe's conduct is abhorrent and, once again, L'Arche strongly condemns his behaviour, as it did in 2015¹ when the results of the canonical enquiry confirmed the allegations made against him.

In 2014, as soon as the leaders of L'Arche received the two testimonies of women accusing père Thomas Philippe, who died in 1993, the former called for a canonical enquiry so that those concerned could be heard and the facts established. Fourteen testimonies were received. The leaders of L'Arche made public the results of the canonical enquiry in June 2015, attesting that: *"Père Thomas Philippe acted in a sexually inappropriate manner toward adult women... he had a psychological and spiritual hold over these women" and L'Arche "strongly condemns these acts, aware as we are of the serious impact they have had on the lives of their victims."*

Since these revelations words of condemnation have been reiterated; spaces for dialogue have been proposed; symbolic gestures have been made, such as the mass for victims of père Thomas Philippe (announced to the whole federation i.e the 38 countries where L'Arche exists). Nevertheless, we are well aware that all of this will not erase the hurt caused to these women. We continue to question ourselves as to how to accompany and support the victims of père Thomas Philippe.

In effect, père Thomas Philippe played an important role in the genesis of the association. He was Jean Vanier's spiritual father and inspired the latter to found L'Arche in 1964, in the village of Trosly-Breuil north of Paris. In the following years, he continued to exercise his priestly ministry as spiritual accompanier of the first community. During this time, L'Arche came into being, grew and developed throughout the world under the direction of Jean Vanier. The latter rapidly adopted fundamental orientations for L'Arche such as an openness to the inter-religious dimension, which père Thomas Philippe disagreed with. Some of the women who he abused were employees of this first community.

We acknowledge that this episode is part of our history that we will need time to fully understand and integrate in all of its aspects. We refuse any temptation to avoid this reality.

Let us remember that L'Arche is an international federation that, throughout the world, supports and accompanies communities where people live and work, bringing together people with an

¹ <https://bit.ly/2U71KbO>

intellectual disability and employees and volunteers who accompany them, from different religious denominations, believers and non-believers. L'Arche is inspired by Christianity, especially with regard to the attention given to people on the margins or the excluded, the spiritual dimension is an important part of its identity in the respect of all sensitivities.

L'Arche International is aware of how urgent it is to deploy a policy to prevent and combat abuse, one which can ensure a safe environment and culture, irrespective of the country. This is achieved by a review of procedures, which is currently underway, and by developing a Code of Conduct, which was validated in December 2018 by the International Leadership Team and which will be presented to the Federation delegates in Slovenia in April 2019 to ensure its deployment. L'Arche International is determined to apply a policy of zero tolerance concerning exploitation and sexual abuse.

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