

## Press release

# Publication of the report of the Study Commission mandated by L'Arche International

Paris, 30 January 2023

On 30 January 2023, the members of the Study Commission – set up in November 2020 by L'Arche International – published their report.

This document of more than 900 pages confirms, among other things, what L'Arche made public in February 2020 (at the conclusion of the investigation it had entrusted to an independent body and a historian), in particular Jean Vanier's adherence to the doctrines of his spiritual father, Thomas Philippe, and to the abusive practices related to them.

Following this investigation in 2020, in which its founder was seriously implicated, L'Arche decided to set up a Study Commission in order to better understand Jean Vanier's life orientation, the founding history of L'Arche and the institutional dynamics at work within the organisation. The Study Commission worked independently, backed by a Scientific Committee in charge of monitoring its work.

The leaders of L'Arche International express their deepest appreciation to the members both of the Study Commission and of the Scientific Committee.

The leaders of L'Arche International, Stephan Posner and Stacy Cates-Carney, write in their letter to the members of L'Arche: *"We are appalled [by the story detailed in the report and the way in which Jean Vanier was intimately involved] and we once again condemn, without reservation, the actions of Jean Vanier and Thomas Philippe which are in total contradiction with the elementary 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 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 forestall 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. "*

Twenty-five women of legal age, single, married or consecrated, and without disabilities, were identified as having experienced, at some point in their relationship with Jean Vanier, a situation involving a sexual act or an intimate gesture between 1952 and 2019. Some presented themselves as victims of an abusive relationship, others as consenting partners in a transgressive relationship. Some of these women are now deceased. In their diversity, these relationships, sometimes concurrent, are all part of a continuum of confusion, control and abuse.

Jean Vanier's adherence to Thomas Philippe's doctrines and related practices is extensively documented in the historical section of the report. In addition, it details the circumstances of the foundation of L'Arche in 1964 and points to the existence of a sectarian core around Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier. However, the Commission stresses that the arrival of people from very different backgrounds, totally unrelated to this sectarian core, and the integration of L'Arche into the medical and social systems, have guided its development in a way that is incompatible with the deployment of these sectarian aberrations.

This nucleus formed a microsystem at the inception of L'Arche that did not spread beyond a very narrow circle of people whose situations are widely documented in the report.

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.

With regard to possible responsibilities within L'Arche, 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.

L'Arche recognises its responsibility for not having been able to prevent, identify or report these abuses, and therefore for not having been able to prevent them.

L'Arche has decided to join the Recognition and Reparation Committee (*Commission Reconnaissance et Réparation*, [CRR](#)), an independent commission set up in France at the end of 2021. In doing so, L'Arche offers the victims of Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier, to engage, if they so wish, in a restorative justice process, when civil justice is not available.

At the request of L'Arche, 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 its history. It highlights the pitfalls which, to varying degrees, have created a favourable breeding ground for abuse and the failure to report it. This will fuel a critical review of these 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.

The two international leaders state that *" 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.*

*... 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 however 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 makes us vulnerable, but also 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.”*

Furthermore, L'Arche wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the promotion of a culture of good treatment and protection against all types of abuse, and this concerns everyone who participates in the life of L'Arche.

In terms of a safeguarding policy, L'Arche International – following its commitment of 2020 – set up an audit that was implemented in the 157 communities around the world in 2020 and 2021. This audit led, among other things, to the creation of a reference [framework](#) inspired on British safeguarding standards. It was finalised 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, and from then on audits will be scheduled every 3 years.

Since 2020, L'Arche International has also set up a [reporting unit](#) in charge of investigating the situations referred to it. This unit is made up of people from outside L'Arche or without operational responsibility within L'Arche. Similar mechanisms have been implemented in a growing number of its national structures and communities.

Safeguarding Response Team: [ireport@larche.org](mailto:ireport@larche.org)

**For more information:**

**Communication on L'Arche International website**

[www.larche.org/about-larche/news/study-commission-2023/](http://www.larche.org/about-larche/news/study-commission-2023/)

**Study Commission website**

<https://commissiondetude-jeanvanier.org/commissiondetudeindependante2023-empriseetabus/index.php/en/home-english/>

**Press contact:**

Jonathan Boulet-Groulx - [jonathan.boulet-groulx@larche.org](mailto:jonathan.boulet-groulx@larche.org)