

Canadian disability pioneer Vanier wins Templeton Prize

March 11 2015

Jean Vanier, who founded a pioneering global network of residential communities for people with and without mental disabilities, on Wednesday won the 2015 Templeton Prize, which honours "entrepreneurs of the spirit".

Shocked by the conditions inside mental institutions, the former officer in the Canadian Navy gave up everything in 1964 to live with two mentally handicapped men in a village in northern France, which quickly attracted new residents.

Over 50 years later, Vanier, 86, still lives at the community and there are now 147 "L'Arche" residential communities operating in 35 countries.

The Templeton Foundation announced the \$1.7 million award during a press conference at London's British Academy on Wednesday.

Late billionaire investor and philanthropist John Templeton established the prize in 1972 to identify "[entrepreneurs](#) of the spirit".

Past recipients of the prize, include Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

French-Canadian Vanier in a statement following the announcement called for society to focus on the "common good".

"People are healed and become more human as they enter into real

relationships with others," he said in a statement.

Vanier, the son of a Canadian diplomat, credits the solitary hours spent on board Royal Navy ships for spurring his spiritual development.

The next step came in 1963 when he was asked to visit psychiatric hospitals and other institutions.

Having seen first hand the conditions the patients were being held in, he invited two residents to live with him in Trosly-Breuil, near Paris.

Other patients and volunteers soon joined L'Arche, with some of the helpers going on to establish more centres around the world.

Jennifer Simpson, the granddaughter of John Templeton, said Vanier was an example of how people could "change the world for the better".

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