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[Rupert's Land News](#) is published 10 times per year (September - June) by the Diocese of Rupert's Land, in the Anglican Church in Canada. It connects churches and communities from Portage la Prairie, MB, to Atikokan, ON, by offering news, events, opinions, and ideas to 4,000 readers per month. RLN is available in a variety of formats:

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RLN welcomes story ideas, news items, and other input. If you want to be involved in this media ministry, please [email the editor](#).

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Cue R.E.M.

Image: [Elena Mozhylo](#)

It feels a little bit ironic to be putting together an issue on Endings right now. When we came up with this topic in January, my advisory board and I discussed the idea of endings as transformation. We talked about resurrection and how there must be an end before a new beginning.

As I write this, we're in the midst of lockdown in an effort to "flatten the curve" of COVID-19. Church buildings, schools, malls, and other social spaces are closed. With exception to those who work in essential services, everyone is staying home in isolation. When we do go out, we're following social distancing protocols by staying two metres away from other people.

Right now, as we adjust to this new normal, it feels like a lot of things are ending. Some of these are things we take for granted, like nights out with friends, or an hour at the gym, or the time we spend worshipping together. Families are facing some bigger questions. What happens if this lasts more than a few months? When will kids go back to school and parents to their jobs?

It's the end of the world as we know it. I don't feel fine, but I'm trying to find the bright points of hope every day. In Rupert's Land, parishes are responding in creative ways; you can read more about that on page 12.

And, we've now seen how the countries of the world can pull together to accomplish

something. Scientists have been telling us for months that we need to respond to the climate crisis; what might we learn about how to do that amidst this global pandemic? Communities and churches are pushing for the federal government to institute Universal Basic Income, stating that this crisis is showing how the cracks in our economic systems affect the most vulnerable. How different will the world look on the other side of this?

This issue is on Endings. Alex Jackson offers a reflection on how endings can be moments of transformation. Rachel Twigg Boyce writes about how to recognize when something does truly need to end. And, Helen Holbrook relates her experiences in palliative care as a spiritual health worker. In via media, Jane Barter examines the theology of Jean Vanier after the L'Arche Report about his abuse of six women.

Stay safe, Rupert's Land, and hang onto the hope that we'll come through this a stronger and more compassionate people.



Kyla Neufeld is the editor of Rupert's Land News.

The Leadership of the Suffering Servant

GEOFFREY WOODCROFT

Image: CDC

On Friday morning, March 13, 2020, a big chunk of my life ended. I am a boomer, albeit near the tail end, but a boomer nonetheless. As such, my world view and responsibility finally became clear and immediate. My assumptions of abundance in all manner of things, and my feelings of privilege regarding my fortunate lot in life, have been so greatly eroded by a disease that does not discriminate between one human and the next.

COVID-19 is. On its own, COVID-19 does not create fear, greed, or isolation, however, some human responses and behaviour have been just that. When removed from our self-made comfort zones, our vulnerable selves are visible, almost raw, and exposed. This in itself is neither good nor bad, but the very reality of our vulnerability, even when disguised by the comfort zone. How we process our vulnerability as people – in this case vulnerable to a disease – matters greatly for what we will do. For example, we could be more prone to fright, fight and flight mechanisms, or we might become more compassionate, courageous, and out-reaching as our vulnerable story unfolds.

BODYOFCHRIST-20 is. With God, the Body exercises one of its most beautiful attributes, and that is its capacity to draw upon the sincere hope of individuals into a divine collective. Out of weakness, brokenness, fallibility, and loneliness, God consecrates anew every day a divine Body to affect a temporal world. Our present stance to suspend worship and gatherings, to adhere to social separation, is not a cowardly act nor an act of greed, but rather an act of support by showing leadership from the

ground up, for municipal and provincial officials, neighbourhoods and families.

Through these troubled times I encourage the Body of Christ, using WRHA preparedness protocols, to be ever vigilant for its neighbours, especially the vulnerable. I encourage the Body of Christ to continually seek God in our common living, praying morning and evening, reading out loud the Jewish and Christian testaments, remembering all whom we have promised to nurture and support in this Body, and finally, with one another, lead in our wider community where present and past models of leadership struggle with the societal fall-out of a pandemic.

The leadership of which I speak is that for which the Body has been trained since the very first disciples. It is leadership that has its roots in the groundswell of our common life as humans and raises up as a cry to God as opposed to a petition to the local magistrate. This leadership recognizes the God of all creation divinely suffering with the vulnerable, the outcast, and the lost; this leadership is called to “kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen...” This leadership no longer assumes, no longer has privilege, but has only God who functions in, through, and out of the Suffering Servant.

Praise God, love life, and be hope.



Geoffrey Woodcroft,
Bishop of Rupert's Land

It's Hopeless

RACHEL TWIGG BOYCE

Image: [Sandy Millar](#)

"I've tried. You know I've tried. For the past few years I've tried everything I could think of and now I'm ashamed to admit that I think the situation is hopeless. There isn't anything left for me to do except admit it's hopeless."

My spiritual director leaned in, smiled, and said, "I've been waiting a long time for you to realize this is a hopeless situation. Now that you have, we can finally get somewhere."

Christians are Easter people. We believe in resurrection. We believe in new life. We are, at least ideally, a hope-filled people.

This is one of my favourite things about being a Christian, but our hopeful nature also has a dark side: we don't know how to let things die. And sometimes things are supposed to die.

If you're wondering about the specifics of the story I opened the article with, the truth is, this has happened to me over and over again. I have tried to keep relationships, individual programs, and entire churches open when I should have been helping them have a dignified death. I'm not good at endings, but I'm trying to learn.

In *Necessary Endings*, Dr. Henry Cloud asks:

"Why endings? Whether we like it or not, endings are a part of life. They are woven into the fabric of life itself, both when it goes well,

and when it doesn't. On the good side of life, for us to ever get to a new level, a new tomorrow, or a next step, something has to end. Life has seasons, stages, and phases. For there to be anything new, old things always have to end, and we have to let go of them.... good cannot begin until bad ends."

Good cannot begin until bad ends. That was what my spiritual director was trying to teach me. I'm a natural problem solver and find it easy to come up with endless options to tweak and improve something rather than letting it die. Sometimes this skill is a real gift and I can help things that are filled with life continue to grow, but sometimes it means I create the appearance of life where there is no life at all.

I can spend years pretending that something that is already dead is still alive. When things start to smell, I try a different perfume. I try and I try and I try.

It never works.

Eventually I run out of ideas and energy. When I know that I have exhausted every option, when I sit with a wise guide who knows me and has been following my story, I can sometimes get a glimpse of clarity. I can see that the dead thing is, in fact, dead.

Once I am finally willing to admit the situation is hopeless, once I am honest, I need time to grieve. Grief makes people uncomfortable and they prefer to see that I've bounced back and "landed on my feet," but it's an essential part of the process. I do not invest large amounts of time and energy into things unless I love them. When they die, I need time, lots of time, to mourn.

It's a weird time to be a part of the Anglican Church, but I think it's an infinitely hopeful time.

Eventually I also need a place to put all the time and energy I had been pouring into the hopeless case. When I am ready to do that, I am usually surprised by just how many beautiful and hope-filled things have been there all along, waiting for me to notice them.

And that's when I have to admit a hard truth. I hadn't been living as a hope-filled Easter person with faith in the impossible. I'd incorrectly diagnosed the situation and I'd been deceiving myself. And I'd been wasting my time. I'd been so focused on trying to resurrect a hopeless situation that I had missed the hope-filled ones. I'd been stuck in the bad and it prevented me from seeing all the good.

It's a weird time to be a part of the Anglican Church. Some things are ending. Gone are the days when we could assume that people would know what we mean when we make casual references to stories from our Scriptures, would look to us at key times in their lives to help them walk through major milestones like the birth of a child or the death of a loved one. Gone are

the days when we could expect our church buildings would be filled to capacity on Sunday mornings.

And other things are changing, some happening so fast it can be hard to keep up. As I type this, we're trying to figure out how to shift our services online because of COVID-19. Some of these changes will be temporary, but I suspect online services will become more common even after this disease has been eradicated. While I believe we will always long to meet together and worship face to face, this crisis has shown us that meeting online is not only doable, but valuable. Online worship is valuable in times of crisis for people who can't easily leave their homes or to create a sense of community in dioceses that cover a huge geographic footprint. Something new is growing, and it fills me with hope.

It's a weird time to be a part of the Anglican Church, but I think it's an infinitely hopeful time. If we can use our God-given discernment to diagnose correctly the hopeless situations and the hope-filled ones, we can begin to shift our energy to the sources of new life and growth that are bubbling up all around us. If we can correctly diagnose hopeless situations and stop pouring time and other resources into them, then we will be surprised by the abundance we have to use towards new life and growth.

Discerning what things need to die and letting them die is hard. People need to be given legitimate space to grieve and honestly express their feelings. They need to be reminded that death is normal and they are not failures. Ultimately, we all win when we take the courageous step of trading in the bad for the good.



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Rachel Twigg Boyce is the Vicar of Saint Benedict's table. You can find her there, [at her website](#), or on social media as "Rev Rachel."

Reflecting on Endings

ALEX JACKSON

Image: [George Pagan III](#)

Our minds like patterns and predictability, so we seek to establish routines and rituals to bring order and meaning to our lives. We use words to frame our understanding, but our vocabulary, like our understanding, is limited. We pretend our days start at a given time, or that our activities are finite and fit within a contained temporal boundary. It's a story we tell ourselves: *Our lives are contained, the universe is small and manageable, the illusion I build is real and solid and reliable.* Things start and come to a reasonable conclusion. But what we call endings are moments of transformation. We are always in the middle of something, preparing for changes to come. An ending is really the emergence of what is next as part of a continuum of growth and change. Sometimes

evolution is radical, quick, sharp, and sudden, and sometimes it's gradual like the slow work of erosion on bedrock.

Endings aren't what we think they are. Our memories and imaginations can bring someone or something back even after they are gone. Stories train us to expect a beginning, middle, and end to all things. But my experience teaches me that life isn't a story, because my work is constantly changing. I'm involved in education and community renewal, and I can think of no more radical project than building a caring environment for love, learning, and advocacy. I get to repurpose social tools once used to isolate and separate people from each other into instruments of integration, discovery, and empowerment.



1. Canned Fish
2. Canned Meats
3. Canned Fruit & Vegetables
4. Canned Stew, Chili & Beans
5. Peanut Butter & Jam
6. Pasta (family & individual sizes)
7. Cereal (family & individual sizes)
8. Canned Spaghetti Sauce or Tomato Sauce
9. Canned Soup (lentil, pea, vegetable)
10. Boxed Mac & Cheese



The work needs to be done, but it takes time. Wholeness of being, renewal, and community building: these aren't fragmented industrial assembly-line processes. They take a lifetime of reaching out, connecting, finding and offering healing, learning, and teaching. Small grains of sand build a mountain, and single drops of water fill an ocean. Each one is important and impactful to Creation. Eventually, new ways of being together in the gift of the world emerge from our mistakes and successes, and the humbling process of learning together.

The world works the way it does because we largely agree to it. Nothing changes until a critical mass of people are uncomfortable enough to make changes. Systems don't work without people willing to participate in them. By adhering to the operational rules, we bring about the outcomes those systems are set up for, whether we agree with the outcomes or not. Social change comes when we let go of the things that hold each other down. We must find work in systems that let us lift each other up and re-make systems that don't into systems that do. We are empowered to make and change the world. We have a choice in every moment of what that world will be.

We, the body of Christ, are engaged in a project to recognize and spread love throughout Creation. This is the 2020th year of the common era. That's two millennia of seeking

to build social structures founded in unconditional love, inclusion, and compassion. If it were easy, we'd have done it by now, but we have lots of work left to do.

Truthfully, I'm not much interested in endings. I prefer to ask, *Where has this world come from?* or *What is this based in?* I want to hear more about unconditional love, the feeling that accepts us wholly as who we are and grows us into who we are becoming. Where do I find a thing like that? The systems I inhabit and perpetuate need a critical re-examination. If I'm not meeting people in the place of love and growth because the system I'm in forbids or prevents that from happening, then I need to become a subversive radical.

I wish I could say it's a purely altruistic endeavour, but I know when I work with another person to improve their own life, mine improves too. So does everyone else's. That's because we are all connected. We are all part of the massive super-organism we call society. Like a murmuration of starlings, we flock all over the Earth, urged to fill creation. Recent and historic events show us how we react to stimuli, good and bad. Rapid global communication spreads messages faster than we can imagine.

Endings are not real. We experience transformation and call it a completion, but what was before is not gone. What is now will change, and yet there is no moment when a line can be definitively drawn and one can say, "There is the conclusion." Creation was made with and in love. In faith there is no end to that beautiful journey, no bottom to that well, and no top to that mountain. It's not coming, it is here.



Alex Jackson is a writer, teacher, learner, father, husband, amateur philosopher, and beginner martial artist. He feels called to work in reconciliation.

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End of Life – Reflections from a Spiritual Health Practitioner

HELEN HOLBROOK

Image: Samuel Ferrara

A nurse asked me a question during my first unit of Clinical Pastoral Education at the Ottawa Civic Hospital 19 years ago. The question involved her expectations that chaplains provide primarily religious support to patients. This expectation often surrounds this job. I knew it then, and the intervening years have only reinforced my certainty that the agenda of a chaplain is simple and straightforward: to listen, to be present, and to connect with someone soul-to-soul.

Chaplains hope to empower patients to heal old wounds, forgive, find peace, and feel worthy to be loved as they are. Being loved and accepted despite our dark sides, regrets, and fears is a life long journey for all of us. However, this journey intensifies at the end of life. The role of the spiritual health practitioner, then, is to act as the agent of love and acceptance under the most difficult circumstances possible.

Over the past 19 years, I have witnessed people die both suddenly and slowly. I have watched the passing of those who expected their end due to terminal illness, and those who planned it through MAID (Medical Assistance in Dying). I have heard many people confess their regrets, reveal their brokenness, and express their hopes. I have witnessed the great inner strength people have developed through relationships, spiritual practices, self-awareness, and humility.

However, grief and pain are not limited to those rooms in those moments alone; grief and pain are present before, during, and long after the death of a loved one. It is in light of this limitation that I reflect on my 19 years of service and ask myself where we, as a community, can enhance our support. I consider whether there are enough places for people to sit and reflect

on life and faith. I contemplate whether there are enough people to listen, support, and accept those in mourning. As a result of this introspection, I feel confident making the following suggestions.

Support for Family Care Givers

A prolonged period of caregiving may lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Caregiving causes emotional and vicarious trauma and inevitably takes a huge physical toll on the body. These feelings are even more profound for caregivers when accompanied by the realization that they are burning out and may have to admit their loved one to a hospice or a long term care facility. I have witnessed caregivers suddenly showing up in the hospital because of stroke, heart attack, or falls. All of that stress accumulates over time and, when combined with grief, the body simply breaks down under the weight of it.

Offering these caregivers respite from their task, even going out for a simple cup of coffee and a talk, has immense benefits. These opportunities can happen during the time of illness as well as after to help deal with the grief and loss. They can be created by friends and family, or could be arranged by a community-based organization.

Bereavement Support

In my current position as a spiritual health practitioner, I provide in-house bereavement support to residents and patients. For example, a patient who is terminal will likely need support in dealing with their grief. Practices, such as a Life Review or Dignity Therapy, are suggested. These are designed to assist the dying with reflecting on their life story.

Spiritual health practitioners are also able to provide bereavement support to the family and friends of the person who is suffering. I have shed many tears while saying an end of life prayer, listening to lovely reminiscences, and feeling the pain of past hurts and regrets. I know my presence there at that moment can offer peace and solace to those who seek it. However, after the end of someone's life, the follow-up to this type of hands-on care is very limited.

People can locate [The Canadian Virtual Hospice](#). This site includes a link to MyGrief.ca, which consists of a number of videos by bereaved volunteers who share their story. Hearing the stories of others can give people who are suffering some comfort that they are not alone in their pain.

Some churches have taken on the task of running bereavement support groups, and there are numerous provincial hospice and palliative care associations that strive to support grieving people over the longer term.

For some, these sorts of care are enough. However, some people may require more individual support and might even require professional counseling. For individuals, gaining access to this kind of resource remains quite challenging.

Educational Opportunities

There are some materials, such as Dr. Alan Wolfelt's *100 Things to do While Grieving the Death of a Spouse*, available to those individuals suffering after a loss. The internet also represents a number of opportunities for people to seek out supports. Workshops are periodically advertised on many web sites centred on grief and loss. Organized events, such as [Death Cafes](#), can bring one's community together to discuss various end-of-life and bereavement topics.

Spiritual Opportunities

Churches also offer a number of opportunities for the bereaved to come together and grieve. For instance, Blue

Christmas services are a way to recognize that holidays can be hard. The loss of parents is observed on Mother's and Father's Days. Many churches also offer a service for those traumatized by the loss of a child through disease, accident, crime, or miscarriage. All people grieve, and it is this pain that unites us despite where we are from or where we worship. The question is: do we as a community give sufficient sacred space for grief and mourning after the ceremony has ended, and are these services open to all?

The biblical story that always challenges me to reflect on the work I do is the story of the woman at the well. Jesus, thirsty from his travels, asks a woman for water from the well. It is a simple request that is made complex because of her "otherness" – being not of his nation. Christ was present, patient, accepting, and he listened to her story. She told her story to him because she felt safe that she would not be judged, ignored, or dismissed. This is the goal I keep in mind in all my visits. We are called to be Christ-like in our approach to all people, and I can only hope to continue to strive to reach this goal.

To sum up 19 years of my experience as a spiritual health practitioner is a challenge. However, upon reflection I realize it is an honour to serve, to be a keeper of stories, a companion to people at the end of their journey, and to recognize my own place in that shared journey. I have begun to reflect on my own life story, my own joys, my own hurts, and my relationships with others. I can only hope that when I come to the end of my journey, there will be someone there to see me through it with a listening and accepting heart, and to support my loved ones through their loss in the days and years that follow.



Helen Holbrook has been a spiritual care provider for 19 years. Currently, she works at the Riverview Health Centre in Winnipeg.

Parish News Roundup

Interlake Welcomes New Ministers

An exciting milestone was reached on Sunday, February 9, 2020 when the fledgling Interlake Regional Shared Ministry celebrated the installation and commissioning of John Dut and Theo Robinson to serve the six-member congregations in four widespread communities.

Presiding ministers were Jason Zinko, Bishop of the MNO Synod, and Geoffrey Woodcroft, Bishop of Rupert's Land, Anglican Church of Canada.

More than a hundred members of the six congregations gathered for the occasion in Good Shepherd Lutheran, Selkirk. They came from the member churches – Ardal-Geysir in Arborg, Lundar Lutheran in Lundar, St. Peter Lutheran and St. Cyprian Anglican in Teulon, Evangelical Lutheran in Selkirk, and the host church, Good Shepherd, Selkirk.

Special music enriched the service presented by Good Shepherd's Senior Choir, which sang a choral benediction. A group of musicians and singers from the South Sudan Community in Winnipeg – compatriots of Rev. John Dut – also shared their faith and support in a spirited song, Sudanese style.

This milestone was achieved through efforts that began in 2016 to explore a regional approach to maintaining ministry in Interlake Lutheran churches. Dedicated lay members met about 10 times each year, guided and assisted initially by Pastor Gary Schenk, then later by Pastors Stan Richards, Erik Parker, Courtenay Reedman Parker, and Mark Koenker. The work was supported in leadership by former Bishop Elaine Sauer and most recently by Bishop Jason Zinko.



Photo: Garry Streich

In the new ministry team arrangement, Rev. John (who came to MNO from the Saskatchewan Synod) will be serving full-time. Rev. Theo, a resident of Winnipeg, is half-time serving the IRSM and halftime serving the St. Michael's Anglican Church in Victoria Beach. Both have braved winter driving conditions as the initial three-month worship schedule introduced them to the welcoming members of the Interlake congregations.

The Interlake experiment is evidence of the new paths of ministry, which are appearing Canada-wide, and even world-wide, as the shape of Christian living evolves. Trail-blazing is both exciting and challenging, as these Interlakelers are discovering and sharing with Pastors John and Theo.

– Faye Goranson, Lundar Lutheran



This page of the Parish News Round Up is sponsored by Richard Rosin. For more information, see his ad on page 15.

Creative Parish Responses to COVID-19

The parishes of the Diocese of Rupert's Land are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in new and creative ways.

St. Mary's Church, Sioux Lookout has been holding Evening Prayer and Bible study using Zoom every Tuesday evening, with various people taking turns leading. They are also using Zoom for their LCM group to continue studies every second Sunday.

All Saints, Winnipeg live streamed a Eucharist for the community. They consecrated the host in the church and then distributed it through out the community using volunteers. Parishioners watched the live stream at home and received communion at the same time as the priest. This way, they continued the celebration of being in community with one and another.

Members from **Emmanuel Anglican/United Church in Ignace, Ontario** are making online contact each day with those who have computers and phone calls to the others and live stream Sunday worship. They have also found a way to continue their "blessings in a backpack" program for students who require food assistance. They pack the food up (using gloves), and then a teacher picks up the labelled bags and takes them to the local food bank for distribution.

St. Margaret's, Winnipeg is keeping their church building illuminated throughout this period of being "in exile." This is intended to be a visible sign to the community and all who pass by that, while the building may be empty, the Church remains very much alive and vigilant in prayer, worship, and service.

St. George's, Transcona in Winnipeg is sending out regular weekly emails on Monday mornings, and check-in emails on Thursdays with a reflection for the week. On Sundays, they send out an email with the sermon, musical pieces, and a few prayers.

As well, many parishes have been offering live streaming worship, including saint benedict's table, St. Alban's, Kenora, St. Chad's, Winnipeg, and St. Mark's, Winnipeg

Forest Dwelling: Spirituality for Our Wisdom Years

This two-year program, held through the Oblate School of Theology, is designed for more mature seekers who desire to mindfully embrace the challenges of aging. The goal of the program is to prepare participants to live well during their remaining years.

The next cohort (2021-2022) will begin in January 2021. Applications are [available online](#) and must be submitted by June 15, 2020.

[Poster page 1](#): Program info and faculty

[Poster page 2](#): Curriculum and tuition info

Indigenous Awareness: Online Courses Available

The Diocese of Rupert's Land and St. John's College have co-sponsored an eighteen-hour online course aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of the issues faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada, and particularly within the area covered by our diocese. The course covers subjects including the history of contact with Europeans, the content of treaties, the place of the Métis people, and the role of the Anglican Church in colonization, residential schools and the current moves towards a self-determining Church.

While participation in this course (or equivalent) is mandated for all active clergy and those training for ordination, it is open to anyone!

Registration costs \$40. Once you have paid your fee, you will be sent the course syllabus, readings, and links to listen to the lecture sessions. To register, forward your fee to the Diocese of Rupert's Land.

If you have any questions, please [contact Heather McCance](#).



"Be Thou My Vision" by Mike Moyers

A Theo-Politics of Coercion – The Heresies of Jean Vanier

JANE BARTER

Image: [Patrick Tomasso](#)

Jean Vanier was a hero to many, myself included. When I was in my undergraduate and master's degrees, I was a live-in caregiver for persons with mental challenges. I later volunteered at L'Arche community. I came to see Vanier's theology of disability as not only a pastoral theology, but a political one as well – one which had the capacity to transform not only hearts and minds, but also communities and structures. His theology was, to me, what Stanley Hauerwas called, "a politics of gentleness." Since the news of his abuse of six women broke, I have come to see it otherwise, because, as the [L'Arche Report](#) attests, there was a coercive underside to Vanier's life, and it is one that I believe is intimately tied to his theology.

When the scandal broke, the response on my social media feed was swiftly conciliatory. A particular Christian habit of thought quickly emerged – one which opined that Vanier was like the rest of us – partly good, partly bad – but that the good outweighed the bad. Or, as others put it, "We are all sinners." What does the immediate and instinctive exoneration of Vanier say about his theology and our own? And, more specifically, how does faulty theology both enable and perpetuate the kind of serious sexual misconduct in which Vanier was involved?

First Heresy: Women are not Human

The drive to exonerate Vanier has much to do with the manner in which women are

regarded in the Church – that is, as less than human. Indeed, throughout social media responses, the terrible details of Vanier's targeted and repeated sexual abuse of women were conspicuously ignored.

At first glance, it is striking that the perspective of the victim was overlooked, particularly since Vanier himself seemed to be exemplary in his capacity to see those who have gone unnoticed. But did he? Throughout Vanier's writing on disability, such as in "The Need of Strangers," there remained a tendency to regard persons with disability as instrumental to our salvation, to our human growth and development: "What is true for people with disabilities is true for all those who are weak and in need. They call us to greater compassion, kindness, and tenderness. They can teach us to become human."

Sadly, the six women he abused are granted neither compassion nor kindness nor tenderness, in spite of the need that they expressed when they went to Vanier for spiritual direction. Their humanity was not protected or cherished. Instead, they became a type – the chosen and blessed Mary. In his exaltation of them, he also dehumanized them. They had no recourse to community, so central to Vanier's vision of "becoming human," instead they were spiritualized and privatized so that he could exploit them with immunity. As he told one of his victims: "This is not us, this is Mary and Jesus. You are chosen, you are special; this is secret."

Second Heresy – The Cult of the (Male) Saint

Vanier’s secrecy extended beyond the abuses that he perpetuated; he also colluded with the sexual violence perpetrated by his hero, Father Thomas Philippe. Father Philippe was the creator of *L’Eau Vive*, a community that taught contemplative living. According to the Report, Vanier was aware of his mentor’s abuse of women since the 1950s, although he repeatedly denied it. Not only was he aware, he was engaged in the self-same practices, at times with the same women. As one of the women testified:

“In 19XX, (...) I decided to go and see Father Thomas to seek his advice. I wanted to talk about (...) our secret with Jean Vanier. (...) There was a curtain, and he sat on the bed. Before I could start talking about Jean Vanier, it started with him, the same as with Jean Vanier. He was not tender like Jean Vanier. Morve brutal, no intercourse, same words to say that I am special and that all this is about Jesus and Mary.”

The veneration of Philippe would soon be replicated in the kind of adoration that Vanier received as a spiritual leader, veneration that would make it almost impossible for the women to come forward. As one of the women testified:

“I was like frozen, I realised that Jean Vanier was adored by hundreds of people, like a living Saint, that he talked about how he helped victims of sexual abuse, it appeared like a camouflage and I found it difficult to raise the issue.

The veneration of the male religious leader is a common and pernicious habit of the Christian church. It gives male religious authority unfettered power, while conversely it works to discredit and marginalize women. It was at play almost immediately in the aftermath of the Vanier scandal, as Vanier’s devotees – male and female alike – made an immediate effort to pardon him and vilify the women. It is to the profound credit to *L’Arche International* that it refused to downplay the seriousness of Vanier’s deeds, and conducted a full and thorough investigation, and then condemned his actions without equivocation.

Third Heresy – The Autonomy of Desire

One of the hallmarks of Vanier’s Thomism is the manner in which he views desire. Desire, according to Vanier’s natural theology, simply needs to be properly formed or disciplined by the will. As Vanier wrote in one of his most scholarly works, *Made for Happiness*:



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Image: Christopher Bemrose

The first L'Arche house, L'Arche Bognor, in Trosly, France, founded in 1964.

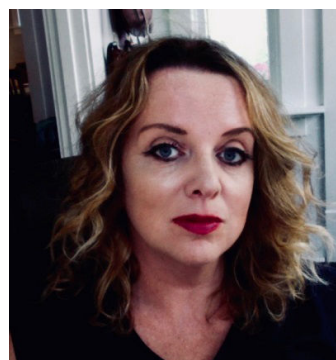
In themselves our desires tend to be chaotic, either excessive or defective. Like runaway, riderless horses, they await direction. Man's proper task is to take hold of the reins and guide them, to orient these desires, with all their fulminating energy, towards their sought-after end.

What is immediately clear from reading the Report is that Vanier not only lost control of these runaway horses – i.e., his own lust – but that the end to which he was steering them was grotesquely coercive and self-serving. In other words, *within* the very desire that animated Vanier's spiritual vision there existed a shadow side, one that drove him to exploitative relationships. The shadow side of desire – its intractability, its rootedness in violent ideologies, and a lust for rule – is never adequately captured by Vanier's theology, although it is patently clear in his interactions with women. To one of the victims, Vanier made the troubling claim that her love of Christ should be made manifest in her expression of love for Vanier himself, for he was a conduit through which his victim could express her devotion:

“When I expressed my astonishment saying (...) how could I manifest my love to Jesus and to him, he replied: ‘But Jesus and myself, this is not two, but we are one. (...) It is Jesus who loves you through me.’”

I daresay that the habit of baptizing human desire with divine intention and purposefulness has been a source of theological justification for more than one Christian sexual predator. Feminist theory has long taught us that desire bends to the dictates not merely of the will, but also to the tacit forces that shape us, including wide-scale misogyny and those sadistic powers that confuse coercion with compassion, and violence with love.

In the end, I believe that the legacy of Jean Vanier is forever tarnished due to the nature and the gravity of his actions. This is not to say that the work of L'Arche is tarnished. L'Arche consists of countless decent persons of goodwill whose work conforms to a vision that its founder could never quite attain. Distinctions are important in theology as in life. The distinction to be made here is not between the sin and the sinner for they are interdependent. The only distinction to be made is between the founder and the community that he helped found. There is one that we must stand against and another that we must stand behind.



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