

Statement of Supreme Knight Carl Anderson on the Death of Jean Vanier

Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus made the following statement on the death of Jean Vanier:

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — It is with great sadness that we learned of the passing of our friend Jean Vanier. Jean lived a life dedicated to the simple but inviolable belief that each of us is created in God's image and that every single life is sacred and deserving of respect, protection, and most of all, love. In a world in which the vulnerable are held in contempt and life is increasingly expendable, Jean offered the antidote – an antidote of hope and an antidote of truth. For Jean, human life was beautiful from beginning to end. And so, at a young age, he dedicated his own life to serving those in need.

It was this passion for living the Gospels that led him to create L'Arche, the movement for those with intellectual disabilities that now numbers more than 120 communities in 30 countries. It was in one of these communities that Jean lived until his passing. I'm struck by an interview he gave last year to Columbia magazine, in which he said:

"People with intellectual disabilities are extraordinary. I come home and I find Pauline who tells me 'you are the handsomest guy in the world.' They reach out and say, 'I love you.' And what they awaken in us is the desire to reach out to them, because what is their desire? Many of them have been humiliated and unwanted all their lives. So, they draw out in us an answer to the cry: 'Do you love me?'"

Jean loved many in his long life. And in return, he was loved by so many.

It was one of my greatest joys as Supreme Knight to present the Gaudium et Spes Award, the highest honor of the Knights of Columbus, to Jean in 2005. The presentation came hours after the death of St. John Paul II. In accepting the award,

Jean recalled being with the Pope in Lourdes, France, just eight months earlier.

“Looking at Pope John Paul II in the eyes, I saw him as a sign of the glory of God because the glory of God is the manifestation of his presence in the weak.”

The same can be said of my friend Jean Vanier. He was a philosopher who was also a man of action. He was a true icon of the Beatitudes. We must now continue his mission. We must rededicate our lives to the service and protection of others. We must love as Jean loved.

Also see:

Jean Vanier, who changed lives of intellectually disabled, dies in Paris