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## Message from the Editor

Shannon E. French

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## Message from the Editor

Shannon E. French

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Ethical leadership has never been a more important subject as the world confronts the dire challenge of a global pandemic. From countries to communities, we have seen some leaders rise to meet the occasion, taking bold steps to mitigate the impact of the deadly virus and uniting people in the common cause of saving as many lives as possible, while others have stumbled badly, putting more people at risk and sowing division through indecision, incompetence, or even outright corruption. When the stakes are life and death, the character of a leader is placed in sharp relief. There is a particular urgency to revisit the idea of servant-leaders, whose primary motivation is serving others and advancing or protecting the interests of those they serve, rather than advancing their own careers or other personal interests. There is also a need to engage with the ethics of care and caregiving, as well as the general question of what we owe one another, from loved ones to strangers. These are all pressing ethical issues, along with questions about justice, the fair distribution of scarce resources, the balancing of harms and competing needs, conflicts of duty, and preserving human rights and human dignity. Ethics and ethical leadership must be at the heart of our collective effort to survive the current crisis and construct a promising future, for ourselves and future generations.

We have now honored twelve outstanding individuals with the Inamori Ethics Prize. We have learned much from their examples of global ethical leadership, and we continue to do so, as their actions and influence improve the condition of humankind around the world:

- **2008: Dr. Francis Collins**, leader of the Human Genome Project and current head of the NIH
- **2009: The Honorable Mary Robinson**, Elder, policymaker, and former president of Ireland
- **2010: The late Mr. Stan Brock**, founder of nonprofit Remote Area Medical

- 2011: **Advocate Beatrice Mtetwa**, human rights lawyer
- 2012: **Dr. David Suzuki**, environmentalist, scientist, and broadcaster
- 2013: **Mr. Yvon Chouinard**, entrepreneur
- 2014: **Dr. Denis Mukwege**, physician and advocate against sexual violence
- 2015: **Professor Martha Nussbaum**, ethics scholar and UN advisor
- 2016: **Professor Peter Eigen**, anti-corruption pioneer, and founder of Transparency International
- 2017: **Mrs. Marian Wright Edelman**, founder of the Children's Defense Fund
- 2018: **Dr. Farouk El-Baz**, NASA Apollo Program scientist and conservationist
- 2019: **Mr. LeVar Burton**, actor-writer-producer-director and literacy advocate

Our most recent addition to this distinguished list, Mr. LeVar Burton, is the kind of talent you can only describe with a lot of hyphens. He is an actor-producer-director-script writer-book author and advocate for children's literacy as well as for AIDS/ HIV treatment and research. Known to many for his groundbreaking role in the 1977 award-winning ABC television miniseries *Roots*, where he embodied Kunta Kinte, the main character in Alex Haley's powerful epic about slavery in America, he is also recognized worldwide for his portrayal of Lt. Commander Geordi La Forge from the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* TV show and movies: a brilliant blind, black engineer on whom the entire crew depended. For an entire generation (or more) he will always be remembered as the host of the long-running, award-winning PBS children's series, *Reading Rainbow*, where he brought the joy of reading into myriad hearts and helped children everywhere believe in their own uniqueness and potential. Now, he reawakens in adults the same excitement for reading with his incredible podcast, *LeVar Burton Reads*. During the pandemic, he has lifted the spirits of thousands of people in social isolation and quarantine by livestreaming himself reading books aloud from popular authors such as Neil Gaiman and Kurt Vonnegut on social media. He encourages literacy in both high- and low-tech ways around the world through his ongoing nonprofit work and profound personal commitment. He is a beacon of hope, using the power

of storytelling in many forms to fight for inclusion and dignity for all. Nor is he alone. All of our surviving former prize recipients have stepped up and used their influence, insight, and gifts to meet this moment and “improve the condition of humankind.”

We dedicate this issue of *The International Journal of Ethical Leadership* to all those who have lost their lives to COVID-19 and to the courageous healthcare workers who have risked their own safety to aid and heal others. Dr. Kazuo Inamori, whose spirit of altruism inspires our work at the Inamori International Center for Ethics and Excellence, said, “Human beings have no higher calling than to serve the greater good of humankind and society.” We believe this to be true. We honor the dedicated researchers who have turned all their energy towards finding effective treatments and developing a vaccine, the teachers who have adapted virtually overnight to virtual teaching, striving daily to keep their scattered students’ education on track, and everyone who has met the current crisis by reaching out with kindness and generosity, using their talents to make the world a better place. From artists to athletes, from journalists to judges, from lawyers to librarians, from first responders to first-time voters, we see countless reminders of the unquenchable human spirit and the power of positive, collective effort towards a common goal. There will always be voices of hate, but the voices of hope are louder and getting stronger every day. Despite social distancing, as a human family, we have never been closer.

Stay safe and well, everyone.