

## **Social Entrepreneur Rami Nashashibi Wins 2018 Opus Prize for Chicago's Inner-City Muslim Action Network**

**South side community organizer wins USD \$1 million award honoring champions for faith-filled change**

**PORTLAND, OR. (Nov. 15, 2018)**—Social entrepreneur Rami Nashashibi has been awarded the prestigious 2018 [Opus Prize](#) for his inspirational work as founder and director of the Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) in Chicago, Illinois. [IMAN](#) is a nonprofit organization that fosters health, wellness and healing in some of the city's most challenged neighborhoods by organizing for social change; cultivating the arts; and operating a holistic health center, corner grocery store initiative, and job-training program. IMAN incorporated as a nonprofit in 1997 through the drive of people directly impacted by and deeply invested in social issues affecting communities of color living on Chicago's South Side. Since that time, IMAN has steadily grown and, in 2016, opened a second office in Atlanta to continue mobilizing a cross-section of people committed to their mission.

"The million-dollar Opus Prize award will allow IMAN to significantly expand its Green Re-entry program which provides life coaching, healing and dynamic job-training in the construction trades for returning citizens and young men who are potential victims of neighborhood violence," Nashashibi said. "It will also reinforce our team's efforts to exemplify prophetic compassion and mercy for all of the IMAN family."

The two Opus Prize finalists, Daniel and Avitha Victor of Agape Rehabilitation Centre in Chennai, India, and Rev. Daniel Panchot, CSC, and Jose Antonio Patron of Yancana Huasy in Lima, Peru were awarded \$100,000 each. The prize was announced during a ceremony at the Earle Chiles Center, hosted by the University of Portland and the Opus Prize Foundation.

The Opus Prize is one of the world's largest faith-based awards for social entrepreneurship. In the face of improbable odds, its laureates are creating change in their communities and demonstrating faith and creativity through their work. Their leadership and dedication is transforming the lives of people around the world.

The University of Portland was selected by the Opus Prize Foundation to administer this year's award because of the school's commitment to educating the hands and heart – in addition to the mind – of its students, many of whom are dedicated to service and social justice. The 21-month process to identify, nominate and review candidates was made possible by the involvement of University of Portland students, faculty, alumni and administration.

"IMAN has spent nearly two decades as the lynchpin implementing grassroots programs serving vulnerable families in some of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods," explained Don Neureuther, Executive Director of the Opus Prize Foundation. "Rami

Nashashibi and his team exude ‘mercy,’ a Muslim virtue and tradition that embodies the values of the Opus Prize as they offer vulnerable families a ray of hope and inspire others through their work.”

“IMAN’s holistic business model and spirit of inclusion of all ethnicities and faiths is a key to their success,” Neureuther said. “They identify a need and creatively respond to it, whether it’s a lack of housing and healthcare, poor nutrition, a dearth of arts opportunities, or providing a skill set through job training for at-risk young men. The working partnerships they establish with other neighborhood faith leaders is really impressive and intentional.”

The two finalists were also honored for their faith and dedication to those in need. Daniel and Avitha Victor are a married couple whose life’s work in Chennai, India is supporting and educating an array of teens and adults with special needs. Through compassionate care, they develop a professional skill set and support system for each person, promoting personal confidence, independence and success. Many served by Agape learn computer skills by completing a one-year diploma course leading to employment as software engineers in Chennai’s IT corridor. Others have the opportunity to start their own small businesses. Daniel and Avitha hope to eventually build their own facility, expanding the number of people they serve.

In 1981, a small group of Peruvians with motor disabilities sought help from Fr. Daniel Panchot, a Holy Cross priest working in Lima, Peru. With a call to serve as an ‘educator of the faith in mind and heart with a preference for people who are poor,’ Fr. Daniel established Yancana Huasy. Now directed by Jose Antonio Patron Quispe, Yancana Huasy is one of Peru’s leading NGOs, working to integrate children and families with special needs into public schools, faith communities and neighborhoods. They are primary advocates in ensuring the disabled have access to public transportation and facilities, and focus on training parents of children with disabilities to meet the physical and emotional needs of their child. Yancana Huasy’s staff—many who have worked there for more than 20 years—help parents understand that ‘it takes a special parent to care for a child with special needs.’

To arrange interviews with Rami Nashashibi or the two finalists, please contact the Opus Prize at [info@opusprize.org](mailto:info@opusprize.org)

### **About the Opus Prize**

The Opus Prize is an annual celebration of individuals working anywhere in the world, whose faith-filled, entrepreneurial leadership helps people in need transform their lives. The Prize is awarded to the recipients’ organizations not only to expand their humanitarian efforts, but also to further inspire people to pursue service to others. Each year, the Prize partners with a Catholic university to identify worthy recipients, host the awards events, and involve committed students at every level of the process and celebration. More at: [www.opusprize.org](http://www.opusprize.org)