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**INSTITUTE AWARDS \$1.7 MILLION IN SCIENCE RESEARCH GRANTS TO DOCUMENT
THE EFFECTS AND NATURE OF ALTRUISM**
Launching An Effort To Better Understand Unselfish Concern For Others

More than \$1.7 million in grants have been awarded to 21 research projects to conduct groundbreaking investigations into the scientific nature of unselfish or "unlimited" love, including volunteerism, organ donations, rescue work and other examples of selfless altruism, compassion, and service. The research, funded by the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love (IRUL), based at the School of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, represents one of the most carefully reviewed set of projects in the history of this emerging scientific field. The institute hopes that the grants, the first of many it intends to award, will help establish clinically documented evidence of the positive effect and transformative power, even on a global scale, of unconditional love.

Though it is generally assumed that altruism is a good thing, scant hard scientific evidence exists to support that notion, or precisely how or why it is good. Whereas negative human behavior -- such as spousal abuse, childhood neglect, and anger -- has been examined through innumerable studies, few studies have investigated the benefits of love, especially unlimited love, which the institute describes as altruistic affirmation and care for all humanity without exception.

The research will explore a vast range of human activity that falls under that category and attempt to establish a body of evidence that will advance the institute's stated mission of "helping all persons better understand their capacities for participation in unlimited love as the ultimate purpose of their lives." One of the more interesting aspects of the funded projects will be the sophistication of how such human phenomena as religion and spirituality will be examined using the scrutiny of pure science.

The 21 projects span a startling array of subject matter. Though at first glance some of the projects seem distant from the concept of unlimited love, each offers the promise of valuable insights.

One study, for example, will examine the valor of 9/11 rescuers. Another will peer into the mystery of autism in an attempt to discern whether empathetic deficits lie in the mind or behavior of autistics, or both. Still another study hopes to determine if divine or human love provides a curative or protective defense against the effects of military post-traumatic stress disorder. And another will research Paleolithic hunter-gatherer societies in a test of competing theories on the origin of human activities that fall outside the parameters of nepotism and strict reciprocity.

Other projects include the neurobiology of parental love, the relationship of brain hormones and social bonding, the nature of love outside one's social group, organ donors, volunteerism in faith-based service organizations, civic engagement of African-American adolescents and their parents, and a study of why chimpanzees display the "consolation behavior" -- reassuring physical contact -- to distressed fellow chimps.

"We believe that we have succeeded in funding an extraordinary set of studies after an extensive review process by national experts," said Stephen G. Post, Ph.D., the institute's president and a professor of

bioethics at Case Western. "The response to the idea of applying science to the most positive of all human motivations and behaviors, unselfish and unlimited love, has been overwhelming."

The 21 projects were selected from a group of 85 full applications invited from some 320 letters of intent that the institute received in March 2002 in response to a nationwide request for proposals. After painstaking review by a distinguished panel of experts and the institute's research area consultants, \$1,730,000 was awarded.

The grants represent dramatic and steady progress of the not-for-profit institute since its founding in 2001 with a four million dollar endowment from the John Templeton Foundation, one of the world's foremost benefactors and advocates for rigorous, open-minded and empirically focused investigations into the boundary between theology and science.

The newly-funded projects are categorized into six areas:

- Human Development;
- Public Health and Medicine;
- Mechanisms by which Altruistic Love Affects Health;
- Other-Regarding Virtues;
- Evolutionary Perspectives on Other-Regard; and
- The Sociological Study of Faith-Based Communities and Their Activities in Relation to the Spiritual Ideal of Unlimited Love

The broad scope of studies underscore the vast possibilities for this nascent, yet growing movement among researchers. Earlier this year, for example, IRUL provided \$300,000 in matching funds to four on-going studies of the Fetzer Institute's Science of Compassionate Love initiative.

Additionally, the institute will host an international, interfaith, and interdisciplinary conference -- The Works of Love: Scientific and Religious Perspectives on Altruism -- from May 31 through June 5, 2003 at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, co-sponsored by the Metanexus Institute on Religion and Science.

Besides the grants and conference, the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love will also extend its work over the next few years by publishing and disseminating its findings, conducting a national essay competition for young people as a way to underscore the importance of compassionate love in their development, and providing opportunities for scholars in science and religion to develop book proposals that will be supported by the Institute after competitive review. The institute's first book, *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy and Religion in Dialogue*, was published in June 2002 by Oxford University Press.

Complete summaries of all 21 funded projects and other research papers are available at www.unlimitedloveinstitute.org.

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Please Note: The institute offers the following definition of unlimited love:

The essence of love is to affectively affirm as well as to unselfishly delight in the well-being of others, and to engage in acts of care and service on their behalf; unlimited love extends this love to all others without exception, in an enduring and constant way. Widely considered the highest form of virtue, unlimited love is often deemed a Creative Presence underlying and integral to all of reality: participation in unlimited love constitutes the fullest experience of spirituality.