

# **Report of the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ**

## on the findings of the investigation into the accusations filed against Father Fernando Martínez Suárez, LC

(This is a translation from the [original](#))

November 22, 2019

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## **I. Nature, purpose and sources of this report**

As announced in the [statement of the international communication office](#) on May 8, 2019, in this report, the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ present the findings and conclusions of the investigation carried out on sexual abuse<sup>1</sup> allegations of minors filed against Father Fernando Martínez Suárez. Also presented here is an evaluation of the Congregation's actions in this regard.

The main sources of this document are the final report of the external independent investigation conducted by [Praesidium, Inc.](#), based on interviews and a review of the archival documents and other published information, as well as complementary inquiries made at the request of the general superior of the Congregation. In addition, this document includes the conclusions reached and decisions made.

The Congregation publishes this report so that the victims, the Legionaries of Christ, Regnum Christi members, people from our institutions and others interested in the case may have access to this information and its conclusions. The Legionaries of Christ publish this report with deep pain and shame for the events that occurred, with the intention of correcting them and, in so far as possible, helping victims and their families in their healing. At the same time, the Congregation is committed to a greater awareness of the seriousness of the abuses, as Pope Francis has been asking from the Church, as well as continuous improvement in the prevention of any type of abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to "abuse," this report applies the canonical concept of "more grave delicts (crimes) against morals" (*delicta graivora*) that are categorized as a "delict against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a cleric with a minor under the age of eighteen years" ([Substantive Norms](#), Art. 6).

## II. History of the reported facts and handling of the case

The history of the case of Father Martínez, born in 1939 and ordained a priest in 1964, is described below:

- **1969:** According to a statement made in 2005 by a former religious of the Congregation, published lately, the father of a child between the age of four and six years old accused Father Martínez of abusing his son at the Cumbres Lomas Institute in Mexico City. According to the allegation recounted by the former religious, the superiors at that time did not confront Father Martínez with the accusations but informed Father Marcial Maciel, superior general of the Congregation during that period. Father Maciel decided to transfer him to Saltillo (Coahuila, Mexico). No civil or ecclesiastical authorities were informed. Father Martínez, confronted with these allegations in 2019, denies that this abuse ever occurred. Up to now we have not been able to clarify nor substantiate these statements.
- **1969-1971:** Father Martínez resides in Saltillo as community superior and director of the Cumbres Institute of that city.
- **1971-1974:** Father Martínez is transferred to Mexico City and performs pastoral ministry at the Cumbres Lomas Institute.
- **1974-1976:** Father Martínez returns to Saltillo, where he is assigned as community superior and director of the Cumbres Institute. Around 2008, a priest heard of some inappropriate behavior or possible abuse that Father Martínez committed while in Saltillo between 1974 and 1976. Father Martínez was confronted with this accusation in 2019 and denies that he committed any abuse during this period. So far, investigations into these allegations have not been able to provide more information.
- **1976-1991:** Father Martínez resides in Mexico City and is assigned to pastoral ministry with youth and students.
- **1990:** A mother claims that her daughter has been abused by Father Martínez at the facilities of the Cumbres Lomas Institute (Mexico). Father Martínez admits having unduly approached this girl and, consequently, is removed from contact with children and adolescents by the territorial superior. The case is reported to Father Maciel, then general superior. Father Maciel decides to move Father Martínez and appoint him as director of the Cumbres Institute of Cancun in the summer of 1991<sup>2</sup>, even though Father

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<sup>2</sup> The Constitutions of the Legionaries of Christ then in force gave exclusive authority to the general superior to appoint to and remove from mission assignments. The territorial superior did not have these faculties. In the Constitutions currently in force, the territorial superior has authority to appoint to mission assignments regarding the members assigned to his territory.

Martínez asked not to be assigned to this mission: “I do not feel physically, spiritually nor morally ready to accept this type of responsibility given the recent allegations.”<sup>3</sup>

- **1991-1993:** Father Martínez abuses at least six girls between 6 and 11 years old at the Cumbres Institute in Cancun. After an analysis of the documentation and multiple testimonies, Praesidium has corroborated these abuses. One of the witnesses interviewed by Praesidium speaks of seven girls. Father Martínez, interrogated both by Praesidium and the internal investigation, admits with sorrow and remorse the abuses against minors committed during these years in Cancun. In 1993, the superiors inform Father Marcial Maciel. He decides to remove Father Martínez from his position as director and transfer him to Salamanca (Spain) as administrator of the seminary of the Congregation in that city. The territorial superior of Mexico meets with the parents of the abused girls and offers them psychological counseling. According to some testimonies, he promises that Father Martínez would undergo treatment, and would no longer have any contact with minors—promises that later would not be fulfilled. The abuses eventually become public knowledge, and various media publications republish the story over the following years. There are no known cases of abuse after this date.
- **1993-2016:** Father Martínez resides in Salamanca (Spain) and works as administrator of the Congregation’s seminary. Restrictions to his priestly ministry are imposed informally and superiors in Salamanca are not clearly informed about the cause of those restrictions. On account of this, over the years, the application of restrictions is relaxed. In 2007, the new general superior, Father Álvaro Corcuera, elected in 2005, appointed Father Martínez as confessor at the seminary of the Congregation in Salamanca. In addition, during this period he is occasionally given priestly pastoral ministry outside the house of the Congregation.
- **2011-2013:** Both the general superior and the pontifical delegate receive some warnings about deficiencies of the earlier investigation and enforcement of penalties incurred due to abuses committed by Father Fernando Martínez. They are asked to report the allegations to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities and to formalize restrictions so as to avoid laxity in compliance. After a quick review of the case and some informal consultations, they do not consider it necessary to conduct a canonical investigation or issue written restrictions, arguing that the case had already been addressed in 1993 and that there were no new formal complaints of victims or witnesses, a stance that is maintained in the following years.
- **January 20, 2014:** The Extraordinary General Chapter elects a new general superior of the Legionaries of Christ, Father Eduardo Robles-Gil. The Chapter Communiqué asks for decisive action to be taken with regards to the support of victims, the prevention of abuses against minors, and steps for healing and reconciliation.

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<sup>3</sup> Communication by Father Martínez, July 19, 1991.

- **December 30, 2014:** The general superior signs the decree approving the [Accreditation Standards for Safe Environments](#), which guide the efforts of the Congregation to guarantee the application of processes and policies for the prevention of child abuse and the proper response to them.
- **January 2, 2015:** The general superior sends the Accreditation Standards for Safe Environments to all the territories of the Congregation and urges the territorial directors to comply with them.
- **December 2016:** The general superior, having listened to his council, moves Father Martínez to Rome (Italy) where he neither has contact with minors nor exercises public priestly ministry.
- **2017-2018:** Father Martínez's restrictions remain informal and unwritten, unknown to members of the communities where he resides. He concelebrates at community Masses in the house of the Legionaries of Christ, sometimes with other faithful present, and hears confessions when requested by someone from the same Legionary house.
- **December 17, 2018:** The general superior decides to initiate an internal investigation into the case of Father Martínez in order to understand better what happened at the time. The investigation seeks to fill gaps in the available information of the case and the measures already taken, and to formalize the restrictions on Father Martínez.
- **May 2, 2019:** Ana Lucía Salazar publicly denounces in a social media forum that as a child she suffered abuse in Cancun by Father Martínez.
- **May 4, 2019:** The Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ, in response to the public claims of Ana Lucía Salazar announces an exhaustive external investigation into the case to accompany the ongoing internal investigation.
- **May 5, 2019:** The general superior receives the results of the internal review of the documents available at that time and of an initial interview with Father Martínez. This report indicates that Father Martínez had committed child abuse. This report does not provide information on the number or the identity of the victims nor an analysis of the previous actions of the Congregation. It recommends maintaining and formalizing the ministerial restrictions imposed on Father Martínez for life.
- **May 7, 2019:** Father Gerardo Flores, LC, safe environment coordinator of the Legionaries of Christ, travels to Cancun (Mexico) and meets with one of the victims.
- **May 8, 2019:** The Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ issues as statement reporting that Praesidium will be the agency that will conduct the external investigation.

The objective is to bring clarity regarding the accusations presented, listen to those affected, and evaluate the behavior of the Congregation over these years. Praesidium receives the documents and initial results of the internal investigation. An independent claims channel is set up so as to make it easier for victims to come forward. The Praesidium external investigation concludes on November 8, 2019.

- **May 16, 2019:** Father Martínez is officially notified about the beginning of the investigation by Praesidium. Restrictions already imposed in the past are reiterated and formalized (prohibition of publicly exercising priestly ministry and of contact with minors). Other restrictions are added: the prohibition from wearing clerical garb outside the houses of the Congregation; the prohibition from hearing confessions from those who live in the communities of the Congregation; the prohibition from participating in community concelebrations of the Mass attended by religious in formation or other faithful. Also, Father Martínez is asked to embrace a path of conversion and reparation, including spiritual guidance and psychological support.
- **May 21, 2019:** The general superior of the Legionaries of Christ notifies the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Holy See about the case. According to the procedures provided, he also informs Bishop Pedro Pablo Elizondo, bishop-prelate of Cancun-Chetumal (where the reported abuses occurred) and the Vicariate of Rome (where the denounced priest presently resides), about the ongoing canonical investigation.
- **May 23, 2019:** Given that the abuses occurred in Cancun, the Cumbres Institute of Cancun, in agreement with the Congregation, reports the case to the civil authorities through the attorney general of the State of Quintana Roo.
- **June 20, 2019:** The general superior orders a commission to review all the cases of child abuse in the Congregation including the old ones to ensure that they are handled correctly.
- **August 7, 2019:** The general superior meets with one of the victims in Cancun.
- **October 28 and November 8, 2019:** The general superior receives from Praesidium the final report on Father Martínez, and later an appendix to the report.
- **October 28 – November 20, 2019:** Additional interviews recommended by Praesidium are conducted. Father Martínez is confronted with the results of the investigation so that he may give his own statement. Father Martínez asks forgiveness for what he has done. This present document is prepared.
- **November 11, 2019:** The general superior of the Legionaries of Christ delivers the results of investigations into the abuses of Father Martínez to the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith and asks for instructions on the canonical process to be followed. Meanwhile he reaffirms the restrictions that had already been imposed on Father Martínez.

### III. Evaluation

The Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ deplores and condemns the abuses committed by Father Martínez. It also deplores those institutional or personal practices that, in this case, facilitated or propitiated any form of abuse or revictimization. We are ashamed that adequate and sufficient measures were not applied. In this sense, the Congregation highlights the following deficiencies in the handling of this case over the last decades:

- The most serious mistake of assigning, in this case, a priest who had abused a child to pastoral ministry with children and youth elsewhere.
- The absence, at the time, of adequate procedures to respond to accusations and to provide attention to victims and their families.
- Ignorance of the phenomenon of child abuse, especially regarding the serious and lasting consequences for the victims and of the psychological mechanisms of abusers.
- The existence of a defensive culture that prioritized the image and reputation of the institution over the good of victims, which prioritized the abusive priest over the victim.
- The mentality of avoiding civil and canonical processes unless strictly necessary<sup>4</sup> instead of thorough investigation of accusations and ensuring they be reported to the competent authorities<sup>5</sup>.
- The norms and practices of the Congregation that gave exclusive authority to Father Maciel, as general superior, over all important decisions regarding priests.<sup>6</sup> This practice limited the ability of local or territorial superiors to act. Furthermore, they did not

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. canon 1341 of the *Code of Canon Law* (1983): “An ordinary is to take care to initiate a judicial or administrative process to impose or declare penalties only after he has ascertained that fraternal correction or rebuke or other means of pastoral solicitude cannot sufficiently repair the scandal, restore justice, reform the offender.”

<sup>5</sup> A judicial process correctly concluded is good because it allows the victims to have official confirmation of their victimization, it holds the guilty priest accountable so he can begin to walk a path of reparation, and it permits the institution to contribute to the healing process. With regard to legal responsibility, it is evident that civil and ecclesial laws in past decades were inadequate with regard to the classification of abuses, the obligation to respond to accusations, and the statutes of limitations. There has been progress in civil and canonical legislation thanks to a better understanding of the phenomenon of the abuse of minors. We support these advances that have been made in favor of victims.

<sup>6</sup> Message from the 2014 General Chapter of the Legionaries of Christ.

receive the relevant information needed to responsibly and maturely govern their subjects.

- Although there is no known abuse committed by Father Martínez after 1993, by not offering him professional therapy and preventing him from further contact with minors, the Congregation did not eliminate the risk of further abuse and increased the suffering of the victims.
- The failure over the years to formalize restrictions and to inform those responsible for their enforcement.
- The lack of interest by members of the Congregation in learning about the abuses, their seriousness, and their consequences.
- The decision not to review old cases in the light of recent findings about child abuse cases in the Church to make up for deficiencies in its handling of cases and to facilitate further healing for victims.

The investigation examined the actions of the superiors of the Congregation who dealt with this case at different time and verified the personal responsibility of Father Marcial Maciel who was general superior until 2005. First, as we now know, because Father Maciel abused Father Fernando Martínez in Ontaneda and Rome in the summer and fall of 1954, when he was 15 years old.<sup>7</sup> Then, although Father Maciel knew that Father Martínez in turn had committed abuses, he decided to move him from one place to another, and ignoring the territorial superior's reservations and Father Martínez's own request, appointed him director of the school in Cancun. The community and the school were not informed that Father Martínez had abused a minor. Thus, Father Martínez committed abuses in at least two different places. Finally, the personality and the authoritarian action of Father Maciel favored many of the deficiencies mentioned above. The other superiors recognize with pain that the handling of this case as well as the attention to victims and those presenting claims suffered as a result of these deficiencies.

The external agency and internal investigation were not able to evaluate the behavior of teachers and employees of the Cumbres Institute of Cancún from 1991-1993, the years in which the abuses by Father Martínez took place.

#### **IV. Conclusions and determinations**

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<sup>7</sup> Father Martínez authorized the release of this information.

Given the outcome of the investigations into the case of Father Martínez, we are grieved with deep pain for the suffering of the victims and the scandal caused. Together with Father Martínez, we humbly ask forgiveness for his abusive acts against minors and deplore our mistakes that have further increased the pain of the victims. Institutionally, we also apologize to Father Martínez for the abuses he suffered and for not having helped him properly when the abuses he committed came to light.

We appreciate the collaboration of the victims and all those who have participated in the investigations for their commitment to the truth and for providing their testimony so as to walk a path of justice, healing and reparation. We also appreciate those in the Church who, during these months, have welcomed and have listened to the victims of Father Martínez when they approached them.

We recognize the contribution of people who continued to insist that this case be properly addressed by the superiors of the Congregation. We also appreciate those who have raised their voices publicly in social media and the press. At the same time, we are sorry for our delay in treating these accusations with the gravity they deserve, much less in diligently taking action to respond to them.

Throughout the investigation we have approached victims of Father Martínez, but we cannot exclude the possibility that there may be people affected by his actions from whom we have not yet heard. Therefore, with the desire to reach out to them if they so desire, we set up an email and a hotline to contact us: [childprotection@legionaries.org](mailto:childprotection@legionaries.org) and mobile number +39 328 593 7082.

At the same time, we reiterate our commitment to offer [safe environments and spaces](#) for minors and vulnerable adults, with strict prevention policies and processes for quick and just response to any accusation, always including collaboration with civil and ecclesiastical authorities. We are available to anyone who wants to [contact us](#) in regards to any other child abuse case by members of the Congregation.

To continue down a path of reconciliation, the general superior has made the following decisions, based on the recommendations of the Praesidium agency:

1. To actively seek reconciliation with all victims in this case.
2. To seek adequate and empathic communication with victims and accusers, recognizing deficiencies and communicating resolutions.
3. To implement the instructions of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the canonical procedures to be followed.



4. To collaborate with the civil authorities willing to investigate the accusations presented regarding this case.
5. Father Martínez will be restricted from public priestly ministry and the restrictions imposed on him will be maintained for life:
  - Prohibition from the public exercise of the priestly ministry and contact with minors
  - Prohibition from hearing confessions
  - Prohibition from participation in community concelebrations attended by religious in formation or other faithful
  - Prohibition from wearing clerical garb outside the houses of the Congregation
6. Father Martínez will receive adequate psychological support and will submit to a safety plan.
7. Even though there is no evidence of this, the Congregation will investigate among those who lived with Father Martínez in Salamanca from 1993 to 2016 to verify that there has been no inappropriate behavior during that time.
8. In the context of the application of safe environments standards, increased attention will be given to the training of superiors so that they know how to respond to victims and accusations of child abuse by members of the Congregation.
9. In addition to the investigation into the case of Father Martínez that has been conducted, the Congregation will complete the review of child abuse cases in the past so as to understand more thoroughly the abuses that occurred in the Congregation, seek the truth, and comply with the demands of justice so that there is an authentic path to healing and reconciliation.