Communiqué from the Legionaries of Christ 2020 Ordinary General Chapter

Conversion and reparation

february 26, 2020

LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST

An insistent call to conversion

1. *"Repent, and believe in the Gospel"* (Mark 1:15) These opening words of the public ministry of Our Lord Jesus Christ have resonated in many ways in the lives of the Legionaries of Christ over the past few years and have forcefully impacted this General Chapter. We have before our eyes how much pain is caused by behaviors contrary to the Gospel. The recent *1941-2019 Report* on the extent of sexual abuse of minors in our Congregation showed us that in our history there were crimes and delicts ("crimes" in canon law) committed by some of our brothers. As representatives of our Congregation and as priests we recognize and shoulder this reality and want to act accordingly. For this reason, with pain and sadness we address, in the first place, the victims of abuse and their families, we ask their forgiveness, welcome their claims, and assure them that we want to be converted and make reparation with concrete actions.

2. Throughout the decades, some of our older brothers made reports so our Congregation could correct its course in regard to the sexual abuse and abuse of power and conscience by Father Marcial Maciel and other Legionaries. Among them we mention Federico Domínguez's 1954 report and Father Luis Ferreira's 1956 report. Also Juan José Vaca's 1976 letter and Juan Manuel Fernández Amenábar who said in 1995 that he forgave but also asked for justice. Then, starting in 1997, the public denunciations of eight victims of abuse by Father Maciel: Father Félix Alarcón, José Barba, Saúl Barrales, Alejandro Espinosa, Arturo Jurado, José Antonio and Fernando Pérez Olvera and the above mentioned Juan José Vaca.

3. We retract the negative institutional and personal judgments about the character and motivations of the people who made legitimate and necessary accusations. Today we recognize as prophetic their accusations in favor of truth and justice (see Matthew 5:6). We ask forgiveness for our blindness and omission, which resulted in harming their reputation, and we thank those who had the courage to come forward, for the good they did, not only to us but also to the Catholic Church itself. Their courage also helped others to report sexual abuse perpetrated by unworthy priests, overcoming the shame that this entails. We recognize that our efforts at reparation have so far reached only some of those who reported abuse.

4. "Do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges" (Hebrews 12:6). Seeing the grave discredit that our Congregation has brought to the Church and to the priesthood of Christ, we thank God for the Church's intervention with the 2009-2010 apostolic visitation decreed by Pope Benedict XVI, the years of renewal until the 2014 General Chapter and the accompaniment of Pope Fran-

cis. By putting into practice the indications we received, we have understood even better that a profound revision of the life and structure of our Congregation[1] was necessary and that our renewal and purification has made progress but is by no means complete[2] and will always remain a challenge for each new generation.

5. During the General Chapter we studied the *1941-2019 Report*, the phenomenon of abuse and its devastating consequences, the various responses throughout the history of our Congregation, and the lessons and recommendations that emerged. We received with gratitude the contributions and suggestions of a good number of former members of our Congregation who through a survey and other means shared with us the lights and shadows of their time with us. We also welcome Pope Francis' call to the whole Church: to put the victims at the center of our concerns and to frame the problem in the wider context of the abuse of power and conscience. This challenge demands a determined response from all the people of God[3].

6. From all this, four basic attitudes emerge which illuminate this General Chapter Document and our commitment.

a) The victims are beloved sons and daughters of God, and brothers and sisters of ours, to whom we have caused great harm.

b) We reaffirm that our first personal and institutional duty is to consistently live the Gospel and to fulfill the requirements of justice.

c) We recognize that the increase in our awareness, and our actions for conversion and reparation of evil, are late. This delay has increased the pain of our brothers and sisters who suffered abuse and has created confusion among the members of our Congregation and among those who work with us.

d) We consider the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, society, the media, and organizations specializing in the prevention of abuses and restorative justice as allies in making reparation for wrong and bringing about the good.

1 See *Communiqué of the Holy See Regarding the Apostolic Visitation of the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ,* May 1, 2010, n. 2.

2 See *Statement* of the Extraordinary General Chapter of the Legionaries of Christ About the Path of Renewal that we are Traveling, January 20, 2014, n. 277.

3 See *Pope Francis' Letter to the People of God*, August 20, 2018.

A personal and institutional conscience examen

7. This General Chapter did an extensive conscience examen and today we propose to our brother Legionaries of all ages to personally ask themselves the same questions. We invite them all to join this journey of conversion and reconciliation (see Matthew 5:23) which, animated by the grace and love of God, must always be manifested in concrete actions:

a) Have I come to see the victims of abuse as brothers and sisters, beloved sons and daughters of God? Do I feel solidarity with their pain? Have I refused to listen to their testimonies? Do I thank them for their courage in denouncing the evil they have suffered, and do I respond with acceptance?

b) Have I acted contrary to the truth and to people's dignity (lack of empathy, pretense, propaganda, lies, manipulation, any other type of abuse, etc.)? Do I live my religious consecration coherently, especially in relation to my vows and to my affectivity?

c) How have I responded to the people with whom I live and work and who have suffered the scandal of these crimes committed by certain Legionaries of Christ?

d) How have I contributed positively to eradicating the plague of sexual abuse of minors and rectifying injustices?

e) What do I think the Lord is asking me to do to counteract any kind of abuse?

8. In doing our conscience examen we recognize that the sins and crimes committed by specific persons have also left their mark on our Congregation and have distorted our understanding and living of the charism.[4]

9. The dedicated lives of many of our brothers, the good done in our apostolic works and the recent improvements in some areas do not exempt us from the responsibility of purifying ourselves according to the Gospel. To continue to move in this direction, it is necessary to call these negative realities by their name. With pain and shame, we acknowledge:

a) a) Shortcomings in listening to and accompanying victims of abuse, the lack of an empathetic response, and the failure to take

4 See John Paul II's *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* 16.

full responsibility for investigating cases, punishing crimes and making amends.

b) At times, disbelieving those who reported certain irregularities and abuses of power or conscience, which prevented us from confronting the truth in a timely manner.

c) Insufficient measures, in the past, for the prevention of abuse in high-risk environments such as boarding schools. We deplore that minor seminarians and novices who had suffered sexual abuse were often sent home without due care for their needs and those of their families.

d) The tendency, widespread at one stage in the Church's history, to treat abuse almost exclusively as a moral or religious problem. This did not respond to the serious damage and lasting effects on the victims, the need for psychological treatment, and the application of effective penalties.

e) Assigning certain priests with a history of abuse to pastoral work with minors or to houses of formation, reopening wounds in the victims and provoking dismay. Many brother Legionaries have been shocked to discover that some of their professors or confessors had committed such crimes and today the superiors themselves feel deceived because they had not been informed.

f) Accepting unquestioningly Father Maciel's way of thinking and acting and not limiting his authority in accordance with the law.

g) A formation process too focused on following norms and a way of exercising authority that left little room for personal discernment.

h) The lack of separation, in the past, between the internal and external forums, depriving the religious of a properly diversified accompaniment.

A firm commitment to change

10. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). We realize that neither asking for forgiveness nor frankly acknowledging what has been said above has any value without sincerely taking concrete steps to make amends to each victim, to render justice, and to prevent this from happening again in the future. Our resolution of amendment seeks to foster a new mindset within our Congregation capable of promoting true conversion and above all a culture of acceptance and empathy with the victims.

11. Specifically in relation to the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable persons, the 2020 Ordinary General Chapter, as the highest governing authority of our Congregation, has established the document *Protect and Heal* (PH) containing principles, policies and standards, in addition to the universally binding *Safe Environment Standards*. Here we summarize and highlight several important measures:

a) Investigate each claim of abuse by collaborating with civil and ecclesiastical authorities (see PH 7 y 36).

b) Request that the competent canonical authorities lift the statute of limitations when it is necessary to prosecute a past delict of abuse of minors (see PH 52).

c) Establish structures and procedures to facilitate remediation and therapeutic options for all those affected (see PH 4-5).

d) Publish the names of Legionary priests convicted in court of abusing minors, unless prohibited by civil legislation (see PH 29).

e) Prohibit priests convicted of abuse of minors from exercising any public ministry (see PH 47-48).

f) Exclude priests convicted of abuse from residing in houses of formation (see PH 49).

g) Canonically investigate possible grave negligence, failure to report abuse, or hindering the investigation of abuse (see PH 8 and 51). A conviction in such a matter will entail the privation of offices, the right to participate in a general chapter or a territorial assembly, and the prohibition of exercising certain pastoral responsibilities (see PH 55-56).

h) Continue training members of our Congregation to prevent abuse and to care for victims of sexual abuse (see PH 9-10).

i) Carry out a "purification of memory" by narrating the success and failures in the history of our Congregation in the writings and courses we give to our members (see PH 28).

j) Encourage attitudes and spiritual initiatives of prayer, penance and atonement for abuses committed by members of our Congregation and of the Church.

Conclusion

12. "Out of the depths I call to you, Lord" (Psalm 130:1). No matter how many concrete steps we take, and no matter how much we delve into

the past and bring to justice all those involved, we must accept the shortcomings of our actions, and persevere on the path of conversion and reparation, trusting in God's mercy.

13. The Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through the words of Pope Francis' Letter to Priests:

> I am convinced that, to the extent that we remain faithful to God's will, these present times of ecclesial purification will make us more joyful and humble, and prove, in the not distant future, very fruitful. "Let us not grow discouraged! The Lord is purifying his Bride and converting all of us to himself. He is letting us be put to the test in order to make us realize that without him we are simply dust. He is rescuing us from hypocrisy, from the spirituality of appearances. He is breathing forth his Spirit in order to restore the beauty of his Bride, caught in adultery. We can benefit from rereading the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel. It is the history of the Church, and each of us can say it is our history too. In the end, through your sense of shame, you will continue to act as a shepherd. Our humble repentance, expressed in silent tears before these atrocious sins and the unfathomable grandeur of God's forgiveness, is the beginning of a renewal of our holiness." [5]

14. With our new General Director we address all Legionaries: "The Lord is calling us to conversion. We have embraced it. We want to be new men. It is a central aspect of our charism and our mission. He calls us to heal the wounds of so many victims of abuse" (Homily of Fr. John Connor, February 9, 2020).

15. To our families, to the Consecrated Women, the Consecrated Laymen, all the members of Regnum Christi, friends, pastors of the Church and everyone we serve in our ministry: thank you for your trust and patience. Help us to fulfill the decisions expressed in this communiqué. Pray to the Lord that with his grace we will overcome evil with good (see Romans 12:21) so that we may be better disciples of Christ and apostles according to the Gospel.

---

5 Pope Francis' *Letter to Priests on the 160th Anniversary of the Death of the Holy Curé of Ars, St John Vianney,* August 4, 2019.

LEGIONARIOS DE CRISTO

ceroabusos.org | 0abuse.org
legionariesofchrist.org