
Legionaries of Christ: Report on abuse. Prevention measures and the "Safe Environments" project

The Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ has published today the 2020 Annual Report: Truth, Justice and Healing, marking 10 years since the “path of renewal” undertaken 10 years ago, following the abuse scandal involving their late founder. It represents *a further step “on a broader path seeking forgiveness, with numerous initiatives to ensure the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.”* Precisely a year ago, in a statement addressed to the victims and their families, the General Chapter declared: “We want to be converted and make reparation with concrete actions.” Moreover, the journey “towards a culture of zero abuse” began over 15 years ago when – under the government of Father Álvaro Corcuera, then general director, and later under the leadership of the pontifical delegate, Cardinal Velasio de Paolis - the Legionaries of Christ “slowly and painfully became aware of the abuses committed by its founder, Father Marcial Maciel, and the effects they had on the Congregation.” The “1941-2019 Report on the Study of Sexual Abuse of Minors in the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ since its Foundation” was published in November 2019, in preparation for the General Chapter of the Congregation, which took place in the first months of 2020. The document “Conversion and Reparation”, explicitly asking for forgiveness to the abuse victims and their families, was released as a result of that meeting. The same General Chapter published “Protect and Heal”, a normative document that addresses the principles and protocols for fostering healing and reconciliation with abuse victims while reinforcing prevention measures and Safe Environments in the Congregation. The Report, released worldwide today, explains the reasons why *The Legionaries of Christ have decided to publish the names of priests of the Congregation who have abused minors.* It is an update of the statistics of abuse committed by priests of the Congregation between 1941 and 2019, which includes “progress made on cases in state or ecclesiastical justice systems”, along with “new information received subsequent to” the 1941-2019 Report. To date, 27 Legionaries of Christ priests have been confirmed to have committed sexual abuse on minors. “This represents 2% of the 1,380 Legionaries of Christ ordained as priests throughout the history of the Congregation”, states the Report. *There are about 170 minors, (including approximately 60 known cases of abuse by Father Marcial Maciel Degollado) who were victims of sexual abuse committed by these 27 priests.* The vast majority of the victims were adolescent boys between the ages of 11 and 16. With approximately 50 of these victims, progress has been made “on a pathway to reparation and reconciliation, seeking to facilitate this path for all victims who wish to do so.” In terms of criminal procedures, of the 27 priests, three died without being tried, two have been convicted in criminal courts. “The others, so far – reads the Report - have not been prosecuted for various reasons, such as the legal situation in the respective countries or because the statute of limitations has elapsed.” Canonically, of the 27 priests, two died without being tried, 16 were sanctioned, eight are currently undergoing proceedings, one received a dispensation from ministry without trial. “The Congregation’s authorities asked the Holy See to consider lifting the statute of limitations on eight of these cases so that they can be tried” – reads the text, adding that “regarding the 16 priests who committed abuse and remain in the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ, their cases were all submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.” *The Report makes known that “the Congregation has not received any complaints filed against member priests for alleged sexual abuse of minors after 2016.”* As regards the 74 Legionaries that the 1941-2019 Report identified as allegedly abusing minors when they were novices or religious in formation, 60 (81.08 %) were not ordained as priests in the Congregation. During 2020, the 14 cases that did reach the priesthood were further studied according to the criteria of Protect and Heal and the following conclusions were reached: in the case of one priest, now deceased, the person who reported the allegation clarified after the 1941-2019 Report was published that it was not sexual abuse; in three of the cases, which the 1941-2019 Report noted as “under investigation,” the respective review boards

concluded “that they were boundary violations, and not sexual abuse”; three cases remain under investigation while the remaining seven cases have been confirmed. Of these cases, states the Report, “one member is deceased, two are without public priestly ministry, one is not under the jurisdiction of the Congregation and three have left the priesthood. Two of these seven have also abused after ordination.” This is the updated picture, also pursuant to the commitment made by the 2020 General Chapter and by the newly elected general director, Father John Lane Connor. In fact last year, in the awareness that “sexual abuse is one of the traumatic realities that most intensely and profoundly affects human beings”, and that “the healing process, often long and difficult, requires proper accompaniment”, the Legionaries of Christ established a stable partnership with Eshmá, an external and independent institution founded by people who experienced firsthand the victimization of child sexual abuse and by therapists, social workers and lawyers who are experts in restorative justice. Eshmá, which serves some victims of members of the Congregation in different countries, is believed to be

“a safe and independent channel for those who wish to report an abuse”

it is a point of contact for receiving and listening to concerns and therapeutic accompaniment of the victims. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpNPcIY9FE0> As regards the situation in Italy, the Report does not add any new information with respect to the cases - which have been known for years - involving Father Marcial Maciel Degollado and Mexican citizen Vladimir Reséndiz Gutiérrez. Nonetheless, reads a statement, “We, the Legionaries of Christ of the Italian Territory, suffer with the entire Congregation over the pain and scandal caused over time by some of its members to victims of abuse, to their families, and to the whole Church. We feel committed to the path of asking for forgiveness with the implementation of numerous initiatives aimed at protecting minors and vulnerable adults.” On this occasion, they reiterated their willingness “to listen to any further victims” who have not yet had the opportunity to report the abuses of the past years through the “Safe environments” project. There are currently some people living in Italy who have committed abuses in other countries of the world and have no ministry within the Legion.

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