

Communiqué of the Extraordinary General Chapter of the Legionaries of Christ about the path of renewal that we are traveling

1. The Extraordinary General Chapter, which is convened in Rome and is being presided over by the Pontifical Delegate, Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, publishes this communiqué about the path of renewal that we are traveling. We address this communiqué to all those who have followed the recent events in our religious congregation, especially to our brother Legionaries of Christ, to the lay consecrated men and women, and to the rest of the members and friends of the Regnum Christi Movement.

2. This is the first meeting of the General Chapter since 2005. Since the Chapter is the highest internal authority that represents the whole Congregation, it seems necessary for us to take a stance regarding the significant events that have occurred in the past nine years. With this, we want to define conclusively the posture of our Congregation with respect to the behavior of Fr. Marcial Maciel and his role as founder, in continuity with the decisions of the Holy See and the previous declaration of all the major superiors of the Legion of Christ¹. As well, we offer some initial reflections on the most important points of the process of renewal of our Congregation. Throughout the coming weeks, we will continue to analyze the different issues that demand our attention, and we will give orientations to the new government of the Legion for the journey yet to come.

3. When we ponder the magnitude of the evil and scandal caused, we realize that we are under the merciful gaze of God who, with his providence, continues to guide our steps. United with Jesus Christ, we hope to be able to redeem our painful history and overcome with good the consequences of evil. Only in this way can we consider what has taken place in light of the Gospel and build our future on the solid foundations of trust in God, of fidelity to the Church, and of the truth.

4. From this point of view, we have considered the reprehensible and objectively immoral behavior of Fr. Maciel, which merited the sanctions that, at the time, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith justly imposed on him.² Our founder died in 2008. We ask God to have mercy on him. At the same time, we want to express our deep sorrow for the abuse of minor seminarians, the immoral acts with men and women who were adults, the arbitrary use of his authority and of material goods, the indiscriminate consumption of addictive medicines and the act of presenting writings published by third parties as his own. We find the incongruity of presenting oneself as a priest and a witness of the faith continuously for decades while hiding this immoral behavior to be incomprehensible. We firmly condemn this. We are grieved that many victims and other affected persons have waited so long in vain for an apology and an act of reconciliation on the part of Fr. Maciel. Today, we would like to issue that apology as we express our solidarity with these persons.

¹ MAJOR SUPERIORS OF THE LEGION OF CHRIST, *Communiqué on the current circumstances of the Legion of Christ and the Regnum Christi Movement*, March 25, 2010.

² PRESS OFFICE OF THE HOLY SEE, *Communiqué*, May 19, 2006.

5. We have heard reports about how the major superiors of the Congregation discovered these hidden aspects of the life of our founder, how they sought to discern the appropriate response in light of ethical and moral demands, and how they carried out the process of communication. Together with them, today we acknowledge with sadness the initial incapability of believing the testimonies of the persons who had been victims of Fr. Maciel, the long institutional silence and, later on, the hesitations and errors of judgment when setting out to inform the members of the congregation and others. We apologize for these shortcomings, which have increased the suffering and confusion of many.

6. These events and situations could have done away with our religious Congregation had we not been accompanied by God's mercy and the Church's maternal care, which found expression in the resolute interventions of His Holiness Benedict XVI. The Pope determined that the Legion of Christ, by and large, was a sound community, but that corrections needed to be made.³ The help of the Holy See was essential in discovering how Fr. Maciel's personality and way of acting affected our religious congregation. In fact, the Apostolic Visitation – carried out by order of the Pope between 2009 and 2010 – ascertained that “the conduct of Father Marcial Maciel has given rise to serious consequences in the life and structure of the Legion, such as to require a process of profound re-evaluation.”⁴ The visitors indicated three areas: the redefinition of the charism, the exercise of authority and adequate formation⁵. The Pope desired to “follow closely, support, and guide this journey” by means of a personal Delegate, conferring on him “the task of governing this religious institute in my [his] name for as long as it takes to carry out the path of renewal and lead it to the celebration of an extraordinary General Chapter, whose main purpose will be to bring to completion the revision of the Constitutions.”⁶

7. We have listened to the reports of the Pontifical Delegate and of our Pro-General Director about the work carried out in these three-and-a-half years. We would like to share briefly the analysis of some aspects connected with the findings and recommendations of the Apostolic Visitation. We know that this is only the beginning of a journey and that there is still much to be done. We are committed to continuing this process of renewal and conversion humbly.

a. In the area of **the revision of our charism**⁷, the Pontifical Delegate has first of all led us to an adequate comprehension of the role of Fr. Maciel in relation to the Legion. In the past, the Congregation stipulated that it cannot propose Fr. Maciel as a model, nor his personal writings as a guide for the spiritual life⁸. We recognize his condition as founder. Nevertheless, a religious congregation and its essential features do not have their origin in the person of the founder; they are a gift of God that the Church accepts and approves and that afterwards live in the institute and in its members.

³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Light of the World*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, p. 38-39.

⁴ PRESS OFFICE OF THE HOLY SEE, *Communiqué of the Holy See regarding the apostolic visitation of the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ*, May 1, 2010.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Appointment Letter for the Pontifical Delegate*, June 16, 2010.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁸ Cf. MAJOR SUPERIORS OF THE LEGION OF CHRIST, *Communiqué on the current circumstances of the Legion of Christ and the Regnum Christi Movement*, March 25, 2010, and, GENERAL DIRECTOR OF THE LEGION OF CHRIST, *Decreto sobre criterios y disposiciones relacionados con la persona del P. Marcial Maciel, L.C.*, December 6, 2010.

Many times we gave undue, universal value to Fr. Maciel's directives and clung too much to them because of an inadequate understanding of the concept of founder and an excessive exaltation and uncritical way of considering his person. For this reason, one of the primary tasks in the revision of the current constitutions has been to distinguish what really expresses the charismatic patrimony of our Congregation from other accidental elements. As well, we are ensuring the conformity of the whole of our governing documents with the universal norms of the Church. The three years of the revision process have been similar to a prolonged examination of conscience, carried out in community, in order to discover and purify those elements of our personal and institutional behavior that were not proper to religious life. We noticed some tendencies that have overshadowed the understanding of our charism, among others: insufficient collaboration with the local Church, excessive emphasis on the role of personal effort and merely human effectiveness, striving after prestige, and an indiscriminate fulfilling of minute norms. All of this demands of us not only a change in legislative texts, but also a continual conversion of mind and heart.

In these years, we have also arrived at a better understanding of our role within the Regnum Christi Movement. We are coming to value and respect the vocation and autonomy of the rest of the members, especially of the consecrated men and women. Together with them, we have begun a joint reflection on the role of each branch of the Movement, on our shared charism and on the way of carrying out our apostolate. The numerous lay members of Regnum Christi are a very beautiful part of our ecclesial reality. We want to foster communion even more and support them by means of our priestly ministry.

b. In the **exercise of authority**, the accompaniment of the Pontifical Delegate has been an ongoing and effective learning experience regarding how to put into practice all the Church's directives regarding the governance of institutes of religious life. We have sought to implement a clear separation between the ambit of the conscience (spiritual direction and confession), the internal forum, and the external forum (the guidance of the superior and religious discipline) in order better to guarantee the freedom and the confidentiality of each religious. We are seeking to prevent potential arbitrary behavior and abuses of authority by means of a more frequent change of the persons who occupy the different positions of government, and by means of active councils that meet on a regular basis to analyze important issues, thus helping them in the exercise of their authority. The Pontifical Delegate and some of his personal councilors participated almost weekly in the meetings of our general council and contributed their knowledge and experience. As well, the fragmentation of authority that resulted from an excessive multiplying of assistants and auxiliaries of superiors and the areas of authority assigned to them has been progressively eliminated. As well, formal consultations of the members of the congregation prior to the naming of superiors have been instituted. Also, prior to a change of community or apostolic mission, we are seeking to involve the one who will be affected by the decision in order to better discern God's will. Finally, thanks to the suppression of one of our two private vows and the numerous community meetings for the revision of the constitutional text, we are learning how to share reflections and suggestions with our brothers and freely debate about any issue that affects the life and mission of the Congregation.

c. As regards **the formation of our religious**, above all we have confirmed the need to improve the accompaniment in vocational discernment so that the novices and religious will mature in their personal decision before God prior to making their religious profession. The reports have shown

that, in these past four years, not a few priests and a great number of our brothers have left the Congregation. In some cases the cause has doubtlessly been the negative impact related to the news about the founder and the way in which it was made known. However, we have also ascertained shortcomings in the formation program and our way of life. Among others, we must foster a deeper living of the evangelical counsels, spiritual discernment and fraternal life. Formation and religious life continue to be an object of reflection of this Chapter and will be one of the priorities of the next central government.

8. In the first days of the Chapter, we also heard the reports of the two commissions that the Pontifical Delegate established:

a. The “Outreach Commission” has attended to the persons that have requested a response from the Legion of Christ because of the events that have a direct or indirect relation with Fr. Marcial Maciel. The president of the commission, Msgr. Mario Marchesi, informed us about the twelve cases that were presented. The commission has completed its task and no case pertaining to its area of responsibility remains open. In each case, the Congregation has acted in accord with the proposals of the commission. The opportunity to be listened to and the material help offered to the victims have contributed, insofar as is humanly possible, to relieve their wounds and foster reconciliation.

We also thank all Legionaries for their efforts to approach and personally meet with other affected persons. We ask the new government to maintain this commitment to continue seeking reconciliation.

b. The “Economic Affairs Commission” had the purpose of analyzing the handling of funds and the financial situation of the Congregation. The report presented by Msgr. Mario Marchesi, member of the commission, underlined that they did not find embezzlements of money or other irregularities in the fiscal actions that were reviewed.

The first urgent aspect to address in this area is that of the reduction of the debt with banks that has resulted from various causes: the excessively rapid expansion of the institutions of the Congregation, the world economic crisis and the fall-off in donations. In some countries the debt is very high, but continues to be manageable considering the income and the assets of the Congregation as a whole.

On the other hand, the Commission has pointed out the need – and this will be a task of the next government – of adjusting and simplifying the administrative structure to foster the responsibility proper to the territorial and local superiors, to both the branches of consecrated members of Regnum Christi, and to the directors of the works of apostolate.

The General Chapter, as the highest authority in the Congregation, also has had access to the ample and detailed documentation prepared by the general administrator and the report of the internal and external audits of the financial operations of the Congregation throughout the world.

9. The consideration of all of these issues has led us to conclude that the journey towards an “authentic and profound renewal”, confirmed by Pope Francis⁹, has advanced, but has not yet ended. The events of these years will mark the identity and the life of our Congregation. When seen in light of Providence, we can accept, confront and transform them into a stepping stone towards a new stage in our history. In the next weeks of Chapter meetings, we will conclude the revision of our constitutions in order to submit them to the Holy See for approval. We will also delineate priorities and an orientation to continue with renewed hope along the path that the Church has marked out for us, under the attentive care of the competent authorities.

10. We conclude this message by giving thanks to God for his merciful love, to the Church that has guided us in the person of the Successor of Peter, and to His Eminence Cardinal Velasio De Paolis and his four personal counselors, His Excellency Bishop Brian Farrell, LC, Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, Msgr. Mario Marchesi, and Fr. Agostino Montan, CSI, for their firm and respectful presence among us. At the same time, we thank all the Legionaries of Christ for their witness of faith, of self-giving and of fraternal charity that unites all of us in spite of all our differences. In a special way, we think of those older priests who, for so many years, have offered an example of authenticity and of self-giving to the mission. We cannot “lose sight of their [our] vocation: this has its origin in Christ’s call and its inspiration in the ideal of bearing witness before the world to his love, and it is an authentic gift from God, an enrichment for the Church, and the indestructible basis on which to build their personal future and that of the Legion.”¹⁰

Finally, we would like to thank the members of Regnum Christi and so many persons who have accompanied us during these years with their prayers and concern.

To all of our brothers, religious and priests, who during this period have left the Congregation, we want to express our sadness that we no longer have you among us. We sincerely apologize for the times we have not listened to you or been there for you in the spirit of the Gospel. We would like to maintain your friendship and fraternal dialogue.

We would like to apologize and reiterate our desire to reconcile with all those who in one way or another were hurt by the sad events of these years and our shortcomings.

Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, was a witness of the redemptive power of Christ that conquers evil and sin. To her, our Mother, we entrust our future with great confidence.

Approved in a plenary assembly of the General Chapter, January 20, 2014

⁹ POPE FRANCIS, *Letter to Cardinal Velasio De Paolis*, June 19, 2013.

¹⁰ Exhortation of the Holy Father, PRESS OFFICE OF THE HOLY SEE, *Communiqué of the Holy See regarding the Apostolic Visitation of the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ*, May 1, 2010.