News



Mexican Father Eduardo Robles Gil, general director of the Legionaries of Christ, center, leaves in procession after celebrating Mass at the order's Center for Higher Studies in Rome Feb. 6. Father Robles Gil was elected by Legionaries meeting in a general chapter in Rome. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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The Legionaries of Christ pledged its ongoing commitment to renewal and reform as it released information about a former rector who has publicly acknowledged being the father of two children.

Legionaries Father Oscar Turrion -- who served as rector of the order's seminary in Rome -- informed his superiors of "his intention to leave priestly ministry" in light of the recent revelations, the order said in an online communique Oct. 6.

"We are conscious of the impact that the negative example of a formator and rector has" on the Christian faithful and on those responsible for institutions dedicated to the formation of candidates to the priesthood, the order said.

"We are deeply saddened that the recent history of our congregation has quenched the fervor of some of our members. We are firmly committed to accompanying our brothers in moments of difficulty. Likewise, we reiterate our commitment to the path of renewal that we continue to follow led by the church," it added.

The Legionaries of Christ provided a timeline of events concerning Turrion, who also released his own letter describing the affair, offering his apologies and asking for prayers. Turrion had been a formator at the college since 2007 and was named rector in 2014 for a three-year term.

The order said that Turrion, then rector of the Legionaries of Christ's Mater Ecclesiae College in Rome, informed his superiors in late March 2017 that he was the father of a recently born baby girl and he "asked them to maintain confidentiality." However, leaders informed the Holy See to appoint a new rector, who began his term in August, and restricted the priest to no longer publicly exercise his priestly ministry.

The priest requested a period of prayer and reflection, during which he decided to "to come clean with myself and my superiors," he said in his letter, by

acknowledging he also had fathered another child with the same woman "a few years ago."

The priest said he began to fall in love with the woman after he "began to lose my grounding" and become "more and more disillusioned" because of the "certain circumstances" the Legionaries and the church in general were facing at the time.

In 2014, the order had adopted a new constitution, elected new officers and issued a statement of apology to the victims of the order's founder, the late Father Marcial Maciel Degollado, who had fathered children and sexually abused seminarians, including minors. The Vatican-ordered reform had been overseen by a papal delegate from 2010 to 2014.

The Legionaries of Christ said in its communique that when Turrion "was presented to the Congregation for Clergy as a candidate for the position of rector, as is customary, his file was reviewed and an interview was held with him. During it he said that he was suitable for the position and appreciated the trust placed in him."

In his open letter, Turrion admitted that he had already decided to leave the priesthood while he was serving as rector, but instead continued as leader "out of love and respect for my companions" and seminarians at the college "or out of weakness and shame as well."

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He said he did ask to be "relieved of my responsibilities" when his three-year term as rector ended in 2017. "I ask everyone forgiveness for the lack of trust that this implies," he wrote. He added he never used church funds to support his children, but utilized the private donations friends had given him for his own personal use.

The Legionaries of Christ noted an August statement by Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors: "If a priest fathers a child, he has a moral obligation to step aside from ministry and provide for the care and needs of the mother and the child. In such a moment, their welfare is the highest priority."