News



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During a general chapter meeting largely devoted to their order's sexual abuse crisis, the Legionaries of Christ elected U.S. Father John Connor as superior general for the next six years.

Connor, who will celebrate his 52nd birthday Feb. 15, has been the territorial superior for North America since 2014. He was elected superior general Feb. 6 in

Rome.

A native of Severna Park, Maryland, Connor is the first superior general of the Legionaries who was not born in Mexico, where the order was founded in 1941.

Ordained to the priesthood Jan. 2, 2001, Connor has ministered mainly in New York, Philadelphia and Atlanta. He holds a degree in finance from Loyola College in Baltimore and studied philosophy and theology in Rome.

In a letter Feb. 2 to U.S. members of the Legionaries of Christ and Regnum Christi, the broader organization including consecrated women and lay members, Connor said that during their meeting, members of the general chapter "chose to give priority to the issue of sexual abuse perpetrated by some members of the congregation and the way in which superiors dealt with this abuse in the past, postponing other matters until later."

"We haven't always addressed these cases well and we have a responsibility to revisit them in light of the information" published in December looking at the "phenomenon of abuse of minors" by members of the order from its founding in 1941 through December 2019.

The report included the order's founder, the late Father Marcial Maciel Degollado, who sexually abused at least 60 minors and fathered at least three children. In 2006, Pope Benedict XVI banned the founder from all public ministry and sentenced him to a life of prayer and penance.

The Legionaries' report said another 33 priests and 74 novices or seminarians had abused children. At least 51 youngsters were abused by Maciel's victims or victims of his victims, it said.

After an investigation into the order itself, in 2010, Benedict named a cardinal as his delegate to run the order and oversee a revision of its constitutions.

The December report noted that with the focus on revising the constitutions and renewing the order, cases of the sexual abuse of minors were "not given equal priority and relevance and, therefore, consistent action" was not always taken.

In his letter to members of the order Feb. 2, Connor said that "we in the Legionaries of Christ must not only live with but wade through the sins of our past. We have a

responsibility to those who have been hurt by the Legion, to all of you and to the greater church that we serve."

Early in December, before the report was published on cases of abuse throughout the order, Connor wrote to members of the North American territory about Father Michael Sullivan, who had been assigned by the Legionaries to ministry in Texas since 2009.

"In November of 2017, two women came forward stating strong concerns about Sullivan showing affection and favoritism toward one of them in her youth, which continued into adulthood, and the other later in college, alleging that he crossed behavioral boundaries expected of a priest," Connor wrote.

Sullivan was removed from ministry "for a period of time" and sent to New York "for a weeklong psychological assessment." Connor was the territorial superior at the time. Sullivan returned to ministry in Texas.

Then, in October 2019, another woman made similar allegations of Sullivan crossing "the emotional and physical boundaries of a pastoral relationship." Five days later, he was "interviewed and was immediately removed from ministry and an investigation into the allegations commenced," Connor wrote.

Sullivan admitted to violating the Legionaries Code of Conduct "on more than one occasion from 2013 to the present," he said. "This mainly affected adult women."

"Father Sullivan is not practicing ministry," Connor wrote in December. "At this time, he is receiving in-patient counseling at a treatment center here in the United States."

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