A priest in a black cassock speaks into a microphone in front of a burgundy backdrop

A screen grab shows Jesuit Father Marko Rupnik, an artist and theologian, giving a Lenten meditation March 6, 2020, from the Clementine Hall at the Vatican. Priests who work at the Vatican were invited to the meditation, but the Vatican turned it into an online event in accordance with advice to suspend gatherings to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. (CNS screen grab)

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With a degree of credibility that "seems to be very high," another 14 women and one man have reported to the Jesuits that they were spiritually, psychologically or sexually abused by Jesuit Fr. Marko Rupnik, a well-known mosaic artist and spiritual director.

Jesuit Fr. Johan Verschueren, Rupnik's immediate superior in Rome, issued a statement Feb. 21 saying the new allegations involve incidents that took place between the mid-1980s and 2018.

With a "firm intention to proceed with measures to ensure that situations similar to those reported will not occur again," Verschueren said the Jesuits will begin an internal process that "may result in disciplinary action," but in the meantime, he has strengthened the restrictions on Rupnik's ministry by forbidding him from doing any artistic work in public, and especially not in churches or chapels.

Rupnik already has been barred from hearing confessions, offering spiritual direction and leading retreats, and he is required to have the permission of his superior before leaving Rome, publishing articles or books or engaging in any public ministry.

The Jesuits confirmed those restrictions in December after Italian blogs and news sites reported that he had been accused of spiritually and sexually abusing adult women members of the Loyola Community, a new religious community founded in Rupnik's native Slovenia. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith closed the case in October because the statute of limitations had passed.

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A few weeks later, Fr. Arturo Sosa, the Jesuit superior general, was forced to admit that the dicastery had confirmed Rupnik's excommunication in 2020 after finding him guilty of violating the sacrament of confession by granting absolution to a consecrated Italian woman with whom he had had sex. The excommunication was lifted less than a month later when Rupnik admitted his wrongdoing, repented and wrote a formal request for forgiveness, Sosa said.

Verschueren provided more information about the new allegations and the investigation to the Associated Press and La Repubblica, an Italian newspaper, the day before publishing his statement. He told them the new allegations came from 14 women and one man, that they were credible and confirmed a "pattern" of psychological, sexual and spiritual abuse, and abuse of conscience.

"Many of these people did not know one another and the facts narrated refer to different periods" of Father Rupnik's life and ministry -- from his ministry with the Loyola Community to his artistic and spirituality work at the Centro Aletti, the Rome community where he lives and has his art studio, the statement said.

Verschueren said Rupnik declined to speak to the team that conducted the investigation and interviewed the 15 newly identified survivors, but he was informed

of the accusations and the investigators' recommendations.

Since the accusations do not appear to involve the sacraments or the abuse of minors, the case will not be sent to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the statement said, but will be handled internally by the Jesuits. Rupnik will be asked to respond, and the process could lead to further disciplinary measures, including being dismissed from the order.

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