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Father Jordi Bertomeu Farnos, a member of a Vatican-appointed team that has investigated clerical sexual abuse in Chile, talks to media upon arriving at the airport in Osorno, Chile, June 14, 2018. Along with Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Msgr. Bertomeu was sent by Pope Francis to Peru in July 2023 to investigate allegations of sexual, psychological and physical abuse in Sodalitium Christiane Vitae and confirmed in Lima that Pope Francis' decision to suppress Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, founded by Luis Fernando Figari in 1971, came along with ending "everything that Figari founded" and was based on the fact that there was no authentic charism, or spiritual gifts, in the controversial lay movement. (OSV News/courtesy of Archdiocese of Santiago)

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An official of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith said Pope Francis' decision to suppress Sodalitium Christianae Vitae was based on the fact that there was no authentic charism, or spiritual gifts, in the controversial lay movement founded by Luis Fernando Figari in 1971.

The decision came along with ending "everything that Figari founded," the official, Msgr. Jordi Bertomeu, said.

Concelebrating Mass Feb. 2 at the Church of Our Lady of Reconciliation, a Sodalitium-run parish in Lima, Peru, the priest told parishioners the pope charged him with overseeing the dissolution of the controversial lay movement back in December.

The Vatican envoy confirmed all four branches of Sodalitium were also ended in the process: Christian Life Movement, the Association of Mary Immaculate, the Marian Community of Reconciliation, known as the Fraternas because of its name in Spanish — la Fraternidad Mariana de la Reconciliación — and the Servants of the Plan of God.

"'I ask you to please accompany me in this process of suppression of Sodalitium and of all that Figari founded because I've come to the conclusion, after a long period of discernment, that there was no initial charism,' meaning that Figari did not receive a special grace," Bertomeu recalled the pope telling him.

"But (the pope) told me explicitly, and I would like to begin the Mass with these

words, 'Tell them (the members of Sodalitium) that first and foremost, this is not a punishment. It is the opposite! I want the best for them, I want the best for all these people of good faith, of good will who have taken this path for many years,'" he recounted.

In a brief statement published on its website Feb. 1, Sodalitium announced Bertomeu's appointment as pontifical commissioner and said the process of its dissolution would "begin in the coming days."

"Once again, we express our acceptance and adherence to the decisions of the Holy Father, and we will collaborate in the best possible way in this process," the movement said.

Along with Archbishop Charles Scicluna of Malta, adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Bertomeu was sent by Francis to Peru in July 2023 to investigate allegations of sexual, psychological and physical abuse in Sodalitium.

Dubbed as a "special mission," the investigation included meetings with victims of Sodalitium, the movements' leaders as well as journalists who uncovered the abuses within the group. The findings of their investigation resulted in the expulsion of high-ranking members of the group, including its founder, Figari.

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Although the Vatican has yet to publish an official statement, news of Bertomeu's appointment was confirmed most recently by José Enrique Escardó, the first member of Sodalitium Christianae Vitae to denounce abuse within the movement 25 years ago, during a Jan. 24 meeting with Francis.

Among those critical of Bertomeu was Peruvian journalist Alejandro Bermudez, who was among those expelled from Sodalitium by the pope last year. In an interview with OSV News Jan. 19, Bermudez said the investigation "was deeply flawed, marked by a blatant violation of due process, disregard for the truth and ideological bias of Msgr. Jordi Bertomeu Farnós."

However, Sodalitium distanced itself from criticisms against the Vatican official.

"The Sodalitium disassociates itself from any publication and/or public statement that goes against the Holy Father or the delegates appointed by the Holy See," it said. "We would like to remind everyone that the Sodalitium provides information only through official statements published on its official channels and is not responsible for any other publication issued outside these channels."

Addressing members at the Sodalitium-run parish, Bertomeu said that he was hesitant at first to accept the role the pope entrusted to him, especially after "a very difficult, very complicated special mission of gathering information and listening, above all, to victims."

While he understood that the suppression is a time for personal crisis for the group's members, Bertomeu said he was encouraged to view the process as a time of much-needed purification "with a gaze of faith and accompanied by Peter."

"I do not come here as a sociologist, as a politician, as an economist. No. I come as a priest who is trying to do his work by looking at the Lord and from the point of view of these brothers and sisters. With this look of mercy that only God gives us. That is why I am sure that we needed to pass through this crisis so that the Lord may give us something much better," he said.

He also said that while the process of suppression may "provoke a certain insecurity and unease," life "is not about looking for false securities" and that "our security comes from the Lord who always accompanies us."

"Today, I want to transmit this message of the Holy Father at the start of this process of suppression of Sodalitium and other entities founded by the layman Figari. At the end of this process, we must find ourselves more rooted in Christ and accompanied by the Blessed Virgin Mary. That is what we must find."

The decision to suppress all Sodalitium movements will affect thousands of members across North and South America — at the peak of membership it counted some 20,000 members across South America and parts of the United States.