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Lawyers sever ties with accusers of Maciel

by David Agren by Catholic News Service

MEXICO CITY -- The lawyers representing the supposed children and former partner of Legionaries of Christ founder Fr. Marcial Maciel have severed their relationship with the complainants, a Spanish news agency reported March 8.

The lawyers' spokesman, Jose Bonilla, said in a statement to the news agency, EFE, that the supposed family of Maciel went public March 3 with the story of their lives with the Legionaries of Christ founder and allegations of abuse against the late priest without first notifying their legal advisers.

Bonilla said the family -- Blanca Estela Lara Gutierrez and her three sons, Jose Raul, Omar and Cristian -- told MVS radio host Carmen Aristegui "a different version in some substantial points" than was told to the lawyers.

The family, the statement said, "decided to make public statements without consulting at any time on the decision or content with the legal team."

"We expressly separate ourselves from any link that could exist with the mentioned family," the legal team said.

In the March 3 radio appearance, Lara said she spent 25 years as Maciel's partner and they raised three children -- one of whom was not his biological son. Jose Raul and Omar, who said the Legionaries founder was their father, said the priest sexually abused them as minors.

The Legionaries of Christ issued a letter the following day that acknowledged the pain and suffering of the victims, but added that Jose Raul Gonzalez Lara had met with Fr. Carlos Skertchly, the order's general procurator, in January and requested \$26 million -- \$6 million for an inheritance and \$20 million in compensation for the abuse.

According to the letter, Jose Raul allegedly told Skertchly, "If you give me the money, I will keep quiet about the truth." No money has been paid, according to the Legionaries.

Jose Raul acknowledged March 5 on MVS radio that he had approached the Legion of Christ about money to "close this chapter" of their lives.

"I commented to [Skertchly], I told him paying that amount, [was] \$10 million for the sexual abuse committed against Omar and \$10 million for the sexual abuse committed against me over nine years by my father," Jose Raul said.

He also expressed dissatisfaction with the Legionaries' response.

"We very much regret this type of response from the Legionaries of Christ. The only thing we said or did was tell the story of our lives, which was the truth and, besides, we didn't choose to be the victims of a sexual predator," Jose Raul said.

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In their statement to EFE, the family's previous lawyers' expressed dismay with the Legionaries' response, too.

"Insinuating that the young men, Omar and Jose Raul Gonzalez Lara, tried to extort money from the Legion of Christ is folly," and it comes "from the necessity this religious congregation has, once again, to evade its responsibility," the lawyers' spokesman told EFE.

The Legionaries of Christ has expressed remorse for the actions of Father Maciel. On Feb. 22, its general secretary, Father Evaristo Sada, publicly asked for forgiveness from Father Maciel's victims.

After an investigation, the Vatican stripped Father Maciel in 2006 of the right to practice his ministry in public and ordered him to live a life of prayer and penitence. He died in January 2008 at age 87 and barely a year later, the Legionaries acknowledged their leader had fathered a child -- who reportedly lives in Spain.

A five-member apostolic visitation team is investigating the Legionaries and is expected to submit its findings to the Vatican in March.

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