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Corapi accused of sexual wrongdoing, falsehoods

by Nancy Frazier O'Brien by Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON -- Father John A. Corapi was involved in "years of cohabitation" with a former prostitute, repeated abuse of alcohol and drugs and "serious violation" of his promise of poverty, according to a fact-finding team appointed by his religious order.

Father Corapi, who recently announced he would leave the priesthood because he could not get a "fair hearing" on misconduct allegations against him, has been ordered by the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity to return to live at the order's regional headquarters in Robstown, Texas, and to dismiss a lawsuit against the woman whose accusations prompted the investigation.

"Catholics should understand that (the order) does not consider Father John Corapi as fit for ministry," said a July 5 news release from Father Gerard Sheehan, regional priest servant for the order, commonly known as SOLT.

Although Father Corapi's ministry "has inspired thousands of faithful Catholics," the news release said, he is "now misleading these individuals through his false statements and characterizations."

"It is for these Catholics that SOLT, by means of this announcement, seeks to set the record straight," it added.

There was no immediate response to the announcement from Father Corapi.

The order said its three-member fact-finding team had gathered information "from Father Corapi's emails, various witnesses and public sources" and had concluded that the priest:

-- "Did have sexual relations and years of cohabitation (in California and Montana) with a woman known to him, when the relationship began, as a prostitute."

-- "Repeatedly abused alcohol and drugs."

-- "Has recently engaged in sexting activity with one or more women in Montana."

-- "Holds legal title to over \$1 million in real estate, numerous luxury vehicles, motorcycles, an ATV, a boat dock and several motor boats, which is a serious violation of his promise of poverty as a perpetually professed member of this society."

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Although he did not name them, Father Sheehan said the fact-finding team was made up of a priest specializing in canon law, a psychiatrist and a lawyer, each of whom has a national reputation and "substantial experience in ecclesiastical processes related to priest disciplinary issues."

Two of the three were members of religious orders, and the third was a layperson. Two were men and one was a woman, he said.

As the team was carrying out its work, Father Corapi filed a civil suit against his principal accuser and then offered \$100,000 for her silence, the news release said. Other key witnesses who "may have negotiated contracts ... that precluded them from speaking" with the team declined to answer its questions or provide documents, it said.

When the fact-finding team asked Father Corapi to dismiss the lawsuit and release individuals from their contractual obligations to remain silent, "he refused to do so and, through his canonical advocate, stated, 'It is not possible for Father Corapi to answer the commission's questions at this time,'" the news release added.

Father Corapi, 64, announced June 17 -- two days before the 20th anniversary of his priestly ordination -- in a YouTube video and blog posting that he would leave the priesthood.

"For 20 years I did my best to guard and feed the sheep," he said in the blog posting. "Now, based on a totally unsubstantiated, undocumented allegation from a demonstrably troubled person I was thrown out like yesterday's garbage. I accept that. Perhaps I deserve that."

Father Corapi had been highly visible for several years as a speaker and preacher, including a program on the Eternal Word Television Network. EWTN took his show off its schedule shortly after his suspension, saying it would not knowingly put on the air a priest whose faculties had been suspended.

The SOLT news release said Father Sheehan would not be available for further comment because of the order's general chapter July 5-23.

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