

# **Spokesman: News that founder fathered child causes Legionaries pain**

ROME - The Legionaries of Christ only recently found out that their founder had fathered a child, knowledge that has caused the members great suffering, but has not destroyed the gratitude they owe him, said a spokesman for the religious order.

Father Paolo Scarafoni, spokesman at the Legionaries' headquarters in Rome, told Catholic News Service Feb. 4 that, despite the failures and flaws of the late Father Marcial Maciel Degollado, members of the order are grateful to him for having founded the order and its various ministries.

"We found this out only recently," Father Scarafoni said, referring to the fact that Father Maciel had a daughter.

Asked how the Legionaries came to know about her, Father Scarafoni said, "Frankly, I cannot say and it is not opportune to discuss this further, also because there are people involved" who deserve privacy.

In the past, Father Maciel had been accused of sexually abusing young seminarians in the order, accusations that Father Scarafoni said "have never been proven definitively."

Because the Holy See decided against conducting a canonical trial to investigate the allegations, but rather ordered the then-elderly Father Maciel to withdraw to a life of prayer and penance in May 2006, "we do not know what allegations were made and examined at that time," Father Scarafoni said.

Father Maciel died Jan. 30, 2008, at the age of 87.

The pain the Legionaries are experiencing now "is so great precisely because this is something we did not know before," Father Scarafoni said.

However, he said, "We are serene. Certainly, it is a time of great trial for us and in the face of this there is great suffering."

Father Scarafoni had told the Mexican news agency Notimex that the Legionaries were living through "a process of purification."

He told CNS, "When you are faced with such great pain, it means that you must grow, you must be better, you must be purified spiritually because you must continue to move forward motivated by even higher ideals. This is especially true when you are faced with the unexpected."

At the same time, he said, "there is much gratitude. Our gratitude to him remains very strong because we have received so much that is good from him. This is something we cannot and will not deny."

The priest said the Legionaries of Christ and the lay members of Regnum Christi are dealing with the news "as a family. With prudence and charity we are informing our members and trying to help each other overcome this situation. What is important is not to renounce the great mission that we have."

"The priority is the life and the holiness of each of our members," he said.

A spokesman for the Legionaries of Christ in the United States acknowledged that some aspects of Father Maciel's life "were not appropriate for a Catholic priest."

"We have learned some things about our founder's life that are surprising and hard to understand," Jim Fair, the order's U.S. spokesman, said Feb. 4 in a prepared statement.

Mr. Fair declined further comment on the activities of Father Maciel, saying only that Father Maciel now "stands before God's judgment and mercy."

Mr. Fair denied rumors that the Legionaries would renounce Father Maciel, saying he will always be considered the order's founder.

"It's one of the mysteries of our faith, that someone can have tremendous flaws but yet the Holy Spirit can work through them," he told CNS in a telephone interview

from Chicago.

Despite the unsettling news, Mr. Fair said, the order will continue its ministries.

Father Maciel lived the last years of his life under a Vatican order not to practice his priestly ministry in public.

The accusations that Father Maciel sexually abused seminarians first became public in 1997 in a report in The Hartford (Conn.) Courant daily newspaper. In a letter to the paper, Father Maciel denied the allegations, saying “In all cases they are defamations and falsities with no foundation whatsoever.”

Father Maciel founded the Legionaries of Christ in his native Mexico in 1941. The order has about 600 priests and 2,500 seminarians worldwide, including 75 priests in the United States and a seminary and novitiate in Connecticut.