

Commission to investigate sexual abuse by Focolare member

Rocca di Papa (Rome), 22nd October 2020

Concerning the news published by some French media, on 16th October last, concerning the case of violence against minors by J.M.M., a former consecrated member of the Focolare, resident in France, the Focolare Movement expresses first of all its deep pain, closeness and support for the victims and their families.

“Faced with this immense suffering – Maria Voce, President of the Focolare Movement affirmed – we are convinced that the only path to follow is that of offering the victims full attention and recognition of the harm done. I wish here to reiterate the Movement’s full and unconditional collaboration, to shed full light on the facts and do justice to the victims.”

The Focolare Movement has therefore decided to institute a special inquiry that will be entrusted to an independent Body the composition of which will be made public shortly.

The task of this Body will be to listen to the victims and to gather further testimonies, as well as investigating whether there were any omissions, cover ups or silences on the part of those responsible for the Movement. At the end of the investigation, the independent Body will make its final report public.

In the interests of the completeness of the investigation and to guarantee full transparency, on 21st October 2020 the President of the Focolare, Maria Voce, accepted the resignations from office of Bernard Bréchet and Claude (Christiane-Marie Goffinet), jointly responsible for the Focolare Movement in France, and of Henri-Louis Roche, jointly responsible for the Movement in Western Europe.

With regard to the steps taken by the Movement concerning J.M.M. we communicate the following information:

- In 1994, a male victim filed a complaint as a civil plaintiff for sexual molestation committed by J.M.M. in 1981 and 1982 when he was 15 and 16 years of age. Following the report, J.M.M. was relieved of his responsibilities regarding young people. The case was dismissed, due to insufficient evidence for the crime of rape. The crime of sexual molestation was past the statute of limitations.
- In December 1998 J.M.M. underwent a civil trial in which he admitted the molestation (but not the attempted rape) for which, in 1998, he was ordered to pay damages.
- At the request of those responsible for the Movement, J.M.M. followed a psychotherapeutic path for a number of years.
- In 2015, following a new request by the victim to those responsible for the Focolare Movement in France, and to Mons. Pansard (then President of the national Council for Movements of the Bishops’ Conference of France) who forwarded the request to the

Dicastery for the Laity in the Vatican, the case was studied by the Central Commission for the Promotion of the Well-Being and Protection of Minors (CO.BE.TU.) of the Focolare Movement, established in 2014. After carefully studying the case, in 2016 the Commission proposed to the leadership of the Movement that J.M.M. be dismissed from the section of the focolarini, the consecrated members. The dismissal became effective in the same year.

- In November 2019, the independent Commission on sexual abuse in the Church in France (CIASE) received notification concerning the presence of other presumed victims of J.M.M.
- At its meeting on 16th November 2019, CO.BE.TU. reopened the file on J.M.M. in order to contact the victims already identified, to gather their testimony and give each of them full recognition.
- At the request of one of the victims, on the 18th September 2020, in Nantes, a meeting with some of the victims was held in the presence of the Co-president of the Focolare Movement, Jesús Morán, of the coordinator of CO.BE.TU, the lawyer Orazio Moscatello, and the people responsible for the Movement in France. On that occasion Jesús Morán expressed his pain and shame for the abuses suffered “and also for the silence or lack of initiative sustained for years on the part of various people in positions of responsibility”.

The members of the Focolare Movement in France were immediately informed of the meeting and asked to report any information they may have, as also indicated in the letter of 26th March 2019 addressed by the President and Co-president of the Focolare to all the members of the Movement in the world.

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