



FRÈRES DE
SAINT-JEAN



Letter of 7th February, 2019

In light of the articles that appeared in the media following Pope Francis's press conference during his return flight from the United Arab Emirates, we would like to clarify some of the points made.

The press room director explained that the holy Father used the term 'slavery' in order to signify 'manipulation', a form of abuse of power that can also become a form of sexual abuse ([Source](#)). In addition, the Pope mentioned a community that was dissolved, the Institute of Saint John and Saint Dominic, itself composed of sisters who left the community of the Contemplative Sisters of Saint John ([Source](#)).

For more information, please see the points of clarification below.

Brother Thomas Joachim, Prior General of the Brothers of Saint John, Sister Paul-Marie, Prior General of the Contemplative Sisters of Saint John, and Sister Claire of Jesus, Prior General of the Apostolic Sisters of Saint John, condemn every situation of sexual abuse and abuse of power. Following Pope Francis' lead and in communion with him, they reaffirm their clear resolve to eradicate any and all abusive situations. Each of the Prior Generals expresses their deep sadness to the women who generously offered their lives to God and found themselves to be victims of such abuse.

On his own initiative the Prior General of the Brothers of Saint John in 2013 revealed that their founder, Father Marie-Dominique Philippe, "had committed acts contrary to chastity with several adult women whom he accompanied at the time". The Saint John Family condemns all the acts of sexual abuse and abuse of power committed by their founder. These acts were made evident by the convergent testimony of several victims, some of whom were sisters.

Some sisters or former sisters have also testified that brothers and priests of the community were also responsible for abuse. Many of these brothers and priests have already been sanctioned and others are in the process of being sanctioned. The government of the Brothers of Saint John is committed to process every case of abuse in accordance with the Directives of

the Catholic Church and the civil law of the country where the act was committed.

For many years now, the Brothers have taken a proactive stance to prevent abuse and to respond quickly and effectively to the cases of abuse that have taken place. These proactive measures include, but are not limited to: better vocational discernment, emotional maturity formation and procedures validated by the Vatican for dealing with cases of pedophilia and sexual abuse. These procedures imply full transparency and transmission of information to civil authorities as well as the creation of a commission composed of professional lay persons to examine carefully every testimony, complaint or admission of an abusive behavior.

There are now 80 sisters in the Community of Contemplative Sisters of Saint John and they have consistently chosen to cooperate with the decisions that the Church authorities made in 2009 and they have enacting the reforms that were required at that time with regard to their government and the abuse of authority. The Contemplative Sisters of Saint John were never dissolved.

The sisters who did not agree to cooperate with the reform proposed by Church authorities in 2009 left the Community of Contemplative Sisters of Saint John in 2014 and founded a new community in Spain under the name of '*Maria Stella Matutina*'. This followed the dissolution in 2013 by Pope Benedict XVI of the sisters' first initiative to form a new community, when they took the name '*Saint John and Saint Dominic*'. In 2014 Pope Francis permanently removed from religious life the four sisters who held positions of authority in the pre-reformed government of the Sisters. They were opposed to the decisions made by the Church authorities and promoted the division that took place among the sisters.

For many years now the Sisters and Brothers of Saint John are committed to rebuild and change what needs to be corrected. This is being done in complete collaboration with Rome and competent external assistance.

The Brothers and Sisters of the Family of Saint John reaffirm their commitment to any person abused by a member of our religious family: we are ready to listen to you and take action according to the established norms. Anyone concerned may contact the commission established by the Brothers of Saint John: sos.abus@stjean.com or the commission set up by the Conference of Bishops in France: paroledevictimes@cef.fr.

We are given hope by the Church's ongoing efforts for truth and remain committed to the fight against abuse so that places of consecrated life can be safe places for all who live there.

Sr Paul Marie + Thomas
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Sr Claire de Jésus
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