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Legionaries of Christ apologize for founder Maciel

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Father Marcial Maciel Degollado, right, is pictured celebrating Mass in this undated file photo. (CNS)

MEXICO CITY -- The general secretary of the Legionaries of Christ asked for forgiveness from the people who were harmed by the "immoral actions" of the order's founder, Father Marcial Maciel.

"We ask forgiveness because we are sincerely sorry for what the church and people have suffered," Father Evaristo Sada told an audience during the Youth and Family Encounter in the Mexican capital Feb. 20.

The comments were the most recent in an effort by the order to overcome allegations of sexual abuse of young seminarians by Father Maciel and the subsequent revelation that the Mexican priest fathered at least one child.

Father Maciel died Jan. 30, 2008, at the age of 87. In May 2006 after its own investigation, the Vatican decided against conducting a canonical trial, but ordered the then-frail Father Maciel to withdraw to a life of prayer and penance.

The Vatican has since ordered an apostolic visitation of the Legionaries. As part of the visitation, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver is visiting Legionaries seminaries and religious houses in the U.S.

In his presentation, Father Sada, 48, compared the difficulties facing the order with those of person in a small boat facing an immense storm.

"This year has been very difficult. Many things have converged: the economic crisis, the serious disorders in the life of our founder, and everyone has their own sufferings," Father Sada said.

Father Sada also provided a small insight into the apostolic visitation and the questions being asked by the visitors. Father Sada said one of the apostolic visitors asked him if he felt as if the rug had been pulled out from under him when his superiors told him "about the immoral behaviors in your founder's life."

"I answered, 'I was not founded on our founder,'" he said. "My human handles collapsed, and that is hard, but the rock I'm founded on is firm. It is the rock of God's love. I am founded on the certainty that this work is from God and that I consecrated myself to God."

He said that when he lived with Father Maciel he did not see the "negative things that we now know."

"I did not see them," he said. "I was only able to see the good and I did not realize the bad. God allowed it that way. Now that I know them, it hurts very much to see it. It hurts me for the people who have suffered. It hurts me that it has caused such a loss of prestige to the Catholic priesthood."

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Editor's Note: The full text of Father Sada's presentation can be found online at www.legionariesofchrist.org.

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