

Father Corapi, a popular preacher, put on administrative leave

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas - Father John Corapi, a popular author and preacher who has had speaking engagements all over the world, has been placed on administrative leave from priestly ministry over an accusation of misconduct.

"We have received an allegation that Father Corapi has behaved in a manner unbecoming of a priest and are duty-bound to conduct an investigation into this accusation," said Father Gerard Sheehan, a spokesman for Father Corapi's community, the Texas-based Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity.

Father Sheehan, who has the title "regional priest servant," issued the statement March 18 on behalf of the community.

"It is important to keep in mind that this action in no way implies Father Corapi is guilty of the allegation," Father Sheehan said. "It is equally important to know that, based on the information we have received thus far, the claim of misconduct does not involve minors and does not arise to the level of criminal conduct."

The matter will "be investigated internally," he said. Father Sheehan did not reveal the exact nature of the allegation.

In a March 19 statement, Father Corapi said, "All of the allegations in the complaint are false, and I ask you to pray for all concerned." His statement was posted on his website, www.fathercorapi.com.

He said he learned on Ash Wednesday, March 9, that a former employee "sent a three-page letter to several bishops accusing me of everything from drug addiction to multiple sexual exploits with her and several other adult women."

Father Sheehan told Catholic News Service that Bishop William M. Mulvey of Corpus Christi has instructed the religious community to ask two priests who are not clergy of the diocese and who are not members of the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity to investigate the allegation. The two priests have not yet been

named.

In his statement, Father Sheehan added that “unless and until information suggests otherwise,” the allegation made against Father Corapi “will not be referred to civil authorities.”

If officials of the religious community learn that the accusation involves a violation of criminal civil law, he said they would refer the matter to civil authorities.

In his statement, Father Corapi complained that the bishops’ procedures to protect minors from sex abuse by church personnel are “being applied broadly to respond to all complaints,” whether the complaint is deemed “to be credible or not.”

“I’ll certainly cooperate with the process, but personally believe that it is seriously flawed, and is tantamount to treating the priest as guilty ‘just in case,’ then, through the process, determining if he is innocent,” Father Corapi said. “The resultant damage to the accused is immediate, irreparable and serious, especially for someone like myself, since I am so well known.

“I am not alone in this assessment, as multiple canon lawyers and civil and criminal attorneys have stated publicly that the procedure does grave damage to the accused from the outset, regardless of rhetoric denying this, and has little regard for any form of meaningful due process,” he added.

It was not the first time Father Corapi has criticized the zero-tolerance policy mandated by the U.S. bishops’ “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”

In an address at the Call to Holiness conference in Michigan in 2002, Father Corapi called the policy “unjust.” He said there was no question the church needed to remove serial molesters or any priest who posed a threat. But he said there was “a radical difference” between a child-molester priest who “just wallows in it” and a priest removed because he was accused of one long-ago incident but who repented and went on to have 25-30 years of fruitful ministry.

According to his website, Father Corapi has traveled more than 2 million miles preaching the Gospel since his 1991 ordination by Pope John Paul II. He has

preached in 49 of the 50 states, all of the Canadian provinces except Newfoundland, and several other foreign countries.

Father Corapi often tells audiences his story of his late vocation to the priesthood and his life before that, when he knew both success and failure, from gaining millions of dollars in real estate to being penniless, homeless and addicted to cocaine.

Besides television and radio, he also preaches about the Catholic faith using the Internet and various other multimedia formats. He is the author of several books and has produced a number of multimedia products.

A native of Hudson, N.Y., he makes his home in Kalispell, Mont.

Father Corapi, 63, is widely known from his appearances on the EWTN cable TV channel, as a guest homilist in churches, and his many speaking engagements.

Founded in 1958, the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity is based in the Diocese of Corpus Christi. It is comprised of priests, brothers, deacons, sisters and laity.

Its website says the community's "primary apostolate is to serve the areas of deepest apostolic need."

Its members serve in missions around the world, working in parishes, and ministering to migrants, refugees, homeless people, among others. They also are involved in education, catechetics, evangelization, and marriage and family life. The community also has an outreach to prisoners and drug addicts.

This article was updated March 21, 2001, to remove incorrect information.