

Congregation of Bétharram

Bétharram, September 6, 2024

The Congregation of Bétharram is determined to support victims of sexual abuse and physical violence.

For several months, numerous revelations about terrible events that took place within the Bétharram school have been relayed in the media, and more particularly accounts detailing sexual abuse and physical violence, committed for the most part from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Deeply affected by these despicable acts and filled with compassion for all these victims, the Congregation of Bétharram and the management of the *Beau Rameau School Group* wish to reiterate what was said in a joint press release of February 16, 2024, i.e. how much they condemn these unacceptable acts committed against minors by religious or lay people. Since then, numerous complaints have been filed with the Public Prosecutor of Pau, which explains the rare statements made by our Congregation, which has to respect the ongoing legal proceedings.

Throughout these last months, the Congregation of Bétharram has ensured to continue and strengthen all the steps taken for several years in order to ensure that victims can come forward and benefit from all the support they are due, but also to prevent such acts from happening again.

Indeed, for victims of sexual violence committed by religious, the Congregation, in line with the CIASE report published in October 2021, voted at the General Assembly of the Conference of Religious Men and Women of France (CORREF), in November 2021, to set up the Independent Commission for Recognition and Reparation (CRR).

Since then the Congregation has been informed by the CRR of the existence of a certain number of victims. Facilitated by the CRR, numerous contacts have allowed the Congregation to meet victims who wished to do so. At the end of these meetings, letters of recognition and financial compensation were able to be initiated. The Congregation remains totally ready to continue this path so that victims of sexual abuse are recognised and supported in their desire to rebuild their lives.

The Congregation of Bétharram also took the initiative in May 2024 to contact the Francophone Institute for Justice and Democracy (IFJD) based in Bayonne, which specialises in the promotion of human rights and justice, as well as assistance to victims of violence, particularly sexual violence. The specialists of this NGO met all the religious of our vicariate on June 5.

The Congregation asked the IFJD to support it in preparing and facilitating an effective meeting, in the coming months, with any victims who wish to do so.

Regarding preventive measures, the Congregation did not wait until just recently: back in June 2017, during the General Chapter of our Congregation, which now brings together 256 religious in 14 countries (including 24 French mainly based in France), a motion was passed so that special vigilance be observed for the protection of minors in our different places.

In March 2021, the Superior General of the Congregation published "Guidelines of the Congregation for the protection of minors and vulnerable people in situations of sexual abuse". All communities have implemented them.

In June 2023, our last General Chapter meeting in Thailand indicated the measures to be taken so that all our works are "safe spaces". A reception and listening unit was set up, following these recommendations.

In July 2024, this process of reflection continued during international sessions, led by a psychologist, which brought together religious in Bétharram: formators and young people in formation.

In July 2024, following the meetings with the 5 communities that make up the Vicariate of France-Spain, the Superior General recalled the need to devote ourselves to supporting victims and to continue with steps to meet them.

Furthermore, the Congregation, with joint supervision of the current establishment "*Beau Rameau School Group*" on the two sites of Igon and Bétharram, ensures the application of the directives given by Catholic Education so that students are respected in their dignity. The Congregation recognises the commitment of the educational team which guarantees that parents will find in this establishment a "safe home" for their children.

At the end of the international meetings organised this summer, the Superior General of the Congregation wanted to send a strong message by which he commits himself on behalf of the Congregation to "continue with determination this path of recognition and reparation" "by going to meet all those who wish to do so" (these meetings being organized by the CRR and the IFJD) and to implement "all concrete measures" so that this criminal violence is definitively ended.

contactbetharram@gmail.com