

## JMM Inquiry Report - SUMMARY

### **Background to the Inquiry**

In light of ongoing concerns regarding cases of sexual violence against minors by JMM, a former consecrated member of the Focolare, resident in France, the Focolare Movement decided to entrust to an independent Body the task to set off and bring ahead an extraordinary inquiry.

The task of this Independent Inquiry was 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 makes its final report public.

### **Voices of the victims**

The profound and cruel indifference demonstrated towards many victims of child sexual abuse, whether within religious Movements, Churches, other institutions and sectors or in Society as a whole, is a constant reminder of the difficult journey any victim undertakes when sharing their stories of sexual violence and abuse. Society is quick to try and silence these voices as they confront us with a difficult and often unacceptable truth. There is a time of legal proceedings and definitions, there is also a time for organisations and society to stand up and acknowledge stories of situations which are against internal standards of behaviour and organisational rules. For this reason, the inquiry dedicates a short chapter on the definition of a victim and how this report has been using the term. For the purpose for this report, the team has decided to use the term 'victim' as it better corresponds to most of the situations encountered but also as its translation into other languages is less problematic.

### **Credibility of victims**

The Independent Inquiry found that all victims it was in contact with had no apparent links to each other and no knowledge of their respective stories (with the exception of the witnesses who told their stories through French Media '*Le Quotidien*' and '*Les Jours*'). It was evident all had undergone a process of serious personal reflection. Although some of them are still deeply affected by the events of the past, they were humble and without any specific hatred or desire for revenge against the perpetrator. They explained they had come forward to tell their stories as a way of confronting their own past, but also to help others in a similar situation to come forward with their own stories, seeking support and resilience in so doing.

### **Psychological hold**

In addition to the victims who initially came forward publicly in the French Media, the Independent Inquiry reached out and invited other victims who had either come forward already during past discussions with the former team of the people in charge of France, or who had contacted the Independent Inquiry by their own initiative. All of them described

their relationships with JMM using similar words, telling similar events, giving a coherent description of events as they happened when they were children or adolescents.

All of the reported abuses took place under conditions the Independent Inquiry labels as 'psychological hold'. JMM did not only groom the children but also their parents as well as members of the Movement at large. JMM was highly regarded by other members, as an intellectual, an engineer, a journalist; somebody who was successful in his job, committed to the Movement, a consecrated member having dedicated his life to serve the Movement of Chiara Lubich, of whom he was seen as being a close friend. In some cases, JMM seemed to have linked his behaviour to spirituality, praying for forgiveness after the abuse took place. Such behaviour added emotional abuse to the sexual abuse. Such relationships are characterised by significant imbalances of power, whereby the alleged victims feel deprived of their free will or does not fully apprehend events.

### **Stories about abuses and individual impact**

This section is specifically dedicated to the victims of JMM, former consecrated lay member of the Movement. Even though many years have passed since some of the stories were told to the Inquiry, those stories are often painful, powerful and can never leave the listener untouched or unconcerned. Respecting the wishes of most of the individuals concerned, this section contains a mix of stories shared by victims about the abuse they suffered and the continuing impact these events had on their lives, decisions they took, possibilities they missed, opportunities they created. The Inquiry wishes to recognise and acknowledge all the suffering which was reported, independently of the origin of the abuse, recognising all victims in a similar way, **as they are not only victims of different individuals but most of the time also victims of systemic failures within the Movement. For a majority of them, recognition of their suffering is a core expectation.**

The Inquiry team received testimony from 26 victims of JMM, either through direct contact and verbal testimony or through documented third parties. An additional 11 victims were suspected and subsequently reported through different means and triangulation but with no further contact or confirmation.

*The report presents extracts from victim testimony received during the course of the inquiry. This content has been reviewed by victims and we are grateful to them for agreeing to include their stories.*

### **Grooming process and manipulation**

When children, adolescents and vulnerable adults are abused, this is very often preceded by sophisticated manipulative processes. Events told by different victims as well as the profile emerging from different witness statements demonstrate, as so often in similar cases, a clear grooming process. Targets of JMM seemed often to have been children from poorer backgrounds, living in the countryside or in decentralised regions, coming from families with a number of children and less able to dedicate individual time to each of them. He provided

them with exceptional memories which were not necessarily open to them without invitations from him. JMM, consciously or not, incited some adolescents to some sort of competition, to be the selected one, the favourite child. In addition to the grooming and manipulation of the children, JMM created a conducive environment in which to approach the children and adolescents by also grooming their parents. He committed a number of abuses under the roof of parents who trusted him, who had invited him, who were convinced of his superior morals given his status as a consecrated lay person who had committed his entire life to the Movement, to poverty, chastity and celibacy.

In addition to the above, JMM was also successful in grooming his own organisational management which for years had partially knowledge about the situation. The Focolare Movement, as with similar situations in the Catholic Church, has spent years using legal concerns and resolutions as a defence, making the excuse that because an abusive situation has not been proven via a legal process, it can somehow be ignored and managed without acknowledging the victims. Again, like the Catholic Church and other institutions, the Movement for a long time was more concerned with protecting the perpetrators, and thereby its own reputation, rather than supporting the victims. In this way, JMM benefitted for years from a system protecting him; at the same time, the Focolare Movement systemically failed the victims.

For a long time, victims of such situations felt guilty for not having pushed back, for not having been brave or strong enough to prevent the abuse. The Movement itself contributed to the guilt felt by victims, considering that once the legal responsibility was not confirmed, it was not their responsibility either to protect future other victims from JMM or to actively trace back other victims who had not come forward with their stories. JMM for years was left in the same position of authority and potential abuse of power. A victim remembers that when he told his story to the people in charge at the International Centre, they seemed to be so bewildered by his story he felt strongly that what had happened must have been his own fault.

### **Other abusive situations within the Movement (not related to JMM)**

The Independent Inquiry is aware of the trust it has received from many people to listen and use their experience to contribute to a more complete picture of the situation. In telling their stories some succeeded in overcoming their psychological difficulties, some are still struggling with past events and trying to find some meaning. Witnesses are both former and current Members of the Movement.

***The Independent Inquiry, whilst ensuring that all voices are heard, wants to point out that the following reported cases of abuse including sexual, emotional, spiritual, and financial, were not investigated in detail by the Inquiry.***

However, these stories describe similar situations to those of JMM and his victims adding weight to the testimonies received by the Inquiry. Profiles of perpetrators reported by the different individuals are often similar to JMM - charismatic people idolised by others, seen as central, untouchable, morally irreproachable, and trustworthy. The different situations described follow similar patterns of abuse of power, psychological dependence and adoration. This leads to a worrying snapshot image of the Movement and points to systemic situations of abuse which were and are known about by those in positions of leadership and responsibility since the early days of the Movement, but not addressed and therefore are likely to still continue.

### **Allegations of sexual abuse**

During the Independent Inquiry, a number of other stories of sexual abuse were reported to the team. Some were new, others were already partially known by the Movement and well documented. What is persistently shared by many of the witnesses is the feeling that not much is done to acknowledge some of the very difficult situations the victims continue to face. Victims described how the abuse therefore contributed to situations of weakness or vulnerability leading to other abuse. Also, even though there have been some statements and letters acknowledging publicly that the Movement had issues of inappropriate behaviour, sexual abuse and other difficult situations, victims and witnesses described how these declarations did not seem to be followed by actions and effective change.

Most of the victims or witnesses reporting other cases of sexual abuse within the movement are concerned about the lack of diligence, reporting to national authorities when appropriate and necessary as well as a level of opacity when cases were dealt with and perpetrators expelled.

Witnesses who spoke to the Inquiry team about past experiences of sexual abuse within the Movement very often also spoke about subsequent or prior situations of abuse of power, emotional or spiritual and sometimes financial abuse. It appears that negative experiences which were reportedly lived inside the Movement, contributed in some cases to further weakening the self-confidence of those concerned and allowed further abuse through different forms.

### **Allegations of spiritual, emotional, financial abuse and abuse of authority**

The case JMM describes a major breach of trust within the Movement but in many cases the breaches go further than just the sexual abuse cases. This section contains detail of testimony from people who described being victims of behaviour which for them generated long term negative impact on their lives, sometimes in a very dramatic manner and who feel that so far they have not been fully heard by the Movement's leadership.

The scope of the Independent Inquiry was to look into abuses committed by JMM and the context in which they occurred, while at the same time receiving reports with regards to other abusive situations. As with the sexual abuse cases reported in the previous section, the

following reported situations have not been fully investigated by the Inquiry. However, the Independent Inquiry has received during the last 10 months a large number of reports from many different locations, regarding other situations perceived as being abusive, not necessarily sexually abusive, but involving emotional abuse, financial abuse, or spiritual abuse.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### ***Allegation A – Sexual Abuse by JMM***

The Independent Inquiry received credible and corroborating accounts, including JMM's own admission of parts of the allegations, covering a period of more than 30 years (1963 – 1997), from various alleged victims, all males as well as other witnesses, both male and females. They originated from all parts of France, were coherent with JMM's own locations, travels and responsibilities. Dates provided and details of other events were coherent and triangulated through different sources of information. All witnesses described similar events, providing sufficient evidence that JMM engaged in manipulative and inappropriate sexual activities with children and young adults under his supervision and influence.

The Independent Inquiry received direct oral or written testimony from 26 victims. The team also received trustworthy information mentioning at least 11 other victims of JMM. At the same time, the Independent Inquiry also received testimony of at least 3 young people subjected to a grooming process, without any subsequent abuse. These additional reports on grooming concern incidents up to 2017, reported to the Independent Inquiry. No reports of inappropriate behaviour were received since then. The identified numbers do not presume there were no other victims, especially given the different challenges encountered and allegations of sexual abuse during travels and Chaplaincy work which could not be followed up by the Independent Inquiry.

For the Independent Inquiry, given the age of the children as well as the very special grooming environment including his own position of authority and trust towards the families and the children, the many allegations received by the inquiry of inappropriate behaviour, sexual misconduct and sexual abuse are substantiated based on testimony and documentary evidence.

### **Conclusion**

**Based on the allegations of sexual abuse against 26 victims and 11 other victims reported through third parties to the inquiry, the Independent Inquiry concludes JMM was a prolific, serial child abuser responsible for multiple cases of child sexual abuse and attempted child sexual abuse including those we have information on and most likely many others beside.**

## ***Allegation B – Handling of the alleged events by the Focolare Movement***

The Independent Inquiry is conscious of the difficulties in identifying individual responsibilities over the last 55 years. The pyramidal structure of the Movement, its mantra of obedience and unity has certainly contributed to the systemic failure to deal with not only the case against JMM but also other cases. Many layers of people including at the highest governing level<sup>1</sup> were informed about the fact that ‘something was wrong’ with JMM and he needed to be kept under surveillance. However, the people most in charge, both in France and internationally, at the time the case of one victim came into public view via the court cases in 1994/5, remained satisfied there had been a legal process that resulted in a non-lieu and did not take any further formal action.

It is highly unlikely that the highest level of Leadership was not informed about the legal issues JMM encountered in 1994 – 1998, then again in 2017. JMM had been in police custody in 1994 and members of the Movement had been called upon to testify. In addition, as already established, JMM needed the Movement’s help to pay the financial reparation he was condemned to pay to the victim in 1998. As the amount was very significant, such a payment must have been authorised at the highest level of the Movement. The Independent Inquiry has established that Leadership at the Centre authorised this payment in 1998 and therefore, must have been informed about the facts.

The people initially responsible for JMM many years ago are now deceased. Others, in charge later, have consistently failed to act on information based on a mistaken or misguided belief that the court case verdict meant they could not move against JMM or out of fear of the consequences or self-preservation and an avoidance of reputational damage.

### **Conclusion**

**The Independent Inquiry finds systemic failures in the handling of the JMM case and establishes that a chain of people in charge over many years, both in France and in Rome, failed to act on the situation of JMM in a way that would have protected victims and prevented other incidents of abuse or attempted abuse.**

### **Recommendations**

As well as considering the findings of the Inquiry and review of documentation, the Independent Inquiry team met with several prominent members of the Focolare international leadership including the former and current leadership representatives in France, the current President, Co-President and a previous President. Key members of the CO.BE.TU were also interviewed to gather information on the way in which safeguarding has developed in Focolare, the prevention measures in place to protect children and adults, how safeguarding

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<sup>1</sup> Names known to the inquiry team, both deceased, confirmed by JMM

cases are dealt with and current and future plans for ensuring the safety and protection of everyone in the Movement, especially children.

There is no doubt the Focolare Movement has taken significant steps to change the situation in relation to the protection of minors and further developments are planned. There is also a strong commitment from leaders to ensuring the Movement is a safe place, although as indicated already, there are a significant number of people in the Movement who do not feel safe and in spite of the encouragement to do so, have not reported their concerns. Victims also do not feel Focolare are meeting their commitments to them.

There is also a commitment to learn from this Inquiry and to improve in the future. The investment to date in developing good practice, delivering training and creating an infrastructure for safeguarding via the designated staff and the safeguarding commissions, is important to sustain ongoing development in this critical area. The Inquiry team acknowledges the work to date and the efforts and intentions of those in leadership positions to continue to improve. The report proposes actions and developments that are strongly recommended as part of the continuing safeguarding journey in the following areas:

- Culture and leadership
- Prevention measures - policy and procedures, learning and development
- Response measures - reporting and responding
- Monitoring and review

### **Other considerations**

#### **Apologies**

The Independent Inquiry found systemic failings in matters relating to JMM and therefore recommends the Focolare Movement makes a genuine, profound and unconditional public apology to his victims that recognises the Movement failed to protect them and others from abuse that could and should have been prevented or detected.

#### **Redress/Compensation scheme**

It is recommended the compensation mechanism is independent of Focolare, operated in a transparent and efficient way by a third party organisation or body made up of suitably experienced individuals independent of Focolare. The panel should include individuals from a mix of professional backgrounds, for example legal/judicial members and non-judicial members from e.g. psychologists, social workers. Settlements should be offered as quickly as possible and applicants should have the right to appeal.

#### **Other victims**

The case of JMM has received public scrutiny, so will this report. However, it will be important for the movement not to forget other victims and other pending issues and develop a strategy

for how to follow up on all the other cases and also include these victims in their follow-up actions and support procedures.