

# Vatican steps in as scandal hits priests

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Legionaries of Christ founder lived double life

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VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict has ordered an investigation of an influential Roman Catholic priestly order whose founder was discovered to be a sexual molester and to have had at least one child with a mistress.

The Legionaries of Christ announced the inspection, known as an Apostolic Visitation, yesterday.

The conservative group, one of the fastest-growing orders in the Catholic Church, has been shaken by a string of scandals tied to their Mexican founder, Father Marcial Maciel, who died last year at age 87.

The order was much admired by the late Pope John Paul II for its strict loyalty to Vatican teaching and success in enrolling recruits.

Last month, the order said it had found evidence Maciel had lived a double life for decades.

Legion leaders have confirmed that while running the order, whose priests take vows of celibacy, Maciel fathered a daughter, who is now in her 20s.

In 2006, the Vatican disciplined Maciel on charges he had molested boy and men seminarians decades earlier, asking him to retire to a "life of prayer and penance." At the time, the sanctions made Maciel one of the most prominent persons to be disciplined for sexual abuse.

Apostolic Visitation can lead to disciplinary action.

Such probes are not frequent and can last months.

Founded by Maciel in 1941, the Legionaries now has about 800 priests and 2,500 seminarians in more than 20 countries.

Observers have questioned how the order can carry on, since it is so closely affiliated with Maciel. Followers pray that the spirit of the founder lives on in their behaviour.

George Weigel, a Washington-based Catholic theologian, said the probe will have to discover who within the order was complicit in Maciel's deceit.

*With files from Associated Press*

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