

PRESS RELEASE

from the Moderator Father, Moïse Ndione, and the International Council of the Foyers de Charité

Publication of the conclusions of Fr Finet's independent multidisciplinary research commission (1898-1990)

Châteauneuf-de-Galaure, 7 May 2020.

After received a number of inquires about Fr Georges Finet, the Moderator Father and the International Council of the Foyers de Charité decided to form an independent multidisciplinary research commission on Fr Finet in September 2019.

Through a reform process, started four years ago, of governance methods at the international and local level in particular, the work of the Foyers de Charité sought to get at the truth as part of an essential step in combating and preventing all forms of abuse in the Foyers de Charité and in all the activities for which it is responsible.

The Foyers de Charité gave the commission the following objectives:

- to establish the truth regarding the facts alleged against Fr Finet;
- to assess the measures taken by the Foyers de Charité against sexual and conscience abuse;
- to make any practical recommendations.

Chaired by Françoise Gausson, a doctor in Catholic theology, the research commission formed a team of 8 people, who are independent of the Foyers de Charité, with complementary disciplinary skills. This commission conducted its research over a period of 6 months, basing its work primarily on a series of 143 testimonies gathered between September 2019 and February 2020. It submitted its report on 16 March 2020 to the Moderator Father of the Foyers de Charité, Fr Moïse Ndione.

The coordinators of the Foyers de Charité are notifying everyone of the following:

1/ The commission's report reveals and documents the seriously deviant acts committed by Fr Finet. The testimonies gathered relate to a lengthy period, from 1945 to 1983, with an increase in the number of testimonies from 1961 onwards. 26 women, mainly former pupils of the school at Châteauneuf-de-Galaure, most of whom were aged 10 to 14 at the time, reported the behaviour of Fr Finet during confession. Consistent testimonies refer to touching the body, sometimes even on the skin, under the clothing, and intrusive questions about their sexuality. These actions constituted serious intrusions into the intimate lives of these young girls and young women, and caused lasting psychological and spiritual damage. 15 people bear witness to suffering that is still acute today. The fact that these actions were committed during confession, by a priest with spiritual authority over these young girls adds to their gravity.

2/ In his declaration to the victims and all the Foyers de Charité, Fr Moïse Ndione declares the following:

« My thoughts are first and foremost for the victims. I thank them for having had the courage to testify to the commission and dredge up the painful memories of the traumatic experience they endured. On behalf of the Foyers de Charité, I humbly ask their forgiveness and would like to find, with them, the best way of recognising what they have experienced.

It is essential to seek the truth, first for the victims themselves, and to recognise the wounds inflicted by Fr Finet. Their testimony is of utmost importance in helping the Foyers de Charité get to the truth about their past and move forwards in their reform process.»

3/ The Foyers de Charité unreservedly condemns Fr Finet's actions which are gravely contrary to the law and the respect for persons. These revelations are very painful for those who were victims, for every member of the Foyers de Charité and for all those who valued Fr Finet in his role as founder, preacher or teacher.

4/ The work of the commission also mentions 9 testimonies relating to other facts implicating people other than Fr Finet, without, however, citing specific testimony in this regard in its report. In the conclusion to the summary document that is being published today, the Foyers de Charité provide more specific information on these other cases that occurred since 1950. In particular, the Foyers de Charité mention the number of known cases, the nature of the facts, how these cases were handled and the measures which were taken with the different levels of sanctions according to gravity.

5/ The report of the commission underlines that the preventive measures taken and the handling of the abuses by the Foyers de Charité in their communities and different activity branches are in compliance with the standards instituted by the Church. The committee notes, however, the need to make these measures more effective, particularly through the restructuring of the unit for combating crimes against children and all forms of abuse, created in June 2017.

6/ The report of the commission also assessed the anti-abuse and preventive measures taken in the schools. It emphasised that the anti-abuse and preventive measures implemented in the schools of Châteauneuf-de-Galaure comply with the standards instituted by the Catholic Education service. Based on the hearings and school visits, the commission gave a positive assessment of the measures implemented within the context of a global education system.

7/ The work of the Foyers de Charité reasserts its firm and unchanging commitment to combating all forms of abuse in its communities and in all the activities, for which it is responsible, not only by improving the existing systems, but also by pursuing and ramping up its work on community life itself, including changes to the exercise of authority within communities.

8/ The Foyers de Charité have already taken three decisions:

A. To complete the research work of the commission, **the Foyers de Charité will commission a**

general audit of the Foyers and all of their activities, to an independent professional body. The purpose of this audit will be to identify the structural or cultural causes of the dysfunctions, abuses and deviations that could have been identified.

- B. The unit for the fight against crimes against children and all forms of abuse will be restructured**, under the responsibility of a general coordinator, who will be independent of the Foyers de Charité, in order to continue the anti-abuse and prevention work, and improve our capacity to welcome and deal with any further testimonies that these revelations may elicit. As of now, the anti-abuse unit can be contacted at the email address: **paroledevictime@lesfoyersdecharite.com**.
- C.** The Foyers de Charité decided to create **a theological commission** charged with studying the teachings of Fr Finet in the light of these revelations. Indeed, the Foyers must examine, with the help of external experts, the legacy received from Fr Finet and discern anything that is not in keeping with community life because of this legacy, especially concerning the manner, in which the priestly mission is viewed and experienced in the Foyers de Charité, and, more generally, the positioning of authority.

Regarding the future of the Foyers de Charité, Fr Moïse Ndione said,

“ We have started a reform process. I appeal to all members, priests and laity, to take part in the essential collective work needed to deepen our vocation and our mission. We wish to continue this work in the Church, alongside the bishops, that have a Foyer de Charité in their diocese, and under the authority of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life.”

The Foyers de Charité in brief

The Foyers de Charité – an international Catholic Work – were founded in 1936 at Châteauneuf-de-Galaure (Drôme), at the instigation of Marthe Robin (1902 -1981) and Fr Finet (1898 -1990). Their main mission is to offer spiritual retreats, which welcome more than 50,000 people a year. Some Foyers have an additional mission: schools, dispensaries, holiday accommodation, volunteering. The work of the Foyers de Charité currently has 78 Foyers spread over 4 continents and 970 members committed for life to the work and its missions.

In 1986, the Pontifical Council for the Laity recognised the Work of the Foyers de Charité as an international association of the faithful of pontifical right.

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Download the conclusions of Fr Finet's research commission **here**