Then Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois marches toward the Vatican during a demonstration calling

Then Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois, third from left, marches down Via della Conciliazione toward the Vatican during a demonstration calling for women's ordination in Rome Oct. 17, 2011. In 2012, he was expelled from the priesthood and the Maryknoll community because of his public support for women's ordination. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Roy Bourgeois

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"There is neither male nor female. In Christ you are one" (Galatians 3:28).

While in the military, I felt called by God to be a Catholic priest. I was lucky; I happened to be born male. In 1972, I was ordained a priest with the Maryknoll Fathers.

During my more than 40 years of ministry, I met many devout Catholic women who also felt called by God to the priesthood. They were not so lucky. Having been born female, they were rejected by the men who made decisions for the Roman Catholic Church.

There is a serious problem here. Ordination to the priesthood should not be reliant on luck and the possession of certain body parts. Our all-loving God, who made the universe, created women and men of equal worth and dignity.

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In 1976, the Pontifical Biblical Commission found nothing in Scripture preventing the ordination of women.

In different periods of history, women could not vote, become medical doctors, lawyers, astronauts or serve as members of Congress. By refusing to ordain women, the all-male priesthood continues to inflict the grave injustice of sexism — which, like racism and homophobia, is not of our Creator, who made us all equal.

How can men say that our call to be priests is authentically from God, but that the call of women is not? God called a woman to bring Jesus into the world. God called a woman to bring the good news of the resurrection of Jesus to the male apostles, who were in hiding because of their fear. Why wouldn't God call a woman to be a priest?

The all-male priesthood is not of God, but of men who have hijacked the church, become addicted to power and believe themselves to be superior to women.

The Catholic Church is in a major crisis. There is a shortage of priests, the pews are empty and churches are closing. There are far fewer Maryknoll priests and seminarians than when I became a priest. That means Maryknoll has been forced to cut back on its work in Latin America, Asia, Africa and the United States. But this is far from unique; what is happening to the Maryknoll Fathers is a microcosm of what is happening throughout the Catholic Church today.

After serving as a Catholic priest for 40 years, I was expelled from the priesthood and the Maryknoll community in 2012 because of my public support for the ordination of women. Having to leave longtime friends was painful, but I have no regrets for calling for gender equality in the Catholic Church. When there is injustice, silence is complicity. My conscience compelled me to break my silence about this grave injustice against women.

I am not a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Poll after poll show that the majority of Catholics support the ordination of women. The hierarchy is quickly running out of time. If the Roman Catholic Church does not disband the all-male priesthood and

start ordaining women priests and married priests, the church will die.

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