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Sixth Catholic woman priest ordained this year

by Dennis Coday



Janice Sevre-Duszynska was ordained a priest Saturday, Aug. 9, in

Lexington, Ky., making her the sixth woman to be ordained in the United States this year as part of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement.

The movement has ordained 32 priests in the United States over the last two years. Saturday's event was noteworthy because for the first time, a male Roman Catholic priest in good standing publicly joined the ceremony. Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois concelebrated at the ceremony and was a homilist. (See **related story** and read **Bourgeois? homily.**)

UPDATE: Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois, who attended the ordination of Janice Sevre-Duszynska and preached a homily, has been summoned by the superior general of his order. Bourgeois is to meet with his religious superiors in Maryknoll, N.Y., Aug. 18.

The superior general of Maryknoll, an order of overseas missionaries headquartered in New York, told

NCR Aug. 13, "We are asking our brother to come home and explain to us what happened."

Marykoll Fr. John Sivalon said that Bourgeois had not informed Maryknoll leadership about his action before the event and all they knew was based on media accounts. "We would like to know what happened," Sivalon said. "We are asking him to come so that we can have an opportunity to get the facts of the case as they are presented by him."

Sivalon also said that the summons was solely a Maryknoll initiative and that no other ecclesial authorities were involved.

Bourgeois said Aug. 13 that he knew that there would be serious implications for his involvement with Roman Catholic Womenpriests, but said, "I feel that this is something I had to do in conscience in the context of my own faith journey. I feel very much at peace with it."

About the summons from his religious superiors, he said, "I've been with Maryknoll for 42 years, 36 years as a priest. This is family. These are brothers. I am hoping, I'm praying for their support on a critical moral issue that our church is faced with today."

"I am hoping that my community and our leadership will support me and women, that they will walk in solidarity with women who are oppressed."

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Sevre-Duszynska, 58, is married. She has said she will serve as an itinerant priest "speaking out for the voiceless and challenging the powers that be to hear the call of nonviolence and cooperation in our world community."

Marjorie Maguire, a longtime friend of Sevre-Duszynska from Milwaukee, talked with NCR by phone from Lexington after the ordination. About 150 people attended the ordination, which was held in the Unitarian Universalist Church in Lexington.

She said that at the end of the ceremony, Sevre-Duszynska told the congregation that she often thinks of something Dominican Sr. Marge Tuite told her many years ago: "Never stop making the connections between sexism, racism, militarism, nationalism and all forms of violence."

Making those connections, Maguire said, was really the theme of the day's ordination. "Roy and Janice represent the merging of these (struggles of justice), of making these connections," Maguire said.

During the Litany of the Saints, which is part of ordination rite, as Sevre-Duszynska lay prostrate on floor, she held two objects: a wooden cross that she held during protests at SOA Watch demonstrations and an alb made of sackcloth that she wore at demonstrations for women's ordinations that she staged during the meetings of the U.S. Catholic Bishops conferences.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Lexington condemned the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement as "in opposition to the church's authentic teaching" and warned that "members of the Catholic faithful should not support or participate in Saturday's event." Participation in the event, "carries with it very

serious penal sanctions in Church Law, a statement on the diocese's Web site warned.

The event, the diocese said, has no connection to Roman Catholic Liturgy or Sacraments and cannot in any way be recognized as a valid reception of Sacred Orders.

Despite such threats, this has been a busy year for the Womenpriests movement. Three women were ordained in Boston July 20. A woman was ordained in Portland, Oregon June 7 and another in Winona, Minn., May 4. A woman and a man were ordained in Canada May 29. The Roman Catholic Womenpriests claim 26 priests and a dozen deacons in the United States. A California woman, Dana Reynolds, was elected and ordained a bishop for the movement earlier this year. Reynolds presided at the Lexington ordination.

The movement has at least two more ordinations planned for this year, in Santa Barbara, Calif., in September and in Chicago in November.

Vatican formally condemns ordinations

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a decree May 30 formally declaring that a woman who attempts to be ordained a Catholic priest and the persons attempting to ordain her are automatically excommunicated.

Dominican Fr. Augustine Di Noia, undersecretary of the congregation, told Catholic News Service May 30 that the decree makes clear that people directly involved in an attempted ordination of a woman excommunicate themselves automatically; it is not a penalty imposed by the local bishop or the universal church.

Since the excommunication is not imposed, there is no possibility of appeal, he said: "The only recourse is repentance.

"The problem is not that all of a sudden there was a tsunami of attempted ordinations of women," Di Noia said, but that the Code of Canon Law and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches "never anticipated



that such a thing would happen."

The decree was needed "for the good of the church and to ensure bishops have a common way of responding" when such ceremonies are held in their dioceses, he said.

The media spokeswoman for Womenpriests, Bridget Mary Meehan, says the punishments and excommunications are actually helping the movement.

Such extreme treatment doesn't make sense to many ordinary Catholics, Meehan told *NCR*. "They ask, 'Why would you excommunicate someone who just wants to serve God?'" More and more Catholics are accepting the idea of women priests, she said.

“We are building a renewed model of priesthood for a renewed Roman Catholic Church in a community of equals in which all are welcome at the sacred Eucharistic table,” said Meehan, ordained two years ago, is a priest for house churches in Sarasota, Florida, and northern Virginia.

“Excommunications are not keeping people from seeking us out,” she said by phone from Lexington. “There is no punishment, there is nothing the institutional church can do to stop this movement,” she said.

Meehan had high praise for Bourgeois. She said that he is the first active male priest to take a public role in a woman’s ordination. She said he, like many other Catholics, are examining their consciences and finding that they must support a more inclusive church.

Sevre-Duszynska events leading up to ordination

- In January 1998, Sevre-Duszynska made national news by interrupting an ordination ceremony at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Lexington and asking for ordination herself. “I am called by the Holy Spirit to present myself for ordination,” she said when the male candidate for priesthood was called forward by the bishop. “My name is Janice. I ask this for myself and for all women.”

Sevre-Duszynska holds a master’s degree in theater from the University of Kentucky and is an award-winning playwright and received a fellowship to the Yale School of Drama.

Even before her dramatic act at the cathedral she had worn blue arm bands to protest outside the site of ordinations, participated in for-women-only eucharistic celebrations, written to bishops and carried placards promoting women priests.

- In 2000, during the U.S. bishops’ November meeting in Washington, Sevre-Duszynska grabbed a microphone after Cardinal Bernard Law, then of Boston, had proposed a statement on the situation in the Middle East. “I’m here to use my voice for many who cannot speak,” she said.

“There’s an injustice within our church that affects the whole world.” She urged the bishops to be “compassionate to your sisters ... women called by God to ordination.”

Her microphone was turned off. She refused to leave the gathering, sitting there as the bishops continued their meeting in the large hotel ballroom. When that portion of the meeting ended, police escorted her out of the hotel.

The following year, as the prelates, again gathered for their November meeting, assembled for a Mass for Peace, Sevre-Duszynska interrupted the service to answer the responsorial psalm: “Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.” She responded: Justice for women in the church.” She refused to sit down and was led from the church by a group of five men, including a priest.

- In 2002, Sevre-Duszynska was arrested and charged with trespass after she refused to leave a diaconate ordination in Atlanta where she and several others protested sexism in the church. She told NCR in an interview at the time that she had entered the cathedral to pray. When told the service was invitation only, she said she told the ushers: “What are you talking about? I have been to many ordinations, and they’re never by invitation only. Besides, I’m a daughter of the church, and Christ welcomes everyone to the table.” The archdiocese of Atlanta filed suit seeking a permanent injunction barring her from entering any archdiocesan property.

Her protests have not been limited to ecclesiastical matters. That same year she was arrested and sentenced to three months in federal prison and fined \$500 for a non-violent protest at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga. She and more than two dozen others trespassed onto fort property in an organized protest calling for the closing of the school.

(Dennis Coday is an NCR staff writer. His e-mail address is dcoday@ncronline.org)

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