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Bourgeois supporters press Maryknoll

by Joshua J. McElwee

A mid-August gathering of activists calling attention to the pending removal of Fr. Roy Bourgeois from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers was not allowed onto the grounds of the order's New York headquarters because the campus was closed for "private events," says the order's communications manager.

Bourgeois, who is known for his work as the founder of SOA Watch, was sent a second warning letter from Maryknoll Superior General Fr. Edward Dougherty July 27, threatening him with dismissal from the order and laicization by the Vatican if he would not recant his support of women's ordination (*NCR*, Aug. 19).

News of the Aug. 14 gathering came in a letter to *NCR* from Bourgeois supporter Anne Dowling, who was at the event.

The two-dozen activists had hoped to stand outside the chapel at Maryknoll headquarters before Sunday services to "invite those entering the chapel to sign a petition supporting Father Roy," but "never gained entrance to the grounds of Maryknoll," Dowling wrote in the letter.

Instead, the protesters stood in a rainstorm near the front entrance of the Maryknoll campus holding signs in support of Bourgeois for about two hours.

Mike Virgintino, communications director for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, told *NCR* in a phone interview that the chapel is a "private church" and "is not necessarily open to the public."

"The campus is private property," Virgintino said. "And we had private events on the campus that weekend."

Moreover, Virgintino said, he would rather Bourgeois' supporters contact the communications office if they want to discuss the priest's support of women's ordination, as opposed to 'just showing up unannounced in a protest mode.'

'If they want to have a discussion with us, they should contact me,' he said. 'I cannot promise that a meeting would be arranged, but at least it would open up dialogue.'

For their part, Dowling says at the end of her letter, Bourgeois supporters may 'give Maryknoll another opportunity to be hospitable soon.'

Dougherty's July 27 letter gave Bourgeois 15 days from its receipt to recant before the order would 'proceed with the process of dismissal.' Lawyers for Bourgeois are appealing the dismissal order.

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