

Maryknoll priest who backs women's ordination detained at Vatican

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Oct. 17, 2011



Janice Sevre-Duszynska, left, Miriam Duignan and Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois demonstrate in support of women's ordination Oct. 17 near the Vatican in Rome. The U.S. priest, who faces possible dismissal from his order and the priesthood for support of women's ordination, was detained briefly by Italian police outside St. Peter's Square during the demonstration. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

After marching up the wide boulevard to St. Peter's Square, Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois and two other demonstrators supporting women's ordination were briefly detained by Italian police.

A group of 18 people, most of them from the United States, were trying to deliver to Vatican officials a petition supporting the ordination of women as Catholic priests.

The petition, signed by 15,000 people, praised the work of Father Bourgeois, who faces possible dismissal from his order and the priesthood for his refusal to recant his continued support for the ordination of women.

The Maryknoll order has issued two canonical warnings to the 73-year-old priest this year. He was excommunicated "latae sententiae" automatically in November 2008 after participating in the attempted ordination of Janice Sevre-Duszynska, who was also at the Oct. 17 demonstration in Rome.

Father Bourgeois was still with the Maryknoll Society as the matter was being reviewed, the order said in a written statement to Catholic News Service Oct. 11.



The Maryknoll Society said it was aware that Father Bourgeois was traveling to

Rome and added, "From the beginning, it has been Maryknoll that has repeatedly attempted to foster communication between Father Bourgeois and the church."

Father Bourgeois told journalists, "I don't want to be kicked out," but that he was fighting for "what is just" and would accept whatever decision his order made "without anger."

He said the church's ban on the ordination of women "defies reason and defies faith" and had at its roots "the sin of sexism."

The demonstrators, including two women who claimed to be priests and one a deacon, walked from Castel Sant'Angelo to St. Peter's Square carrying banners that said "God is calling women to be priests" and "Ordain Catholic women" while singing and beating a small tambourine.



The Vatican does not allow protests, demonstrations or signs on Vatican

property and Italian police did not allow the group to enter St. Peter's Square.

Police explained to the group that it was illegal to hold a demonstration without a permit and that it would have been more appropriate to have called Vatican officials ahead of time in order to deliver the petition.

"It's not like delivering a pizza, you can't just show up" unannounced and without authorization, the undercover police officer said.

"It's a very important pizza," one of the demonstrators shouted.



Father Bourgeois was told several times by the Italian police that they

could not prevent him from entering St. Peter's Square by himself to try to deliver the petition to someone in the Vatican, but the group as a whole and specifically the women dressed as priests could not enter the square because "their form of dress is a form of protest."

However, the situation grew tense when police tried to confiscate the group's banners and fliers. Members of the group refused because the vinyl banners cost a lot to produce, one demonstrator explained.

Because of their refusal to hand over the banners peacefully, Father Bourgeois and two members of the group, Erin Saiz Hanna, executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, and Miriam Duignan of WomenPriests.org, were brought to a nearby Italian police station. They were not arrested and no charges were made against them.



In 2008, the doctrinal congregation formally decreed that a woman who

attempts to be ordained a Catholic priest and the person attempting to ordain her are automatically excommunicated. In 1994, Blessed Pope John Paul II said the church's ban on women priests is definitive and not open to debate among Catholics.

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