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Bourgeois disinvited from SNAP Philadelphia fundraiser

by Tom Roberts

Roy Bourgeois, a former Maryknoll priest, has been disinvited from a Philadelphia-area fundraising event for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) because some members of the organization feared he would use the event to advance the cause of women's ordination.

"It was a Blaine screw-up," said Barbara Blaine, SNAP's Chicago-based president, in a phone interview with *NCR*. "I invited someone without checking with the local membership."

Bourgeois, who received a letter in 2008 stating he had incurred his own excommunication for his advocacy of women's ordination, including participation in a women's ordination ceremony, was supposed to be part of a panel discussion with Blaine and Dominican Fr. Thomas Doyle, a longtime advocate for victims of clergy sexual abuse.

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, a retired auxiliary of Detroit who openly supports SNAP and attends its annual gatherings, was also to take part in the panel.

The fundraiser, hosted by the Philadelphia-area Voice of the Faithful group and scheduled for the evening of Oct. 21* in Plymouth Meeting, Penn., is being held to celebrate the 25th anniversary of SNAP's founding.

Blaine said she invited Bourgeois without consulting the Philadelphia-area SNAP membership and said some in the area voiced concern that the group not be perceived as allowing its events to be used to foster any agenda other than support of victims of abuse. She dismissed rumors that Voice of the Faithful, another group supportive of victims, or Gumbleton objected to Bourgeois' appearance.

Gumbleton told *NCR* on Wednesday he did not understand why Bourgeois had been invited to attend the SNAP event.

"It would seem very strange to me to have a fundraiser for SNAP in which you bring in the issue of women's ordination," he said. "It's a very single-minded organization. And I think that would be one of its strengths."

Doyle said in a separate *NCR* interview that he had earlier informed Blaine that a prior commitment that was postponed had been rescheduled, and he would be unable to attend the event. But he added he was "very disappointed with SNAP" for disinviting Bourgeois and said he would have considered withdrawing his participation because of it.

Doyle, a civil and canon lawyer, represented Bourgeois in his dealings with the Vatican and the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers after Bourgeois was disciplined for supporting women's ordination.

He said while he understands SNAP's desire not to have its platform used for political purposes, he said Bourgeois "has some outstandingly prophetic points he could have made. He could have brought something very interesting to the discussion about what this whole picture might have been like had there been women in the clergy. He suffered greatly for his beliefs and his conscience. He stood up for what's right and I think he needs to be listened to."

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Bourgeois told *NCR* in a phone interview he was "disappointed and baffled" by his dis-invitation. He said he "rearranged my plans to attend a fundraising event for an organization which I hold in high regard. Then came the disinviting."

"I was going there to support that organization and their cause," he said, "not to talk about women's ordination."

At the same time, he said, "I really believe that if we had had women in the clergy all along, we wouldn't have a need for this fundraiser because they never would have covered up for the old boys' club."

Bourgeois, who is on the road almost weekly giving talks opposing U.S. militarism and supporting women's ordination, said when the Vatican excommunicated him, church officials accused him of causing scandal.

"I always say, 'Over 5,000 priests in the United States have sexually abused or raped more than 12,000 children. When Catholics hear the word "scandal," they don't think about women's ordination. They think of priests who abused children and bishops who covered it up.' "

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**The date of the SNAP Philadelphia fundraiser was originally given incorrectly.*

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