

Priest confirms excommunication; will keep urging women's ordination

WASHINGTON - Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois has confirmed his excommunication from the Catholic Church but said he has not changed his view that women who are called to priesthood should be ordained.

He urged the church to turn away from what he called the sin of sexism.

Father Bourgeois said he was excommunicated Nov. 24, 2008, "latae sententiae" - automatically - for not recanting his public statements supporting the ordination of women, which is against church teaching that, for several fundamental reasons, the church is unable to ordain women.

Father Bourgeois told Catholic News Service Aug. 28 that his beliefs are based on his understanding of justice and equality as expressed in the Gospel.

The 70-year-old former missionary in Latin America said that while he has not heard directly from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since Oct. 21, 2008, his order has confirmed his excommunication.

"In my heart I do not feel I have done anything wrong," he said via telephone from Alabama as he was traveling to visit his family in Louisiana. "On the contrary, it is my conscience that I am following and I find great peace whenever I am following my conscience.

"I feel I am a priest in good conscience. I feel if I went against my conscience I would be an unfaithful priest," he said.

"I feel I am a priest in good standing with God," he added. "Am I a priest in good standing with the Vatican? No."

In June, Maryknoll Father Edward M. Dougherty, the order's superior general, said

in a statement that Father Bourgeois remains a member of the society despite the excommunication. To no longer be considered a priest, Father Bourgeois would have to be laicized.

“The Maryknoll Society continues its pastoral support of our brother Roy and hopes that the day of reconciliation is not far away,” Father Dougherty said. “The church in its leadership and members has been promised by Christ that the Holy Spirit informs the decisions that carry our church into the future. May that same Holy Spirit enlighten Roy and those interested in his case as well as those charged with authority in our church.”

Father Bourgeois told CNS he continues to celebrate Mass privately in his apartment in Columbus, Ga., where he carries on the 20-year-old campaign to close the U.S. Army’s Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas, at nearby Fort Benning. The institute trains soldiers from throughout Latin America.

Father Bourgeois first gained the attention of Vatican officials after participating in a reported ordination sponsored by Roman Catholic Womenpriests Aug. 9, 2008, in Lexington, Ky. In a meeting with his Maryknoll superiors nine days after the ceremony, he received a canonical warning related to his role. At the time, Father Bourgeois said he had no intention of participating in any other such event.

On Oct. 21, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sent a letter to the order saying Father Bourgeois would be excommunicated in 30 days if he did not recant his statements supporting the ordination of women. Father Bourgeois responded in a letter Nov. 7 outlining his views and explaining that he felt excluding women from the priesthood was sexist and therefore was a sin.

Father Bourgeois said he has had no other correspondence with Vatican officials.

“It’s a silencing; it’s trying to get rid of you,” Father Bourgeois said of the Vatican’s action. “In Bolivia (as a missionary) they kicked me out of the country. Now they’re kicking me out of the church.”

After his ordination in 1972, he worked as a missionary in Bolivia aiding the poor for

five years before he was arrested and forced to leave the country for speaking out against injustice.