

Activist U.S. priest arrested at Vatican

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) A Roman Catholic priest from Georgia who is on the verge of expulsion from his religious order for advocating for women's ordination was arrested outside the Vatican on Monday (Oct. 17) and charged with demonstrating without a permit.

The Rev. Roy Bourgeois marched up Rome's Via della Conciliazione with a group of about 15 supporters, including three women dressed in priestly vestments. The group was headed to the Vatican to deliver a petition signed by 15,000 Bourgeois supporters.

"I have come to Rome with a basic question for our church leaders at the Vatican," Bourgeois said. "How can we, as men, say that our call from God is authentic, but God's call of women is not?"

The group was stopped by Italian and Vatican police on the edge of St. Peter's Square. Italian police confiscated the group's banners and arrested Bourgeois and two supporters. The three were held for two hours and charged with demonstrating without a permit, said one of the women arrested, Miriam Duignan, of the group womencanbepriests.org.

Bourgeois incurred automatic excommunication from the church in 2008 when he participated in a ceremony in Kentucky purporting to ordain a woman as a Catholic priest. At the same time, a process began that could result in Bourgeois' forced "laicization," or being stripped of the

priesthood and expelled from the Maryknoll order.

Bourgeois was told in July that he would be dismissed from the Maryknoll order within 15 days if he did not recant or present a defense against his proposed dismissal. Bourgeois' lawyer replied to the warning in August, and a Maryknoll spokesman has said that the order is considering its response.