

Excommunicated priest now faces expulsion

by [Bruce Nolan](#)

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NEW ORLEANS (RNS) The Rev. Roy Bourgeois, the Louisiana native and peace activist who was excommunicated three years ago for publicly supporting women's ordination, now faces expulsion from his religious order and from the priesthood.

Bourgeois and Mike Virgintino, a spokesman for the Maryknolls, a missionary order of priests, confirmed that "with much sadness" the order served Bourgeois written notice that he must publicly recant his support for women's ordination by Saturday (April 2).

Without his compliance, a second warning will be issued, followed by the Maryknolls' request to Rome that Bourgeois be dismissed from the order and "laicized," or defrocked after 38 years as priest, Virgintino said.

Bourgeois said in an interview from his home in Columbus, Ga., he cannot, as a matter of conscience, recant his belief that women are called to the Catholic priesthood.

"They're asking me to tell a lie," he said. "To exclude women from the priesthood is a grave injustice to women, to the church and to God."

Bourgeois made a public assertion of his dissent in 2008, when, with

other activists, he participated in a public ceremony in Kentucky that purportedly ordained Janice Sevre-Duszynska to the priesthood.

The Catholic church responded that the ordination was without effect, and that Sevre-Duszynska and Bourgeois had automatically excommunicated themselves by their action. Bourgeois was barred from priestly ministry in public.

Still, Bourgeois remained a priest and a member of his Maryknoll community, a status now at risk.

As a Maryknoll priest, Bourgeois has lived under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He lives in a small apartment provided by the order outside the gates of Ft. Benning, Ga., the focus of his peace activism for more than 20 years.

Bourgeois said he is seeking a church lawyer and plans to file a full defense of his views on women's ordination, although the Maryknoll notice seems to leave no room for that.

He said his conversations with the order and its superior, the Rev. Edward Dougherty, have not covered whether the order will support him financially should he be expelled.

"I hope they'll do what is just as a Christian community. But I see this with such clarity that rather than recant, I'd rather eat at a soup kitchen and live under a bridge, and do that with deep inner peace and a clear conscience," Bourgeois said.