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Maryknoll head: 'Sadness' over Bourgeois warning

Beth Griffin Catholic News Service | Apr. 20, 2011

MARYKNOLL, N.Y. -- Father Edward Dougherty, superior general of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, said it was "with a lot of sadness" he issued a canonical warning to Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois that he would be dismissed from the order unless the priest recanted his continued support for the ordination of women as Catholic priests.

The warning, which informs a person of a violation of church law, outlined the steps the order would follow under the direction of Vatican officials.

"It is with a lot of sadness that I have to move ahead with this action," Father Dougherty told Catholic News Service April 12. "He has a strength of his convictions. He's on his own path, one that the society, in terms of its response to the universal church, is not able to support."

Father Dougherty reflected on the community's likely loss of Father Bourgeois during an interview about Maryknoll celebrating its centennial.

If Father Bourgeois failed to comply with the order, Father Dougherty told the priest he would "proceed with dismissal" from the Maryknoll congregation and include a request for laicization for the 72-year-old priest.

Father Bourgeois' support for ordaining women to the priesthood led to his excommunication "latae sententiae" -- automatically -- in November 2008.

"Roy has been a Maryknoll priest for close to 40 years," Father Dougherty told CNS. "We're not going to throw him to the dogs, so to speak. We'll try to continue to support him as best we can. We have an obligation, both in charity and in justice, to do that."

When he was in Washington for a demonstration, Father Roy Bourgeois told CNS April 11 that he had received the canonical warning March 29 and had until April 13 to respond to the canonical warning, but he said he would not recant his belief in women's ordination.

"It's a grave injustice," Father Bourgeois said of church teaching which holds that ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood is reserved for men and that the church has no authority to ordain women. "I must be respectful to my conscience and to my God."

In his response to Father Dougherty, Father Bourgeois said he believed men and women are created equally under God and that he has come to believe that women, like men, are called to the ordained priesthood and the diaconate.

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