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100th anniversary of Maryknoll sees protest for Bourgeois

by Joshua J. McElwee

NCR Today

Calling attention to the pending removal of Fr. Roy Bourgeois from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, seven activists stood outside a Mass celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the order at its headquarters in New York Wednesday.

The protest came 100 years to the day of the official creation of the order by Pope Pius X.

Bourgeois, who is known for his work as the founder of SOA Watch, received a first warning from Maryknoll superior general Fr. Edward Dougherty in March threatening him with dismissal from the order and laicization by the Vatican if he would not recant his support of women's ordination.

The activist told *NCR* last week that while he had not yet received the second warning from Dougherty, he was anticipating its arrival "any day." He also said he had been in contact with a canon lawyer and is considering planning a visit to Rome to plead his case.

Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers communications manager Mike Virgintino told *NCR* Friday that because of Bourgeois' retaining of a lawyer, the order has delayed providing a second letter to the priest in order to allow a chance for more dialog.

"We have delayed providing a second letter to Roy in consideration that he has retained an attorney," said Virgintino. "We thought it was best to talk again with Roy and the attorney before issuing a second letter."

A letter written by one of the activists at yesterday's protest says the seven were allowed to stand near an employee parking lot away from the building where the Mass was being celebrated, but were not allowed

inside during the Mass.

As people passed by, headed towards the Mass, many stopped to talk to the activists to express an "outpouring of love and admiration for Father Roy," writes Anne Dowling, one of the activists and a member of School of Americas Watch New York City.

Virgintino said the Maryknoll leadership made the decision to not allow the protestors into the Mass because of space constraints and to keep the focus of the celebration on the work of the order.

"The Mass was to celebrate the official founding day of Maryknoll," said Virgintino. "And the society wanted the Mass to focus solely on the celebration of the society's first 100 years and all the work that the society and the society's members, including Roy, have done around the world. That was the focus of this celebration."

The chapel used for the Mass could only seat about 350 people, Virgintino added, and was full with Maryknoll members, lay associates, employees, and "special invited guests."

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Virgintino also said they provided refreshments to the seven protestors, and had allowed them onto the property to ensure that they would not protest on the public roads leading up to grounds of the order, which are "heavily traveled."



When the activists were not allowed to attend the Mass, Dowling writes that the seven held a small prayer circle.

Despite the size of the group in support of Bourgeois, Dowling expresses hope:

"Our vigil, though small, gives us hope for the future of the Church."

The full text of Dowling's letter follows.

The Two Sides of Maryknoll
By Anne Dowling

On June 29, 2011, seven peace activists set up camp on the grounds of Maryknoll to hold vigil to protest

Maryknoll's dismissal of Father Roy Bourgeois for his public support of women's ordination.

The group included three members of the School of the Americas Watch New York City and Long Island: Anne Dowling, Joe Dowling, Mara Bard. It also included Jim Griffin from NYC Voices of the Faithful; Rev. Jean Marchant, a Roman Catholic Woman priest from the Boston area and two of her associates: Norma Harrington and Sue Malone.

At least two other activists had arrived earlier but were turned away at the gates by Maryknoll security.

Our first interaction with gate security was the moment we began to realize that, although we were small in numbers, our statement carried much weight. Security obviously knew we were coming and had been instructed to turn us away. We were told the 100 year celebratory Mass was by invitation only. I had inquired by phone weeks earlier and was assured the event was opened to the public.

After a respectful interchange which included us sharing the attached flier explaining our purpose, they invited us to a specific area near the employee parking lot, away from the chapel entrance. The security guard, assigned to monitor us promoted the designated spot as having shade and benches -- we accepted.

As people passed on their way to the Mass we received an overwhelmingly positive response. Nuns, priest and members of the Maryknoll community went out of their way to interact with us -- many smiles, thumbs up and in a few cases, members stopping to dialog with us and thank us for our presence.

Nuns told us that our information was posted on their bulletin board, three priests engaged us in conversations expressing the support of the Maryknoll community for women's ordination, and there was an outpouring of love and admiration for Father Roy.

When it came time for the Mass the security guard asked what our plans were. Four of us stated our intention to attend the Mass. The security guard told us we would not be allowed in without an invitation.

We asked him to check with his superiors; it went all the way to the top and the answer was, "No." We were excluded from attending Mass, so we concluded our vigil with our own circle of prayer.

The two sides of Maryknoll could not have been more obvious -- we felt a strong sense of solidarity with the Maryknoll community, yet the Maryknoll leadership was threatened by our mere presence.

Our vigil, though small, gives us hope for the future of the Church.

Editor's Note: This blog was updated Friday with more information about the protest.

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