NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Mercy sisters support Roy Bourgeois

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| Nov. 30, 2012
NCR Today
Roy Bourgeois

The leaders of one of the largest groups of Catholic sisters in the western hemisphere have expressed support for a U.S. priest dismissed by the Vatican for his backing of women's ordination.

The leadership team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is "saddened and disturbed" by the Vatican move, made by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith against Roy Bourgeois, they wrote in a statement Wednesday.

Bourgeois, widely known for his work calling attention to injustices in Latin America, had been a member of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, a U.S. missionary society, for 45 years. The Vatican congregation dismissed him from the society on Oct. 4, the order announced [1] in a press release Nov. 19.

The dismissal drew criticism from a former head of the U.S. missionary order, who said in an interview [2] it represented interference "with the integrity of the society."

"We have known and worked with Father Roy as an advocate for justice in both church and society, nationally and globally," write the five members of the sisters' leadership team. "Father Roy's commitment regarding the role of women in the church reflects our own as Sisters of Mercy."

The five sisters writing the statement head the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, an organization of about 4,000 sisters serving in the U.S. and 11 other countries across the western hemisphere in the order founded by 19th century Irishwoman Catherine McAuley.

Susan Carroll, the director of communications for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, said in an interview that the institute's leaders chose to make their statement to "express their support and respect" for Bourgeois and to recognize his commitment to social justice issues.

In their statement, the sisters point to a document their institute approved in 1991, called a "Direction Statement [3]," which committed the sisters to act in solidarity with "women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society."

"We have heard Father Roy speak with respect and love for his church and find this an extraordinary moment of deep loss for religious life which he loves and to which he has given faithful service," the sisters conclude.

"Father Roy remains our brother and we thank him for his integrity and lifelong fidelity to the gospel of love, justice and peace."

Bourgeois has spoken publicly in support of women's ordination since August 2008, when he participated in the

ordination of Roman Catholic Womanpriest Janice Sevre-Duszynska.

Before the Vatican move, the priest had been in long discussions with his order regarding that support, leading up to a spring vote by Maryknoll leadership on whether to oust the priest. That vote resulted in a deadlock [4], with two of the society's leaders voting in favor of removal and three abstaining.

The Vatican also disciplined another priest for his support of women's ordination on Thursday, stripping [5] Austrian Fr. Helmut Schüller of the title monsignor.

Schüller, a former deputy to Vienna's archbishop, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, has made waves by organizing some 400 Austrian priests into the Austrian Priests' Initiative, which published [6] an "Appeal to Disobedience" in June 2011.

That appeal, which has the support of a large number of Austrian lay Catholics, calls for radical church reforms including the ordination of married men and women.

The full statement from the Institute Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, also available here [7]:

> SISTERS OF MERCY LEADERSHIP SADDENED BY DISMISSAL OF FATHER ROY BOURGEOIS
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> November 28, 2012 -- The Institute Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is saddened and disturbed by the recent action of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to dismiss Father Roy Bourgeois from the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers.
>
> We have known and worked with Father Roy as an advocate for justice in both church and society, nationally and globally. Father Roy's commitment regarding the role of women in the church reflects our own as Sisters of Mercy since our Institute founding in 1991 when we stated in our *Direction Statement* that we will commit our lives and resources to act in solidarity with women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society. We have heard Father Roy speak with respect and love for his church and find this an extraordinary moment of deep loss for religious life which he loves and to which he has given faithful service.
>
> Father Roy remains our brother and we thank him for his integrity and lifelong fidelity to the gospel of love, justice and peace.

Source URL (retrieved on *10/25/2014 - 15:02*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/mercy-sisters-support-roy-bourgeois

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