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157 Catholic Priests Rise Up to Support Fellow Embattled Priest

In an unprecedented move, 157 Catholic priests have signed on to a letter in support of their fellow embattled priest, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, who has been told to recant his support for women's ordination or be removed from the priesthood. The letter that supports Roy's priesthood and his right to conscience was delivered, Friday, July 22nd, to Fr. Edward Dougherty, Superior General of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in Maryknoll, NY.

"We can no longer remain silent while priests and even bishops are removed from their posts simply because they choose to speak their truth," said Fr. Fred Daley, a spokesperson of the effort and a priest of the Syracuse Diocese. "Together, we are standing up for our brother priest, Roy, and for all clergy who have felt afraid to speak up on matters of conscience.

"We hope that our support as ordained priests in good standing will help give Fr. Dougherty the support he needs to make a decision that is fair and just."

This stance of priests from the United States follows a series of recent actions where priests collectively have taken a stand for justice in the Church. Last year, priests in Ireland formed a union aimed at organizing the 6,500 priests in response to the clergy abuse crisis. In May of this year, the National Council of Priests of Australia released a statement in support of a bishop forced to resign because he mentioned women's ordination as one possible solution to the priest shortage. Then, this month, the Austrian-based Initiative of Parish Priests launched a campaign with 300 priests signing a call for resistance that encourages, among other things, the inclusion of women and married men to the priesthood.

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/republic-of-ireland/union-of-6500-irish-priests-to-hold-hierarchy-to-account-14891589.html>

<http://www.catholica.com.au/forum/index.php?mode=thread&id=74167#p74167>

<http://ncronline.org/news/global/300-austrian-clerics-call-women-priests>

Support for Fr. Bourgeois has been pouring in from lay Catholics, as well. In March, when Fr. Bourgeois received a canonical warning demanding he recant his position on women's ordination, Catholics rallied to his side. They organized 16 support vigils in front of Cathedrals across the country from San Diego to Boston, including a gathering of 100 people outside the Vatican Embassy in Washington, DC. Additionally, four organizations, including the National Coalition of American Nuns, held call-in days to the Maryknoll office to share their support of Fr. Bourgeois.

“We want Fr. Dougherty to know that he has the support of Catholics to do the right thing,” said Jim FitzGerald, Executive Director of Call To Action, the country’s largest Catholic Church justice organization. “Every person should be able to speak their conscience without fear of reprisal from their own Church.”

"Roman Catholic Womenpriests are forever indebted to these priests for their courageous stance," said Suzanne Avison Thiel, President of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. "We encourage more priests to come forward and stand with their brother priests in support of the Catholic right to conscience."

“No priest, bishop or any Catholic should be fired because he or she believes in the importance of women’s leadership in the Catholic Church,” said Erin Hanna, Executive Director of Women’s Ordination Conference. “Those who believe in the right to speak one’s conscience stand in faithful solidarity with Fr. Roy.”

Priests who would like to add their name to the letter in support of Fr. Roy and the right to conscience may still do so before August 11th by going to www.cta-usa.org for more information.

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Call To Action (CTA) is a Catholic movement working for equality and justice in the Church and society. An independent national organization of over 25,000 people and 57 local chapters, CTA believes that the Spirit of God is at work in the whole church, not just its appointed leaders. www.CTA-USA.org.

Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) is an international movement within the Roman Catholic Church. The mission of Roman Catholic Womenpriests is to primarily spiritually prepare, ordain, and support women from all states of life, who are theologically qualified, who are committed to an inclusive model of Church, and who are called by the Holy Spirit and their communities to minister within the Roman Catholic Church. www.RomanCatholicWomenpriests.org

The Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) is the world's oldest and largest organization working solely for the ordination of women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Catholic Church. www.WomensOrdination.org