



Fr. Michael Pflieger speaks during a news conference outside St. Sabina Church in Chicago, May 24, 2021. (Ashlee Rezin Garcia/Chicago Sun-Times via AP, file)

by Associated Press

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A prominent Roman Catholic priest known for his activism has been reinstated as leader of his Chicago parish after being cleared by church officials of [allegations that he sexually abused a minor](#) decades ago.

The Chicago Archdiocese [released a letter](#) Dec. 10 saying that a review board found "no reason to suspect" that the Fr. Michael Pfleger was guilty of the allegations. Pfleger had stepped away from his duties as pastor of St. Sabina Church in October during the review.

Cardinal Blase Cupich said in the letter that he recognizes the "great toll" Pfleger's absence had on the parish and said "I am committed to do everything possible to see that his good name is restored."

In October, a man in his late 40s said through an attorney that Pfleger abused him twice in the late 1980s during choir rehearsals in the St. Sabina rectory. That claim was similar to other [allegations Pfleger faced last year](#) involving two brothers than 40 years ago, of which he was also cleared by the archdiocese.

Pfleger, 73, denied the abuse allegations and spoke briefly before parishioners at a Saturday evening Mass about his reinstatement.

"This has been very painful," Pfleger said. "Thank you for your love, for your support and your prayers."

Pfleger, who is white, leads a Black church in Chicago's largely Black and low-income Auburn Gresham neighborhood. His activism captured the attention of film director Spike Lee, who based a character played by actor John Cusack in the 2015 film "Chi-Raq" on Pfleger.

Pfleger has made [national headlines for his activism](#) on an array of issues — calling for gun control and better schools and jobs, opposing cigarette and alcohol advertising, taking on drug dealers and stores that sell drug paraphernalia, and leading countless protests. He has been sued for his activism and once said it "has resulted in jealousy, attacks and hate."

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Attorney Eugene Hollander, who filed the latest abuse allegation against Pfleger, said his client is "incredibly hurt" by the archdiocese's decision.

Hollander also represented the two men who came forward in 2021 with sexual abuse allegations. He said they had voluntarily submitted polygraph tests supporting

their claims before the archdiocese determined their allegations were unfounded.

"In combination with the brothers' claims and their evidence, and my current client's claim, we had a staggering amount of evidence," Hollander said.

The decisions will send a "deep chilling effect and strongly discourage victims of sexual abuse to come forward," Hollander said.

"Obviously the St. Sabina community really strongly rallied around Father Pfleger, and I think it's very unfortunate that it's kind of turned a blind eye to the sexual abuse allegations," Hollander said.