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The St. Benedict Church is shown in southwest Baltimore, Monday, Oct. 16, 2023. A Benedictine monk has been suspended from ministry after the Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore recently became aware of a payment he made several years ago to settle sexual harassment allegations. (AP Photo/Lea Skene)

by Associated Press

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A Benedictine monk has been suspended from ministry after the Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore recently became aware of a payment he made several years ago to settle sexual harassment allegations.

Last week, Fr. Paschal Morlino was dismissed from his position as pastor of St. Benedict Church in southwest Baltimore, where he served for nearly 40 years and became known for his longstanding efforts to help residents of poor neighborhoods surrounding the church.

The archdiocese learned about the settlement on Oct. 12 when reporters for The Baltimore Banner inquired about it, officials said in a statement Oct. 15. They said they immediately opened an internal investigation and decided to dismiss Morlino.

"He is no longer permitted to celebrate Mass or engage in public ministry in the Archdiocese," the statement said.

Morlino, 85, has returned to Saint Vincent Archabbey in Pennsylvania, the oldest Benedictine monastery in the country, after both the Baltimore archdiocese and the Order of Saint Benedict made a joint decision to suspend his priestly faculties, officials said. The investigation is ongoing.

Kim Metzgar, communications director for Saint Vincent Archabbey, said she was unable to comment because of the ongoing investigation.

The archdiocese will appoint a new administrator to oversee Saint Benedict Church, which is owned and operated by the Benedictines, according to their statement.

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Church officials disclosed few details about the 2018 complaint against Morlino, saying only that it focused on "alleged sexual harassment of an adult man" who had died before the complaint was filed. Officials said they were unable to corroborate the third-party allegations as a result.

In an interview last week with The Banner, Morlino confirmed the \$200,000 settlement payment, denied any wrongdoing and said he had nothing to hide.

"I just wanted to keep him quiet, to be rid of him, because he was just stirring up trouble," he told The Banner, referring to the complainant, who died in 2020.

Joanne Suder, an attorney who represented the man, said she couldn't comment because of a confidentiality agreement. Suder represents a number of victims of clergy sexual abuse in Baltimore.

Morlino arrived at St. Benedict in 1984, a time of declining membership and waning interest in the church. In the years that followed, he led efforts to update and improve church buildings and strengthen the parish's mission, according to their website.

Before coming to Baltimore, Morlino founded Adelphoi Village, a nonprofit child care agency that works with at-risk youth in Pennsylvania.