News



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Fr. George Clements, a civil rights activist whose life was turned into a made-for-TV movie after he became the first Catholic priest to adopt a child, died Nov. 25 at age 87.

Clements reportedly had suffered a stroke and heart attack within the last month.

In a statement on Facebook, the Fr. Michael Pfleger of St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago called Clements "a Pioneer for Justice who spent his life helping people."

"He pushed the Catholic church to be inclusive and made black Catholics proud to be Catholic," Pfleger said.

Clements was active in the civil rights movement, marching alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago, Alabama and Mississippi, according to the Chicago Sun-Times.

A Chicago native, he became the first African American graduate of Archbishop Quigley Preparatory Seminary in 1945 and the second African American priest ordained in the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1957, according to the Sun-Times.

He became the first black pastor of Holy Angels Catholic Church in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago in 1969.

That's where he led the "One Church, One Child" program, encouraging Catholic churches to find adoptive parents for black children.

In 1980, Clements adopted his first son, Joey. Their story was shared in the 1987 movie "The Father Clements Story," starring Louis Gossett Jr. as Clements, Malcolm-Jamal Warner as Joey and Carroll O'Connor as Cardinal John Cody.

Three more sons joined their family: Friday, Stewart and Saint Anthony.

"I lost a great father today. I lost a great man," Friday Clements told CBS 2 Chicago.

Clements later started similar programs including One Church, One Addict and One Church, One Inmate, according to the Sun-Times.

"The priesthood is a vocation. But then along the way, one gets avocations, and mine were three: homelessness, addicts and prisoners," he told Sun-Times columnist Maudlyne Ihejirika in 2017.

Clements retired in 2006 and, earlier this year, was asked by Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich to step aside from ministry after he was accused of sexually abusing a minor in 1974 while pastoring Holy Angels.

He told the Chicago Sun-Times at the time that the allegation was "totally unfounded," and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Service later told the newspaper "there was nothing to support it."

The archdiocese's investigation reportedly is ongoing.

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