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Fr. Michael Pfleger, senior pastor of St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago, is pictured in a file photo. Pfleger is facing an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor more than 30 years ago, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich announced July 11, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Jim Young)

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Chicago — July 15, 2026

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A Chicago priest known for his longtime social justice ministry has been placed on leave, following an abuse allegation for an incident said to have taken place some three decades ago.

In a July 11 letter, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago informed the archdiocese's Faith Community of St. Sabina that senior pastor Fr. Michael Pfleger had been accused of the sexual abuse of a minor — a claim the priest has "strongly denied," said the cardinal.

"The abuse is alleged to have occurred at St. Sabina more than 30 years ago," said Cupich. "In keeping with our child protection policies, I have asked Fr. Pfleger to step aside from ministry and live away from the parish while the allegation is investigated."

The cardinal, citing the archdiocese's child protection policies, said that "the allegation was reported to law enforcement authorities and the person making the allegation has been offered the services of our Victim Assistance Ministry."

In a July 11 statement sent to multiple media outlets, including OSV News, Pfleger denounced the allegations as "an absolute lie."

The priest said he had been apprised of the allegations during a July 9 phone call from the archdiocese's vicar for priests. The female claimant said "she went to

school at St. Sabina" and asserted the abuse had occurred "at some time between 1993-1995," said Pflieger.

"I have no memory of this girl nor do countless others who have been at St. Sabina for those years," he said, adding that "the facts will show that this is just an attempt by someone who is either being unfairly manipulated by others to hurt my reputation, or who is simply trying to make money by making false accusations."

Cupich said in his letter that Fr. Thulani Magwaza would "continue to serve as pastor" at St. Sabina and would "help ensure that the good work of your faith community continues."

The cardinal explained that the archdiocese does not "presume the truth or falsity of an allegation until the process is complete and our Independent Review Board has made a recommendation that I accept."

He added, "Only by conducting a thorough and impartial review can we ensure fairness to all concerned."

The U.S. bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, revised in June, commits the Catholic Church to "act on the presumption of the sincerity of those who bring forth a complaint of sexual abuse," while also maintaining "a corresponding presumption of innocence on the part of the accused until guilt is proven."

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Pflieger had been cleared of previous accusations of sexual abuse in 2021 and 2022, following independent investigations.

In his letter, Cupich said, "As your parish has been through this before, I can well understand your distress in learning of this development."

He added, "I appreciate your patience and ask you to recall that our process of investigation and making a determination has proven effective in protecting the rights of all."

In his statement, Pflieger — an outspoken activist against racism, gun violence and other social injustices — said he had been "threatened, slandered, and attacked"

throughout the "51 years" of his ministry, particularly over his opposition to Trump administration policies.

"I believe this is another attempt and another attack by those who have sought to destroy me for years and another attempt by someone to get money from the Archdiocese and to silence me," said Pfleger, affirming he would not "stand by and allow my name, my ministry, and the church I pastor to be slandered or defamed."

The Archdiocese of Chicago has also gone to court to push back against claims it believes to be false. In June, Illinois' Cook County Circuit Court permitted the Archdiocese of Chicago to proceed with a countersuit against allegedly fraudulent settlement claimants.