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Fr. Michael Pfleger, senior pastor of St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago, is pictured in a file photo. In an Aug. 24, 2026, letter to St. Sabina parishioners, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich said that a recently made allegation against Pfleger had been "thoroughly reviewed" and found unsubstantiated. (OSV News/Reuters/Jim Young)

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Chicago — August 26, 2026

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Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago has reinstated a diocesan priest — known for his longtime social justice ministry — as pastor after an inquiry cleared the cleric of abuse allegations.

In an Aug. 24 letter addressed to the faithful of St. Sabina Parish, Cupich said that a recently made allegation against Fr. Michael Pfleger had been "thoroughly reviewed" and found unsubstantiated.

The allegation, brought forward in July and dating to the period 1993-1995, involved a female claimant who said she had been a student at the parish school of St. Sabina in Chicago, where Pfleger has long served as pastor.

In a July 11 statement, Pfleger — who had been cleared of previous accusations of sexual abuse in 2021 and 2022, following independent investigations — vigorously denied the claims, saying he and "countless others" at the parish in the 1990s had "no memory of this girl."

In his statement, the priest — 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, and particularly over his opposition to Trump administration policies.

Pfleger was placed on administrative leave as the investigation proceeded, in accordance with archdiocesan policy.

Cupich said in his Aug. 24 letter that an independent review board, along with the archdiocese's child protection office and outside investigators, had examined the allegation in depth.

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The review board "has concluded there is no reason to believe Fr. Pfleger is guilty of this allegation," said the cardinal. "After careful consideration I have accepted their conclusion and have reinstated Fr. Pfleger to ministry at St. Sabina, effective immediately."

In his statement, Cupich also appeared to address concerns raised by St. Sabina parishioners, who in a July 17 open letter had called for an "immediate and comprehensive reform" of archdiocesan investigative policies.

While stressing they "fully recognize and support" Church efforts to take seriously and investigate abuse claims, the letter's more than 40 signatories lamented "the devastating impact of a process that has repeatedly demonstrated itself to be fundamentally unjust to those who are accused."

"For our pastor, this has meant repeated public scrutiny, emotional anguish, and damage to his ministry and reputation before any conclusion has been reached," they said. "For our congregation, it has meant uncertainty, grief, disruption, and the emotional burden of repeatedly watching our spiritual leader removed from active ministry while investigations unfold."

Cupich had acknowledged parishioners' feelings in his July 11 message, saying, "As your parish has been through this before, I can well understand your distress in learning of this development."

In his Aug. 24 letter, the cardinal stressed that "no one should underestimate the value of an independent and disciplined inquiry, even if it is made public and requires a substantial amount of time."

Cupich said such an inquiry "assures the public and the person making the accusation of a fair and impartial review of all matters related to such cases."

He added, "It also protects the rights and interests of the accused cleric, especially if the board concludes there is no reason to believe the accused is guilty of the allegation. In that case, the cleric has the freedom to return to ministry without a cloud of suspicion over him."

The cardinal pointed to the Gospel passage for the upcoming 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mt 16:21-27), in which Jesus warns his disciples of his pending crucifixion.

"Jesus tells us that being a disciple is about taking up our crosses and following him," and so "redefines our sufferings in life," said Cupich. "Sufferings are not punishments or even tests of our endurance for pain. Rather, Jesus calls them crosses and thus associates them with his own. He wants us to see discipleship as participating in the salvation of the world; discipleship involves joining our sufferings, our crosses to His on Calvary."

In that spirit, said the cardinal, "I want to recognize the suffering you and Fr. Mike have endured, for I know his absence has been real and painful. But I ask you to allow God's Word this weekend to free you from any sadness and disappointment."

He urged parishioners to "respond to Christ's invitation to join your sufferings to His saving work" and remember their "dignity as disciples."

"You will have my support and prayers as you continue to be a light in the community, a great witness that has distinguished St. Sabina's for generations," said Cupich.

In an Aug. 25 press release, St. Sabina Parish announced that Pflieger was "grateful to be returned to his church family."

The parish said the priest and his lawyer would hold an Aug. 26 press conference at the parish on the matter.