

Father Michael Pflieger

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Radical Catholic Priest

Michael Louis Pflieger (born May 22, 1949) is a Roman Catholic priest and social activist in Chicago, Illinois.

Pflieger's social activism has brought him attention throughout Chicago and beyond. He has often collaborated and associated with African American religious, political and social activists such as Jeremiah Wright, Joseph Lowery, Jesse Jackson, Cornel West, and Louis Farrakhan.

On March 28, 2008, Pflieger invited Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of presidential candidate Barack Obama, to deliver a blessing at Saint Sabina during a visit by poet Maya Angelou. Wright had been criticized by political pundits for making what they considered anti-American statements in a sermon, but Pflieger came to Wright's defense. "I wanted him to come here so he could see that people really stand with him and support him while he's under all this attack. America, unfortunately, has been really cheated of knowing the real Dr. Wright," said Pflieger. In a statement on Saint Sabina's website, Pflieger wrote, "Dr. Wright is one of the great biblical scholars of our country and the best of preachers in the prophetic tradition. Dr. Wright has been shamefully demonized by 30 second sound bites that have tried to re-define him into someone other than who he is."

Controversy during 2008 presidential election

On May 25, 2008, Pflieger gave a sermon at Trinity United

Church of Christ, then the church of Presidential candidate Barack Obama, where he mocked Hillary Clinton, Obama's opponent for the Democratic Party nomination. Pflieger imitated Clinton by saying, "I really believe that she just always thought, 'This is mine. I'm Bill's wife. I'm white, and this is mine. I just gotta get up and step into the plate.' Then out of nowhere came, 'Hey, I'm Barack Obama,' and she said, 'Oh, damn! Where did you come from? I'm white. I'm entitled. There's a black man stealing my show!'"

After hearing about Pflieger's remarks, Obama said he was "deeply disappointed in Father Pflieger's divisive, backward-looking rhetoric". Pflieger later released a statement through St. Sabina that read, "I regret the words I chose Sunday. These words are inconsistent with Sen. Obama's life and message, and I am deeply sorry if they offended Sen. Clinton or anyone else who saw them." On May 31, 2008, Obama resigned his membership in Trinity Church, saying that his campaign had caused the church to receive excessive media attention. On June 1, 2008, Pflieger released a longer apology to the St. Sabina parish regarding the incident and its aftermath.

On June 3, 2008, Cardinal George asked Pflieger to take a temporary leave of absence from St. Sabina. George said in a statement, "I have asked Father Michael Pflieger, Pastor of St. Sabina's Parish, to step back from his obligations there and take leave for a couple of weeks from his pastoral duties, effective today. Fr. Pflieger does not believe this to be the right step at this time. While respecting his disagreement, I have nevertheless asked him to use this opportunity to reflect on his recent statements and actions in the light of the Church's regulations for all Catholic priests. I hope that this period will also be a time away from the public spotlight and for rest and attention to family concerns." Pflieger resumed his parish duties on June 16, 2008.

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