

Chicago archbishop apologizes for Farrakhan visit to Catholic Church

WASHINGTON — The archbishop of Chicago apologized to the local Jewish community after a priest in the city invited the leader of the Nation of Islam to speak at his church, days after he was banned from Facebook for what it called hate speech.

“Without consulting me, (Father) Michael Pfleger invited Minister Louis Farrakhan to speak at St. Sabina Church in response to Facebook’s decision to ban him from its platforms,” said Chicago Cardinal Blase J. Cupich in a May 10 statement, a day after Farrakhan spoke at the Catholic Church where Father Pfleger is the pastor in a predominantly black parish. “Minister Farrakhan could have taken the opportunity to deliver a unifying message of God’s love for all his children. Instead, he repeatedly smeared the Jewish people, using a combination of thinly veiled discriminatory rhetoric and outright slander.”

Cardinal Cupich said he apologized “to my Jewish brothers and sisters, whose friendship I treasure, from whom I learn so much, and whose covenant with God remains eternal.”

Local media reports said Farrakhan had mostly spoken during the speech about historic injustices against black people, but then said that he was “here to separate the good Jews from the satanic Jews” while addressing the crowd. He also is said to have spoken about “Talmudic thought” that he said sanctioned pedophilia and misogyny in reference to the Talmud, the collection of writings that constitute Jewish civil and religious law.

“Such statements shock the conscience,” said Cardinal Cupich. “People of faith are called to live as signs of God’s love for the whole human family, not to demonize any of its members. This is all the more true of religious leaders, who have a sacred duty never to leverage the legitimacy of their ministry to heap blame upon a group of persons, and never to deploy inflammatory rhetoric, long proven to incite violence. Anti-Semitic rhetoric — discriminatory invective of any kind — has no place in

American public life, let alone in a Catholic church.”

The Southern Poverty Law Center has categorized the Nation of Islam as a “hate group,” and says on its website that the group’s “bizarre theology of innate black superiority over whites — a belief system vehemently and consistently rejected by mainstream Muslims — and the deeply racist, anti-Semitic and anti-gay rhetoric of its leaders, including top minister Louis Farrakhan, have earned the NOI a prominent position in the ranks of organized hate.” Farrakhan has said he does not hate Jewish people.

On May 2, Facebook banned Farrakhan along with others, including right-wing conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, founder of Infowars, from using its services, calling them “dangerous individuals and organizations.” Instagram, another social media platform, has followed suit.

Cardinal Cupich said he encouraged Father Pfleger to accept an invitation from the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center to meet with leadership and dialogue with survivors.

“And I pledge to continue our work with our city’s religious leaders and all people of good will to promote tolerance, respect, and nonviolence. As the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, ‘Hate is too great a burden to bear,’” Cardinal Cupich said.

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