PRIESTS:
Allegations over incidents
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Cardinal Francis George
Cardinal removes
another priest
Pastor not monitored
for year after allegation

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Losing confidence in a monitoring program they have relied on to safeguard children, Chicago Catholic Archdiocese officials have removed from ministry a priest they were keeping under supervision while they try to determine if he abused two young girls decades ago.

Officials also acknowledged that the south suburban priest was not assigned a monitor until a year after the archdiocese first received an abuse allegation against him in 2004. A spokesman said he could not explain the lengthy delay.

Cardinal Francis George ordered the removal of the pastor of Holy Ghost Catholic Church in South Holland after an emotional meeting this week with St. Agatha parishioners, who voiced outrage that for months they had not known about allegations against their own pastor: Rev. Daniel McCormack.

McCormack also had been placed under monitoring because of an abuse allegation, though his floc did not know that until he was arrested last month. On Wednesday, prosecutors added a third count of aggravated sexual abuse.

Church officials had appointed a fellow priest to monitor McCormack in August, when the first abuse allegation surfaced. He was arrested Jan. 20 after a second accuser came forward and subsequently was charged with two counts of aggravated sexual abuse.

The charge filed Wednesday involved several alleged incidents with a third boy in the rectory of St. Agatha, law enforcement sources said.

Church officials said McCormack was not removed from ministry because the archdiocese had not yet received a firsthand allegation. In the meantime, McCormack was told not to be alone with minors and the archdiocese's vicar for priests asked a peer to "monitor" him.

George asked his staff this week if any circumstances similar to McCormack's monitoring arrangement existed. McCormack said he was "hoped at the time I made the request." McCormack said the woman, who asked that her name be not used, "I feel like a million-ton weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I'm incredibly relieved."

Ordained in 1966, the priest served at St. John De La Salle from 1957 to 1975; Our Lady of the Ridge, in Chicago Ridge, from 1974 to 1975; St. Joseph and St. Anne from 1977 to 1978; and St. Christina from 1979 to 1990. He returned to St. John De La Salle in 1991 and has served there since. He has been at Holy Ghost in South Holland ever since.

As news of the priest's sudden removal trickled out through the media, parishioners reacted with surprise but said they still trusted the archdiocese to handle the situation correctly.

"People don't think that it's going to happen to their own friends and loved ones," said Thomas, 49, a parishioner at Holy Ghost for about 20 years. "There are other people in power in the church that are handling this thing the way they've been doing it. My only opinion is if there's any truth to be unveiled or revealed that it happens as soon as can be."

Tribune staff reporters Jeff Cowen and Tom Roberts contributed to this report.