

Parishioners doubt abuse claims against priest

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Parishioners at St. Mark Catholic Church today expressed disbelief over allegations that a former priest sexually abused two children.

Mirta Arroyo has attended the [West Side](#) church since 1964. She has known Rev. Edward Maloney just as long.

"He's not a priest -- he's my father," said the 62-year-old who now lives in [Alsip](#) but travels north every week for mass.

Maloney presided over her wedding, her renewal of vows in 1990, and her children's baptisms and Communion, Arroyo said. Her three children also attended the parish school from preschool through eighth grade. And Maloney, who is now retired, came to her home for birthday parties and family picnics, she said.

"I keep asking why did they wait so long," said Arroyo of the accusers. "I don't believe it. To me, it's not true."

About 450 registered families at St. Mark, 1048 N. Campbell Ave., were notified Nov. 7 by the archdiocese that officials have found credible evidence supporting the allegations against Maloney. Church officials last week said Maloney sexually abused two boys about 25 years ago when the victims were in junior high school and when Maloney was at St. Mark.

Maloney, who was removed from ministry several months ago, retired in 1999. He maintains his innocence.

On Sunday, days after the archdiocese publicly announced findings from its Independent Review Board, parishioners expressed doubt over the allegations. *When members of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, handed out fliers after mass, encouraging members of the community to come forward, many refused to take the leaflets.*

Darius Villalobos, 24, of [Chicago's Logan Square](#) neighborhood said he was a youth minister at the church from 2002 to 2004. His grandparents have been part of the parish for 40 years. The church, which was once mostly Puerto Rican, now has a Hispanic population made up of immigrants from Mexico and Central America and is seeing more non-Hispanics move in with gentrification, he said.

On Sunday, parishioners Sunday prayed for the victims and Maloney, Villalobos said. The congregation and his family are in shock, he said.

"There's still doubt over whether the allegations are true or not," Villalobos said of people at the parish. "There's a sense of not wanting to make any judgments until things are more substantiated."

The archdiocese has passed on the case to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican.

Barbara Dorris, a director at SNAP, said Cardinal Francis George should not only have informed the congregation of the allegations months ago, but he also should have come out to the parish and encouraged other victims to come forward.

"He is the spiritual leader of these people, and he could've used his influence to get to the truth," she said.

--[Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah](#)