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Fr. James Altman, then pastor at St. James the Less Catholic Church in La Crosse, Wisconsin, is seen in his August 2020 YouTube video. In the clip, he attacks Catholics who are Democrats. (CNS/YouTube screenshot)



by Christopher White

Vatican Correspondent

[View Author Profile](#)

cwhite@ncronline.org

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Fr. James Altman, a rogue Wisconsin priest who [flouted](#) COVID-19 protocols at the height of the pandemic, [derided](#) liberals as "left-wing fascist Nazis" and [warned](#) that Catholics who support the Democratic Party could "face the fires of hell," has been removed as pastor of his parish and restricted from ministry.

According to a new decree issued by La Crosse Bishop William Callahan, Altman is only allowed to celebrate Mass in private and is barred from preaching. He has also been instructed to take a 30-day spiritual retreat to "give him the possibility to spiritually heal and recharge and address the issues that caused the issuance of this decree."

The latest developments come less than two months after Altman [announced](#) that he would fight a request by Callahan to resign as pastor of St. James the Less Catholic Church where he has served [since 2017](#).

The priest turned conservative firebrand has made national headlines for his controversial and incendiary remarks in recent months. Altman earlier told his parishioners that the bishop had labeled him as "divisive and ineffective" and in response, he raised [nearly \\$700,000](#) through online crowdfunding campaigns in support of his appeal efforts.

[Nicholas Cafardi](#), a civil and canon lawyer and a professor and former dean at Duquesne University School of Law, had previously [told NCR](#) that under the church's canon law, a pastor has particular rights and responsibilities and in order to be removed, the bishop must have a proper cause and follow a particular process.

"The cause here is for disturbing ecclesiastical communion," Cafardi said, noting that Altman has the option to appeal the bishop's decision to the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy.

The La Crosse diocese did not immediately respond to an NCR query as to whether a new administrator has been named to Altman's former parish.

Despite the efforts of Callahan to limit the priest's public ministry, Altman has received the backing of Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas, who has repeatedly praised Altman's ministry and [endorsed](#) his viral video claiming faithful Catholics cannot be Democrats.

"Fr. James Altman is in trouble for speaking the truth," Strickland [wrote](#) on Twitter on May 24. "He inspires many to keep the faith during these dark days. Let us pray for him."

Both Strickland and Altman have flouted COVID-19 protocols and [voiced opposition to vaccines](#), while both the Vatican and the U.S. bishops' conference have made repeated efforts to encourage Catholics to get vaccinated.

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Despite efforts from Altman's bishop in recent months to rein him in, Altman continued to engage in divisive behavior in public defiance of Callahan.

The most recent [Sunday bulletin](#) from Altman's parish included an image replicating the Black Lives Matter logo, with the text "unvaccinated lives matter" and a jab at prominent Jesuit priest Fr. James Martin, who recently received a [letter of support](#) from Pope Francis for his ministry toward LGBTQ Catholics.

"There are two genders and a wide range of mental disorders," read the bulletin text. "Memo to James Martin: TRUE ministry brings healing Grace, not affirmation in sin."

As for Altman's ministry, he has been instructed by Callahan that he must remain residing within the boundaries of the Diocese of La Crosse and any violations of the decree against him "may warrant further restrictions and may lead to the imposition of ecclesiastical sanctions."

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