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Newark priest resigns amid child-interaction allegations

by Brian Roewe

The Newark, N.J., priest accused of violating negotiated agreement to stay away from children has decided to leave his archdiocesan positions and active ministry.

Fr. Michael Fugee submitted his resignation to Archbishop John J. Myers on Thursday afternoon, according to the Newark *Star-Ledger*. The newspaper reported he will relinquish authority to say Mass, perform sacraments and represent himself as a priest. It is unclear whether Myers will seek laicization of the priest through the Vatican.

In addition to leaving active ministry, he will also vacate his position as co-director of the Office of Continuing Education and Ongoing Formation of Priests, to which Myers appointed him in February.

Calls to the Newark archdiocese were not immediately returned.

The scandal around Fugee emerged over the weekend, when *The Star-Ledger* first reported that in the past several years he had attended youth events, such as retreats and weekend trips, and heard confessions for minors. Those actions appear to be violations of the memorandum of understanding he signed in 2007 in order to avoid a retrial on charges of aggravated criminal sexual assault.

In 2003, a jury convicted Fugee of groping a 14-year-old boy on separate occasions in 1999 and 2000, and he received a sentence of five years' probation. An appeals court overturned that ruling in 2006 on court procedures unrelated to the sexual assault charge. The judge ruled parts of Fugee's confession, in which he described himself as struggling with homosexual and bisexual feelings, should have been withheld from jurors.

Instead of retrying the priest, the Bergen County prosecutor's office crafted a memorandum restricting him from "any unsupervised contact with or to supervise or minister to any child/minor under the age of

18 or work in any position in which children are involved." That agreement was signed by Fugee, his lawyer, the Bergen County prosecutor and Newark archdiocesan vicar general Msgr. John Doran.

The recent revelations of Fugee's interaction with children -- primarily in the nearby Trenton and Paterson dioceses -- led *The Star-Ledger* and local politicians to call for Myers' resignation as the archdiocese's leader.

Continue to check back at NCRonline.org throughout the day as this story develops.

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