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New pastor assigned to NJ parish where Fugee ministered

Brian Roewe | May. 8, 2013 NCR Today

The bishop of Trenton, N.J., wasted no time in finding a replacement for a parish whose pastor resigned amid a child endangerment scandal impacting multiple New Jersey dioceses.

On Tuesday, Bishop David O'Connell announced he had appointed Fr. Jeffrey E. Lee as the new pastor at St. Mary Parish in Colts Neck, effective immediately. Lee had previously served the Our Lady of the Angels Parish in Trenton and will remain its pastor until June 29.

Lee replaces Fr. Thomas Triggs, who over the weekend submitted his resignation [1] to O'Connell. The decision came a week after news reports revealed that Fr. Michael Fugee, a Newark archdiocesan priest on court order not to minister to or be around with children [2], had attended several parish youth events and heard their confessions.

"The controversy that has arisen during the past week ... has made it clear to me that the good of our parish can only be served if I step down as pastor," Triggs said in a statement. He remains in active ministry and has begun a sabbatical that will continue for the remainder of the year.

Fugee's presence in the parish resulted from a friendship with St. Mary's youth ministers, Amy and Mike Lenehan, who also resigned Saturday from their positions at the parish.

Neither the Lenehans nor Triggs sought a letter of suitability for Fugee before allowing him to minister in the parish. In an email to Trenton priests, O'Connell called the oversight "a terrible lapse of judgment on the part of those who extended the invitation."

The press release [3] announcing Lee as the new St. Mary's pastor did not indicate who would replace him at Our Lady of the Angels. It did state that Deacon Vincent Rinaldi will operate as the parish administrator at St. Mary's until Lee takes over full time.

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