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# Newark, N.J., gets new vicar general in wake of scandal

Brian Roewe | Jun. 6, 2013

The archbishop of Newark, N.J., named a new vicar general Thursday, filling a position made vacant in the wake of the Fr. Michael Fugee scandal.

Archbishop John J. Myers appointed Auxiliary Bishop Edgar da Cunha to the post, according to an archdiocesan press release.

"Bishop da Cunha's long history with the Archdiocese of Newark, both as a priest and pastor serving in urban parishes, and with his work in the fields of Evangelization and the New Energies Parish Transition Project, have given him a full understanding of the breadth and depth of the Archdiocese, its clergy and its people," Myers said in the release.

"Since his ordination as an Auxiliary Bishop in 2003, I have benefited from his expertise and counsel over the years, and look forward to his serving as my Vicar General," he said.

Da Cunha replaces Msgr. John Doran, who resigned May 24 [1] as part of a number of administrative changes in the archdiocese since the re-emergence of the case of Fr. Michael Fugee, who was alleged to have violated a court order banning him from ministry with children, in late April.

Myers cited "operational failures" for the archdiocese's inability to supervise Fugee, who was assigned to an administrative position at the chancery office. Local media learned Fugee had ministered to minors during youth events in the last several years.

By attending youth retreats and trips and hearing minors' confessions, Fugee violated a court agreement that barred him from such. He was arrested May 20 [2] and released on bail a day later. Although he submitted his resignation May 2 [3] from public ministry, he remains an active priest.

In 2003, Fugee was convicted of criminal sexual assault for groping a 14-year-old boy on separate occasions in 1999 and 2000. An appeals court overturned that ruling in 2006 on a matter of court procedure unrelated to the priest's confession to the assault in a 2001 deposition.

Instead of retrying the case, the Bergen County prosecutor presented Fugee with a memorandum of understanding that restricted the priest 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."

Fugee signed the agreement in 2007, as did his lawyer, the Bergen County prosecutor and Doran. While it remains unclear whether Doran was directly responsible for supervising Fugee, his resignation suggests he played a role.

"Both Monsignor Doran and I felt that the Archdiocese would be best served by his stepping down as Vicar General," Myers stated in a May 26 letter to parishioners [4].

The archbishop said Doran's resignation "clears the way for making more effective changes in our monitoring function," one of which included transferring monitoring duties to the Office of the Judicial Vicar.

The new vicar general, da Cunha, 60, was born in Riachão do Jacuípe, Bahia, Brazil, and was ordained a priest of the Society of Divine Vocations in the Newark archdiocese in 1982. He became an auxiliary bishop in 2003 and was named regional bishop for Essex County shortly after. Two years later, he was appointed vicar for evangelization.

But da Cunha's elevation to vicar general does little in strengthening the archdiocese's policies to protect children, said a leader of a national clergy-abuse victims advocacy group.

David Clohessy, director of the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, said in a press release that da Cunha has been "Myers' right hand man" for a decade.

"Myers could have brought in an untarnished outsider. Instead, he promotes a tarnished insider. This is 'circling the wagons,' not solving the crisis," Clohessy said in the statement.

In addition to his new role, da Cunha serves as a member of the archdiocesan board of consultors, its presbyteral council, the clergy personnel board and the RENEW International* board of trustees. He also acts as chair of the New Jersey Catholic Conference's public policy committee.

Nationally, da Cunha is a member of the U.S. bishops' conference subcommittees on Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugee and Travelers, and the Church in Latin America. He is also the Episcopal liaison to the Brazilian apostolate in the U.S.

**An earlier version of this story incorrectly named the group with which da Cunha works.*

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