

NEW JERSEY PAPERS TARGET PRIEST

The Star-Ledger

The Record
North Jersey's Trusted Source

Bill Donohue comments on editorials in the Newark *Star-Ledger* and *The Record* (Bergen County) that appeared this week; both concern the appointment by Newark Archbishop John J. Myers

of Rev. Michael Fugee as co-director of the Office of Continuing Education and Ongoing Formation of Priests (a post he assumed last October):

Just this week it was reported that an ex-priest who allegedly admitted having a sexual relationship with a minor was picked up by the Los Angeles Unified School District for more than a decade. The school district was told many times that Joseph Pina had a record of sexual abuse, but they did nothing about it. No one in journalism has said a thing about it, nor will they. But if a priest was once accused, even though later found not guilty, he should still be punished.

In 2001, Father Fugee was charged with groping a teenager while wrestling. He initially said he touched the boy's crotch, but later recanted. He was initially found guilty, but later had the verdict thrown out by an appellate panel of judges. He was subsequently investigated by the archdiocesan review board and was also cleared of wrongdoing. Over the past 12 years, there have been no allegations against him.

None of this matters to the *Star-Ledger* which says that Father Fugee's promotions "insult all victims of clergy abuse." Similarly, *The Record* says the priest "should not be in active ministry." What is even more appalling is for these outsiders to instruct Archbishop Myers on how to interpret the meaning of a charter drawn up by the bishops to handle these matters.

Both newspapers are a disgrace. If it had been anyone other than a priest who was ultimately cleared of all charges, they would be the first to demand that he be treated as innocent. But because he was once accused—even though found not guilty—they want to treat him like a convicted criminal. Their vindictiveness is palpable, their anti-Catholic bias is obscene, and their contempt for civil liberties is pernicious.