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Delaware crime: Wilmington pastor charged with embezzlement

AG's Office: \$358,000 missing from parishes

Feb. 3, 2011



St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church

WILMINGTON -- A Roman Catholic pastor of two city parishes -- including one that counted Vice President Joe Biden as a past congregant -- is being accused of embezzling more than \$350,000 from the parishes.

The Rev. Cornelius J. Breslin, 59, who had been pastor of the parishes of St. Patrick and St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception until Wednesday, turned himself in at the New Castle County Courthouse and entered pleas of not guilty to the charges.

When he was a U.S. senator, Joe Biden regularly attended Mass at St. Patrick's and was close with a previous pastor, the Rev. James Trainor, who died in 2004.

St. Patrick's also has been the traditional end point for Wilmington's annual St. Patrick's Day Parade.

Roman Catholic Diocese of Wilmington officials -- who detected the alleged thefts during a routine audit -- have put Breslin on administrative leave and relieved him of "all faculties to function publicly as a priest."

As a condition of his bail, Breslin was ordered to have no contact with either of his former parishes. Because he was living in the rectory at St. Patrick's, Breslin had to move.

Breslin, with his attorney James J. Haley Jr., appeared via video before Superior Court Commissioner Michael Reynolds on Wednesday afternoon.

Breslin answered several brief questions and informed Reynolds that he would be moving in with his mother in Philadelphia.

Breslin faces two felony charges of theft over \$100,000 -- one for

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each parish -- and two misdemeanor charges of falsifying business records.

If convicted on all charges, he faces up to 32 years in prison, but likely would face far less -- including a sentence of probation -- given his lack of a criminal record and state sentencing guidelines.

The indictment comes following a five-month investigation by the Delaware Attorney General's Office that was initiated by Diocese of Wilmington officials, who reported suspicious financial activity by the priest. According to investigators, between July 2009 and August 2010 Breslin wrote checks to himself for more than \$358,000 from the accounts of both parishes and deposited the money in an account at a different bank.

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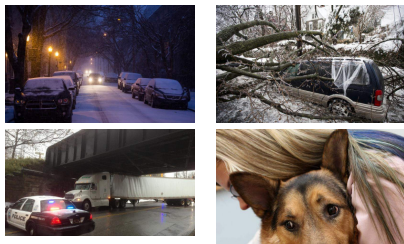
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