

NATION NOW

Vegas priest who stole church money to gamble sentenced to prison

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For years, Monsignor Kevin McAuliffe lived something of a double life.

He was widely admired by his flock at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, which he helped build into one of the largest Roman Catholic parishes in the Las Vegas area. But at the same time, he was stealing money from the church.

He stole from the gift shop. He stole from the votive candle collection. He stole from a fund for novenas, or Masses in honor of the dead. Over nearly a decade, he pocketed about \$650,000.

His motive was all too familiar in slot-machine-heavy Nevada. McAuliffe was a [gambling addict](#).

On Friday, U.S. District Judge James C. Mahan sentenced the priest, who pleaded guilty to charges stemming from the thefts, to more than three years in prison and ordered him to pay restitution. In doing so, the judge waved off the defense's request to give McAuliffe probation.

McAuliffe's attorney, Margaret Stanish, asked the court to consider his lifelong devotion to the Catholic Church, which started with helping nuns when he was a schoolboy. McAuliffe has also been diagnosed with social anxiety disorder and depression, she said, but in recent months had "excelled" in gambling addiction treatment.

"Some supporters see the potential for something good to come from the realization that their trusted spiritual leader also suffers from human frailty, a frailty that merits forgiveness in accordance with their religious beliefs," she wrote.

Indeed, dozens of parishioners asked the court to show mercy. Before McAuliffe's gambling addiction was made public, some parishioners told reporters he must have had a Robin Hood-type reason to steal. McAuliffe, 59, appeared to them a picture of humility, with his scuffed boots and banged-up Cadillac.

At St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, he oversaw the construction of a K-8 school and a community center, and he promoted collections of socks and underwear for the homeless, court papers said. He has since resigned as

the church's pastor, and the local bishop restricted his authority to perform various priestly duties.

"I speak for myself and many from our very large congregation, that we are sorry for what Fr. Kevin has done," parishioner Karen Kinney said in a letter to the court, "but all the good that he has done for all of us over these many years has outweighed the sin of taking the money from our Church."

But the judge was more heavily swayed by prosecutors, who focused on the length and depth of McAuliffe's deception. He falsified parish financial reports and shuffled money among accounts to cover his theft, court papers said.

McAuliffe never sought treatment for his betting problem, prosecutors said, though he could have through the church or private counselors. He also left his own savings untouched as he burned through the church's money.

"The defendant worked diligently within the church, was bestowed with a position of high honor, responsibility, and trust, and abused those bestowals," wrote Christina Brown, an assistant U.S. attorney.

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--Ashley Powers in Las Vegas

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Photo: Msgr. Kevin McAuliffe has pleaded guilty to federal charges involving the theft of more than \$650,000. Credit: Las Vegas Review-Journal

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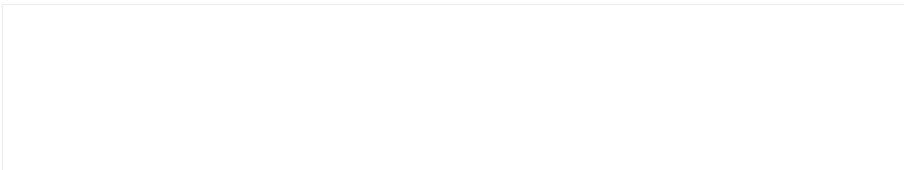
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