

Man who stole checks from New Bedford church sentenced to prison

Radisław Czerkowski was convicted yesterday in Fall River Superior Court on a litany of larceny by check charges and sentenced to serve three to five years in state prison, Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III announced.

The defendant, who is currently 35 years old, pleaded guilty to an indictment charging him with eight counts of larceny by check over \$250.

During a sentencing hearing held immediately after the court accepted his guilty plea, Assistant District Attorney Brian Griffin argued that based on the defendant's history of convictions and the facts of the case, the defendant should serve a three to five year state prison sentence. The defendant, however, requested a one year sentence at the county House of Corrections. After hearing arguments from both sides, Judge Raffia Yessayan handed down a three to five year state prison sentence.

In 2012, the defendant told officials with the Arch Diocese of Fall River that he wanted to become a priest. Since the defendant is a Polish national, The Arch Diocese assigned him to the St. Lawrence Parish in New Bedford due to the fact that the head pastor speaks Polish and the church has a large number of Polish congregants. The defendant was assigned to the church to explore the seriousness of his calling to become a priest.

But while living in the church owned residence in April of 2012, he stole checks and a signature stamp, and made out \$4,500 worth of checks to himself.

The defendant was previously convicted in Norfolk County last July for embezzling money from an elderly woman in that county. Although he was also sentenced to a three to five year prison sentence in the Norfolk case, yesterday's conviction allowed no credit for time served in prison since last July. This means he must serve the full three to five year prison sentence for yesterday's conviction.

"I'd like to thank New Bedford Police Detective Greg Sirois for his persistence in investigating this case. The defendant took advantage of the good will of the pastor, who provided him a place to stay," District Attorney Quinn said. "Based on his recent convictions in both Bristol and Norfolk counties, he obviously has no regard for other people's property. I am pleased he will serve at least an additional 15 months beyond the time he is already serving, based on the sentence that we recommended."