

Nun pleads guilty to theft from the Omaha Archdiocese

OMAHA, Neb. – Notre Dame Sister Barbara Markey, internationally renowned for her pioneering work in marriage preparation, has pled guilty to a charge of stealing more than \$1,500 from the Omaha Archdiocese.

According to her attorney, J. William Gallup, Sister Markey entered the guilty plea of theft by deception March 31. Under Nebraska state law, he said, \$1,500 is the minimum amount that can be considered a felony.

The 73-year-old nun told the Douglas County District Judge Thomas Otepka that she “used at least \$1,500 in funds” that she was “not authorized to use by the finance office of the archdiocese.”

Sister Markey was fired in 2006 as director of the archdiocese’s Family Life Office after an audit found irregularities including missing funds of more than \$300,000 in 2004-05.

According to The Associated Press, the archdiocesan audit found that Sister Markey spent \$307,545 for her own use or spent it without documentation. She has agreed to pay \$125,000 to the Omaha Archdiocese as part of a settlement her attorneys reached with the archdiocese.

Shortly after she was fired, the nun’s attorney at the time said the matter at issue was a dispute “about the proper ownership and priorities for use of revenues” related to a marriage preparation program developed by Sister Markey, a clinical psychologist, and used in the archdiocese and numerous other dioceses.

Gallup told Catholic News Service April 1 that archdiocesan officials were pleased with the amount Sister Markey is agreeing to pay along with her “willingness to accept responsibility.”

As a result, he said, the archdiocese has “dropped all civil suits against her,” and archdiocesan officials have stated that they are “not opposed to a sentence of

probation.” Initially, she faced a possible maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

In a March 31 statement, Father Joseph Taphorn, archdiocesan chancellor, said the archdiocese “is satisfied” with Sister Markey’s “guilty plea to theft by deception.” He said the archdiocese “would not recover all of the missing funds,” but he also acknowledged Sister Markey’s “willingness to plead guilty and make some restitution.”

He said her payment to the archdiocese will “hopefully bring this matter to a close. We’re ready to move on,” he added.

A 2006 report in The Catholic Voice, archdiocesan newspaper of Omaha, said the majority of the funds the archdiocese said were missing were taken from the revenues of FOCCUS.

FOCCUS stands for Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding and Study. The program, whose copyright is held by the archdiocese, is used in diocesan marriage preparation courses across the United States and in 13 other countries.

Attorney John Berry, who was representing Sister Markey, told the newspaper in 2006 that the funds at issue were “revenues brought in from outside the Archdiocese of Omaha by FOCCUS Inc.,” a nonprofit corporation established by the archdiocese to handle dealings with the dioceses and church agencies that use the program and related materials.

The FOCCUS Inventory is a questionnaire for couples preparing for marriage. It provides them with a personalized profile of their relationship and its strengths and challenges.

In addition to the original FOCCUS Inventory she co-wrote in 1985, Sister Markey “developed on her own numerous ancillary and supportive materials, videos and training programs and built a small business that distributed millions of dollars worth of materials worldwide,” Berry said.

“Several million dollars in earnings from these materials and programs have supplemented archdiocesan funds for family life programs and services to parishes and families in the archdiocese and across the United States,” he said.

Sister Markey was hired by the Omaha Archdiocese in 1978 as founding director of its Family Life Office.