

Ohio priest gets one-day jail sentence for evading banking laws

CLEVELAND - A priest who ran a flourishing alcohol and drug treatment center in Akron spent one day in jail after being sentenced on felony charges that he evaded banking regulations and filed a false tax return.

Father Samuel Ciccolini, who founded the Interval Brotherhood Home in 1970, immediately went to jail Oct. 20 after U.S. District Judge James S. Gwin imposed the sentence and ordered the priest to pay nearly \$4 million in restitution and fines.

Gwin cited the 68-year-old priest's age and health as well as his years of service at the home as reasons for imposing the modest jail term.

The priest also was placed on probation for three years.

Father Ciccolini must pay restitution of \$3.5 million to the Interval Brotherhood Foundation that supports the home and a fine of \$350,000.

The judge said that although the priest was not charged with theft, he believed much of the priest's personal wealth came from money he took from the home and its supporting foundation.

Court records showed that Father Ciccolini deposited \$1,038,680 from April through June 2003 in 139 separate cash deposits in banks in the Akron area. The deposits were made in amounts less than \$10,000 to avoid having a currency transaction report made available to the U.S. Treasury Department, investigators said.

Court documents also charged the priest with failing to report the money as income on his 2003 tax return. Father Ciccolini reported income of \$101,064 in 2003 when his income actually was \$407,062, according to the documents.

Father Ciccolini pleaded guilty to the charges July 23 of this year after reaching a plea agreement with prosecutors.

In a court filing by the priest's attorneys prior to sentencing, it was revealed that

Father Ciccolini traditionally kept large sums of money in his room at the rectory of Immaculate Conception Church in Akron. The document said Father Ciccolini received the money through donations, gifts and other legitimate sources since 1969.

The document also said he transferred nearly \$1.3 million from the foundation to his personal bank accounts so that he could control how they were spent for the home, but that money was later returned after Father Ciccolini knew he was being investigated.

In response, prosecutors said in a filing that Father Ciccolini submitted false tax returns from 2002 to 2006 and that he failed to report more than \$900,000 of taxable income during that time. Prosecutors said money misappropriated from the home and its foundation were the sources of the income.

The federal investigation also found that the priest had more than \$4.3 million in personal bank accounts at the end of 2006. Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Bulford told the court the priest created a \$5 million trust fund in 2008 after he realized he was being investigated.

Father Ciccolini resigned as executive director of the home after charges were filed, but Interval Brotherhood trustees left open the possibility that he could continue to counsel residents.

The home has helped more than 15,000 men and women achieve sobriety since it opened, according to its website.