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Police: Priest used church money on male escorts, lavish lifestyle

July 08, 2010 | By Jesse Solomon, CNN

To his congregants, he lived the humble existence of a pastor.

But a high-flying Connecticut priest was charged this week with first-degree larceny in the theft of almost \$1.3 million from his church's coffers to fund a lavish double life that included swanky hotels and male escorts, said Capt. Chris Corbett of the Waterbury Police Department in Connecticut.

Father Kevin Gray, 64, a former pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Waterbury, allegedly embezzled money from the church over the course of seven years.

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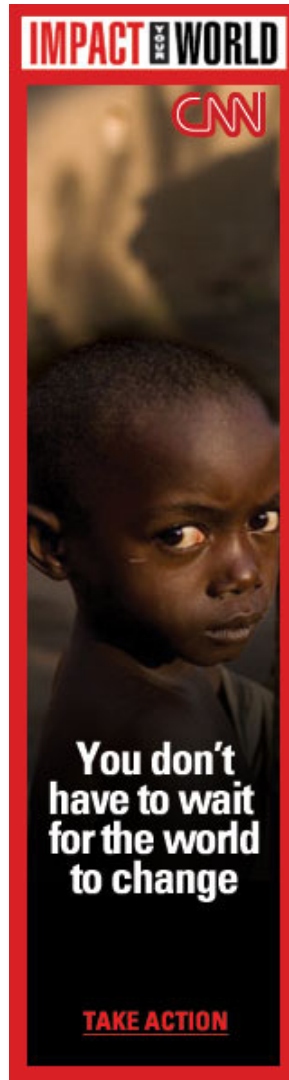
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He used it to pay for fancy restaurants, clothing, vacations, hotels, a New York City apartment and a male companion's tuition at Harvard University, according to an affidavit obtained by CNN affiliate WTIC and filed with the Connecticut Superior Court.

The affidavit says that between June 2003 and March 2010, Gray spent about \$205,000 at high-end restaurants, \$132,000 in hotel stays and \$85,000 at clothing stores. While in New York City, he frequented the Waldorf Astoria, Omni Berkshire, and the W Hotel Times Square, among other posh hotels, the affidavit states.

He also allegedly shopped at high-end retailers including Barneys, Armani and Saks Fifth Avenue.

Along with expensive taste, Gray allegedly kept company with a number of male escorts, and allowed some to have credit cards in their name on his account.

One escort, Islagar Labrada, allegedly charged more than \$49,000 to the account.

"Some items Mr. Labrada charged included a stay at the Sheraton in Buena Vista, Florida, storage facilities, computers, computer software, cell phones, anti-aging creams, artwork, Louis Vuitton stores, a home alarm system and bicycles," the affidavit reads. "Mr Labrada also charged \$8,864.69 to Crunch Fitness Gym for membership fees."

Another man, Weirui Zhong, who told police he met Gray in Central Park in 2005, said Gray paid for his rented apartment in New York, a piano, dogs and Harvard University tuition since 2008, according to the affidavit.

Zhong told authorities that when he pressed Gray about why he was always paying him with checks from Sacred Heart Church, Gray told him that he won big cases as an attorney, and that he put all his live savings into the church account.

He also lied to Zhong and his parishioners that he was suffering from cancer, the affidavit says.

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