

GRAY: Priest felt church owed him

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according to Gray's warrant and police.

Despite Tuesday's heat, Gray's supporters came out in force to his arraignment in Waterbury Superior Court, saying they'll support him and claiming he's "100 percent innocent."

In a 14-page arrest warrant, Det. Peter Morgan detailed the paper trail he followed that showed Gray bilked the largely Hispanic parish out of \$1.3 million since 2003.

While he sat in an Upper East Side apartment last month, Gray explained to Morgan his bitterness at the church leadership and his unhappiness about the decision by the Archdiocese of Hartford to assign him to a church in New Hartford when his mother was dying in New Haven in 2001.

"Mr. Gray stated that when he started at Sacred Heart Church in 2003, he began taking money because he felt the church owed it to him," Gray told police, according to his arrest warrant. "Mr. Gray stated that he is gay and does have a problem with the church's position on homosexuality."

The archdiocese discovered financial discrepancies during a routine inspection and contacted police in May.

In the basement of the rectory of Sts. Peter and Paul Church, police found Gray's personal items, including a list of gay bars in Boston and a picture of Gray with his arm around a man as the two are seated in a horse-drawn carriage, according to court documents.

That discovery led detectives to financial records showing Gray spent thousands on jewelry from Tiffany's, dined at French restaurants and Boston steakhouses, flew to Ecuador and wrote more than 700 checks to himself that totaled more than \$639,000.

Money spent on his boyfriends, including 39-year-old Islagar Labrada, whom he met through an escort service, and Manuel Paque, a stripper he met at The Web, an Asian dance club in Manhattan that advertises a monthly drag queen contest, represented a large hunk of the pilfered funds, court documents indicate.

Gray arranged for Labrada to have his own American Express card, which he paid for using church money. Paque ran up a \$67,755 credit card bill



Supporters of the Rev. Kevin Gray gathered outside Waterbury Superior Court on Tuesday as Gray was arraigned.

buying furniture, cell phones and paying for tuition to LaGuardia Community College.

Gray told police he lives at 1427 York Ave., N.Y., which is a six-story, faded red-brick apartment building next to a sushi restaurant in Manhattan's Upper East Side.

Living at that address with Gray, police say, was Weirui Zhong, a 35-year-old man who told police he met the 64-year-old priest in Central Park in 2005. Gray told Zhong he was an attorney and paid for Zhong's tuition to Harvard University, adorned his apartment with a piano and paid his rent, Zhong told police.

During Morgan's visit with Zhong, Gray arrived at the apartment. Confronted with the police investigation, Gray then admitted to Zhong that he never had cancer, wasn't an attorney and never went to Georgetown Law School, Morgan stated in court documents.

Police say Zhong wasn't the only person Gray lied to. Court documents state he told the secretary at Sacred Heart that he was undergoing chemotherapy treatments at Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York. That secretary told police Gray would leave the parish after mid-week Mass and be gone for days.

She also found magazines with pictures of nude men in a bag of trash taken from Gray's car, but she shredded the magazines, admitting to police she kept the discovery a secret.

Supervisory Assistant State's Attorney John Davenport called Gray's actions a "systemic larceny" from the church.

Gray was arraigned Tuesday in Waterbury Superior Court and is being held on a \$750,000 bond. His passport has been seized. Should he make bond,

court officials suggested he be fitted with a GPS tracking unit.

Supporters, ranging from a young girl in a white dress to gray-haired men, filled a row of the courtroom, some gasping slightly when Gray's name was called. A pack of reporters leaned forward, as a cameraman adjusted his focus to catch an image of the handcuffed priest being led from a courthouse holding cell.

Gray, a frail-looking man with a crown of gray hair, shuffled to a low table, as a supporter who stood up to see him was ordered by a judicial marshal to sit down.

Although his public defender, Dennis Harrigan, asked for Gray to be released on a promise to appear at his next court date, that request was denied by Judge Richard Damiani.

Outside the courthouse, congregants held signs in support of the embattled priest, many of them saying they'll back the priest no matter what.

"True Faith Doesn't Question," one sign stated. "Helping the needy is not a crime!" stated another.

Other church members say Gray is a nice, straight-forward guy and they're shocked and saddened by the claims.

"I don't care what anyone thinks, I firmly believe he's innocent," said Madelin Castillo, a Gray supporter.

Although police believe Gray stole \$1.3 million, the statute of limitations has expired for some of the thefts. Investigators are charging him based on the more than \$1 million in thefts they say occurred starting in 2005.

Gray is expected to appear in court on July 21.

Reporter Erin Covey contributed to this report.

BERGER: Back from bankruptcy

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Some debts, including most taxes and debts secured with property, cannot be voided through bankruptcy.

Berger said he is still responsible for first and second mortgages on his wife's home, which, when he filed for bankruptcy, tallied \$139,142.38. Berger is also repaying the IRS for back taxes owed on the 2007 sale of an 11-unit rental building he owned in Waterbury, a debt of \$42,000 at the time of filing.

Berger's bankruptcy also lists a \$12,897 debt to the state of Connecticut for unpaid taxes on the 2007 sale, which resulted in a lien on his wife's house in February 2009. Berger said he repaid that debt prior to filing the bankruptcy case and it should not have been included. City records show the state released the lien in March 2009.

Under Chapter 7, Berger's personal assets could be liquidated to pay creditors. But Berger had nothing to liquidate, and there was no money to distribute.

Berger's few possessions, worth \$9,284 in total, were exempt from seizure. He owned no real estate and no furniture, except for a \$750 computer, according to his court filing. He owned only \$500 worth of clothing. He had a single bank account, with \$670, and \$150 cash in hand.

In the bankruptcy filing, Berger lists a \$68,915 income as a state legislator and real estate broker, as well as from his disability retirement pension as a Waterbury police of-

LIST OF CREDITORS

Creditors listed on the June 2009 bankruptcy filing of state Rep. Jeffrey Berger, D-73rd, in U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

- ▶ **IRS** — \$42,000 for taxes associated with the 2007 sale of an 11-unit rental property in Waterbury
- ▶ **State of Connecticut** — \$12,897 statutory lien on single-family house owned by Berger's wife, Noreen, at 134 Gaylord Drive, stemming from taxes from the sale of an 11-unit rental property in Waterbury. (Berger claims debt to state was settled prior to bankruptcy filing. Department of Revenue will not discuss individual cases, but the state did discharge its lien on a home owned by Berger's wife in March.)
- ▶ **AT&T Connecticut** — \$229.97
- ▶ **Bank of America** — \$96,000 (business debt)
- ▶ **Bank of America** — \$48,418.39 (business debt)
- ▶ **Capital One Visa** — \$4,854.30 (business debt)
- ▶ **CitiFinancial** — \$9,000 (business debt)
- ▶ **Dell Financial Services** — \$3,195 (business debt)
- ▶ **Direct Merchants Mastercard** — \$7,258.85 (business debt)
- ▶ **Discover Card** — \$5,242.42 (business debt)
- ▶ **GMAC** — \$5,653.07 balance due on expired lease of 2006 Chevrolet Avalanche, which was returned to dealer.
- ▶ **Hanover Insurance** — \$1,621.52 (business debt)
- ▶ **MBNA America** — \$42,816.98 (business debt)
- ▶ **People's United Bank** — \$38,397 line of credit for business
- ▶ **Washington Mutual Bank** — \$102,142.38 mortgage on wife's house
- ▶ **Washington Mutual Bank** — \$37,000 second mortgage on wife's house
- ▶ **Waterbury Police Credit Union** — \$11,509.48 (business debt)
- ▶ **Yankee Gas** — \$5,439.20 (business debt)

icer. He said this recession and the last tipped the balance of his investments, so that he could no longer keep up with his debts and expenses.

Berger said his real estate commissions dropped from about \$65,000 yearly to \$6,000 in the latest recession. Under bankruptcy protection, Berger

said, he's hoping to make a fresh start.

"I'm not the first person to go through this," Berger said. "I'm certainly not the last. Anything I can do to continue to gain and continue the respect of the people in my district, I will certainly work hard to continue to do that."

Heat wave puts demand on power grid, Amtrak

ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOLYOKE, Mass. — Despite the heat wave, New England's power grid is not expected to break its record electricity use of four years ago.

Ellen Foley, spokeswoman for ISO-New England, the region's grid operator, said Tuesday that consumer demand is expected to reach a peak of 27,000 megawatts. The record is 28,130 megawatts

used on Aug. 2, 2006.

She says the long holiday weekend when offices and some businesses were closed, the weak economy that has pushed down energy demand and improved energy efficiency should ensure that electricity use won't be a record-breaker.

If necessary, Foley says ISO can bring in electricity from outside the region, call on large customers to cut elec-

tricity use and ask all consumers to turn down or shut off appliances.

Meanwhile, Amtrak says it is prepared to take care of passengers if their trains breakdown and lose air conditioning amid an intense heat wave along the northeast corridor.

Amtrak announced the plans Tuesday as steamy temperatures were forecast along the nation's busiest passenger rail line.

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