

Church Secretary Faces 280 Years in Prison

A former church secretary in Louisa, Virginia, may spend the rest of her life in prison after being convicted of embezzling hundreds of thousands of dollars from her longtime place of worship. Brenda W. Ragland, 64, who has been a member and employee of the unnamed church for over 20 years, was found guilty on Monday of 14 counts of embezzlement. Each count carries a potential maximum sentence of 20 years, adding up to a possible 280 years behind bars.

The church discovered Ragland's alleged misconduct when attempting to donate funds to support another local congregation's building project earlier this year. Unable to locate Ragland to retrieve a necessary bank letter, church officials reached out to their financial institution directly. To their shock, they learned their account lacked the funds needed for the donation.

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"It is a sad day for the church," said Louisa Commonwealth's Attorney Rusty McGuire, emphasizing the trust the church had placed in Ragland. "They put their faith in Mrs. Ragland to manage the church resources, and she violated that faith by turning church resources into her personal piggy bank."

Investigators later found that Ragland had diverted more than \$670,000 in church funds over the years, including tithes meant for the church, which she funneled into her personal bank account via Cash App. Authorities suspect the total amount may be even higher, as they were only able to review seven years of bank records.

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Senior Assistant Commonwealth Attorney Megan Riordan, who worked with McGuire on the case, expressed hope for the church's recovery, noting the impact of Ragland's betrayal. "Ragland wreaked financial havoc on the church that she was supposed to be helping," Riordan said. She also thanked the Louisa County Sheriff's Office for its "thorough investigation."

Ragland's sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 27, 2025.

This case serves as a stark reminder that God is purifying His church, exposing wrongdoing within its ranks to strengthen the body of Christ. Scripture tells us this in 1 Peter 4:17: "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins first with us, what shall the end be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

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James Lasher is staff writer for Charisma Media.