

Secretary's Embezzlement Forced Alabama Church to Close

A 59-year-old woman has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for stealing nearly \$90,000 from her Alabama church and gambling it away.

The former church secretary's actions led to the closing of Brooklyn Congregational Church in Coffee County in 2019.

Carmen Ramer Davis was sentenced last week after pleading guilty to eight counts of wire fraud according to a release from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Davis served as the church's secretary from 2006 to 2019. It wasn't until 2019 that the church had become aware of her criminal activities, when a church leader received a letter from the church's bank indicating there were insufficient funds to cover a \$75 check written on the church's account.

Davis' activities caused the church major financial hardship and it was forced to close its doors soon after. It has not reopened.

"The crimes committed by Ms. Davis victimized an entire faith community," United States Attorney Sandra J. Stewart said. "The harm will continue to be felt for quite some time. I am hopeful that the sentence imposed will deter others from engaging in such deceitful conduct."

"The actions of the defendant significantly damaged not only the church, but also the community at large," FBI Special Agent in Charge Paul Brown said. "I am proud of the work by the FBI and US Attorney's office to hold Davis accountable for her actions and work toward repairing the public's trust."

Davis must also serve one year of supervised release following her prison term and repay the church \$89, in restitution—the exact amount she stole.

 Court records show that, as secretary, Davis had authority to pay bills and expenses incurred by the church and had access to the church's bank accounts. Court records also show that Davis eventually obtained a debit card connected to the church's bank account, but without the church's knowledge.

The Department of Justice's memo read: "Davis began using the card to make fraudulent cash withdrawals at ATMs and to purchase personal items at various retailers. She also fraudulently wrote checks from the church's bank account to herself or made them out to cash. Davis did not make these withdrawals and purchases with the knowledge or consent of the church, nor were they for the church's benefit. Evidence gathered during the investigation indicated that Davis used some of the illicit proceeds for trips to casinos in Mississippi and Alabama."

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