

Megachurch Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell Pleads Guilty to Fraud Involving Millions of Dollars

A Texas megachurch pastor and former spiritual adviser to two U.S. presidents has pleaded guilty to bilking investors out of millions of dollars alongside a Louisiana investment adviser.

Kirbyjon H. Caldwell pleaded guilty Wednesday to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, news outlets reported. Caldwell was the senior pastor of Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston and a spiritual adviser to Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

Caldwell's co-defendant Gregory A. Smith, a Shreveport financial planner, pleaded guilty to the same charge in July 2019.

According to the Department of Justice, Caldwell and Smith used their clout and influence to persuade people to invest about \$3.5 million in historical Chinese bonds. The bonds were reportedly issued by the former Republic of China before they lost power to the communist government in 1949. The bonds aren't recognized by China's current government and thus have no investment value.

Smith began approaching victims about the investment in 2013 and promised high returns on the investment. In 2013 and 2014, about \$3.5 million was "invested" and divided between Caldwell, Smith and others, prosecutors said.

Caldwell used about \$900,000 to maintain his lifestyle, and pay down personal loans and mortgages, according to the Justice Department.

Smith and Caldwell face up to five and seven years in prison each. Caldwell has made partial restitution and has agreed to pay the remaining balance of about \$2 million before sentencing.

Smith will be sentenced on May 4. Caldwell's sentencing date is schedule for July 22. {eo}

The Associated Press