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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF WESTLAKE EMPLOYEE SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT FOR EMBEZZLEMENT

Amount Embezzled by Church Employee Totaled \$384,032.78

Lafayette, Louisiana . . . A former First Baptist Church of Westlake employee was sentenced to 51 months (four years, three months) in federal prison for embezzling \$384,032.78 over a three year period, Acting United States Attorney William J. Flanagan announced today. Julia Leppo, 39, of Lemont, IL, was also sentenced to three years supervised release, and was ordered to pay restitution to the First Baptist Church of Westlake in the amount of \$383,032.78, and \$1,000.00 to an insurance company. The sentence was imposed by U.S. District Judge Rebecca F. Doherty.

Leppo was employed with the First Baptist Church of Westlake as a financial secretary. After an in-depth investigation, it was discovered that for three years Leppo had embezzled money from the church by obtaining unauthorized credit cards in the name of the church and a former church employee, and using the cards to charge personal expenses and withdraw cash from ATMs. Leppo also forged checks from the church's checking account to pay the balance on the unauthorized credit cards, issued checks to herself under a fictitious name, issued unauthorized payroll checks to herself outside her normal salary, and used church credit cards for unauthorized personal expenses. The fraudulent activity was uncovered by an audit team of church members when Leppo left her job at First Baptist Church of Westlake.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Myers P. Namie.

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