



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

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**PRESS RELEASE**

8/8/18

**TULARE PASTOR SENTENCED FOR GRAND THEFT**

Today in Department 6 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division, Ignacio Villafan, age 52, of Tulare, was sentenced to the Probation Department's recommendation of 5 years of probation for stealing over \$300,000 from his Tulare church. Restitution will be determined at a hearing in October.

On March 5, 2018, Villafan pleaded to one felony count of grand theft of personal property with the special allegation that the financial amount exceeded \$200,000. The count and special allegation were the entirety of charges filed against Villafan. Villafan entered his plea at the start of the fifth day of his preliminary hearing.

Between June 1, 2005 and January 21, 2012, Villafan, the pastor of St. Rita's Church in Tulare, wrote church checks for his personal daily use to the amount of over \$195,000. In addition, Villafan gifted church funds to benefit family members. The diocese' forensic audit revealed a total loss over \$300,000.

"Many positions held in our communities are positions of trust, and it is troubling when that trust is betrayed," said District Attorney Tim Ward. "Mr. Villafan's crime affected those who trusted him in ways we'll never know, and to this day Mr. Villafan has done little to nothing to restore that trust and faith. To think that a person could steal such a large sum and not face incarceration undermines the justice that we in the District Attorney's Office seek every day."

The case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Paula Clark of the Financial Crimes Division and investigated by Sgt. Tim Ramirez of the Tulare Police Department and Criminal Investigator Rodney Klassen of the District Attorney's Bureau of Investigations.

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