Anglican priest imprisoned for 360 sham marriages

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An Anglican vicar has been sentenced to four years in prison for conducting hundreds of fake marriages as part of a fraud helping illegal immigrants set up permanent homes in Britain. Alex Brown was convicted of carrying out some 360 sham marriages at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in St. Leonards-on-Sea in southern England.

The 61-year-old vicar was sentenced September 6 in Lewes Crown Court, which heard how he conspired in the illegal weddings of hundreds of foreigners—mostly of African men to Eastern European women.

According to testimony, the impoverished "brides" were paid up to $4,500 for their involvement in a string of so-called marriages of convenience, in violation of British immigration laws.

Convicted alongside Brown were lawyer and part-time pastor Michael Adelasoye and Ukrainian-born Vladimir Buchak, identified as a recruiter in the scam. The three were trapped by British border agents, who were tipped off by the unusually large number of immigration applicants who had married at Brown's church.

The vicar insisted that he was unaware that the marriages were fake and claimed that he had conducted ceremonies only of couples he was certain were getting married for legitimate reasons. But in passing the sentences, Judge Richard Hayward told Brown the couples "beat a path to St. Peter's because both they knew and you knew what was going on, and you were happy to play your part." —RNS