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 ***News Release***

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**Church leader jailed for charity tax fraud**

A church leader from Luton, who lied about charity donations to fraudulently claim £150,000 Gift Aid repayments has been jailed for four years, after an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Teslim Johnson, 39, from Dunstable, used his position as a preacher and trustee at Luton’s Agape Church to steal £155,840. As a registered charity, Agape Church could claim Gift Aid on donations to the church. But in 2016, HMRC officers contacted donors listed on the charity’s records after they became suspicious of a series of claims that were submitted. They found that most of the donations had not been made and many of the donors had never heard of the church.

HMRC investigations found that as Johnson was the only person named on the church’s bank accounts, he was able to divert money from these fraudulent claims into his personal bank account.

Mark Cox, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“Johnson thought his position in society would put him above scrutiny, but if you break the law HMRC will investigate.

“This is not a victimless crime. It is stealing from honest UK taxpayers money needed to fund vital public services in the UK. If anyone has any information about individuals or businesses involved in tax fraud they should report it to HMRC online or contact our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

During a search of Johnson’s property investigators found documents relating to Agape Church. Gift Aid envelopes were found, but donor names and amounts did not match Gift Aid records submitted to HMRC.

Johnson was found guilty after a trial at Luton Crown Court of fraud by abuse of position and money laundering. Yesterday (28 March 2018) Johnson was sentenced to four years imprisonment.

HMRC has started the process to recover the criminal proceeds.

**Notes for editors**

1. Teslim Wale JOHNSON (DOB 13/09/1978) of Watling Gardens, Dunstable, was found guilty of one count of fraud by abuse of position, one count of converting criminal property, and one count of possessing criminal property, following a trial at Luton Crown Court, and on 28 March 2018 he was sentenced to four years imprisonment.
2. Johnson received repayments of £103,154.44 and attempted a further £52,686.14 bringing the total value of the fraud to £155,840.58.
3. Anyone with information about people or businesses involved in tax fraud can report it online at <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business> or call HMRC’s Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.
4. Follow HMRC on Twitter @HMRCgovuk

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