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Msgr. Massimo Palombella, former director of the Sistine Chapel Choir, is seen at a Vatican news conference in this file photo from 2017. (CNS/Paul Haring)

by Catholic News Service

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The Vatican City State court has returned guilty verdicts against the former director of the Sistine Chapel Choir, its former manager and his wife on charges of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds raised at concerts in Italy and abroad.

In a judgment published Dec. 10, the court sentenced Msgr. Massimo Palombella, former director of the choir, to three years and two months in jail and fined him 9,000 euros ($9,400).

The court sentenced Michelangelo Nardella, the choir's former business manager, to four years and eight months in jail and fined him 7,000 euros. His wife, Simona Rossi, was sentenced to two years in jail and fined 5,000 euros.

The three are free pending appeal.

The court also ordered the confiscation of more than 280,000 euros, plus interest, that it said the trio earned from their malfeasance.

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The Vatican had announced in September 2018 that Pope Francis authorized an investigation into possible money laundering, fraud and embezzlement in connection with the Sistine choir's concerts. Msgr. Palombella stepped down as director in 2019 and in 2021 was named director of music at the cathedral in Milan.

As the Vatican investigation began, an Italian newspaper reported in 2018 that profits from the Sistine choir concerts allegedly were transferred to an Italian bank account — accessible only to Nardella and Msgr. Palombella — and used for personal expenses.

The Vatican trial of Msgr. Palombella, Nardella and Rossi began in May 2023.

Dating back to 1471, the Sistine Chapel Choir is one of the oldest choirs in the world and is comprised of about 20 men and 30 boys.