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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: December 8, 2017
Re: Javier Cruz, Jr
Prison Sentence

For More Information Contact:

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Javier Cruz, Jr., age 51, of Modesto, has been convicted of felony arson after setting fire to the basement of a church last August. Deputy District Attorney Dina Petrushenko prosecuted the case on behalf of the People.

Cruz was a caretaker for the Christ Unity Baptist Church in Modesto. On August 7, 2017, he started seven small fires in the basement of the building. A sprinkler system put out the fire before it could spread, limiting the burn damage but causing water damage. A witness who saw Cruz breaking windows at the church contacted security, who then called 911. Modesto Police officers responded and saw Cruz inside, hiding amongst the pews. He refused to exit the building for an hour before being taken into custody.

On December 5, 2017, Cruz waived his right to a jury trial and pled no contest to Arson of an Inhabited Structure, a "strike" offense under California's "Three Strikes" law. He also admitted having been previously convicted of robbery in 1995 and of having been sentenced to prison twice, once in 1992 and again in 2002.

After taking the plea and finding Cruz guilty of the crime, Judge Rick Distaso immediately sentenced Cruz to serve 18 years in state prison.

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