

Priest gets probation

BROWNSVILLE (AP) — A Roman Catholic priest, given two years probation in a weapons smuggling case, wants to get his life back in order, his attorney says.

The Rev. Salomon Sandoval, 34, pastor of San Martin de Porras Catholic Church in Alton, pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge, was fined \$525 and agreed to testify against another man.

Sandoval's attorney, Sheldon Weisfeld, told U.S. Magistrate Fidencio Garza Monday that the priest was respected in the community, was hurt by the publicity and wanted to "pay for his offense and be able to continue in his life."

The attorney and the priest declined to speak with reporters after the hearing.

Two other men, Alfredo Cumpian and Salvador Vela, also pleaded guilty to misdemeanor charges and were assessed the same punishment as Sandoval — two years probation and a \$525 fine.

The priest was accused of being the middleman between Vela and Cumpian and two Mexican nationals who wanted to buy weapons in the United States. Federal prosecutors alleged that Cumpian and Vela, after meeting with Sandoval, purchased four Uzi semiautomatic weapons last July for Jorge Wong and Luis Davalos and tried to ship the weapons into Mexico as helicopter parts.

Federal authorities, acting on a tip, however, stopped the shipment.

The priest was indicted on conspiracy to give false statements and four counts of giving false statements. Although he didn't purchase any of the weapons, federal prosecutors allege he gave Vela and Cumpian the money to purchase the weapons.

Davalos is scheduled to go on trial today. Wong remains at large.