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Cardinal may face loan-shark charges**Search BBC News Online**[Advanced search options](#)[BBC ONE TV NEWS](#)[WORLD NEWS](#)[SUMMARY](#)**Internet links:**[Itay's La Repubblica newspaper](#)[The Holy See](#)

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Cardinal Michele Giordano (left) talks to Naples prosecutor Michelangelo Russo

The Archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Michele Giordano, may be put on trial in connection with a loan-sharking scandal.

Italian magistrates have requested formal charges against the cardinal, one of the country's most senior Roman Catholic leaders.

Cardinal Giordano, who is a member of the church panel that elects the pope, is accused of involvement in a syndicate that made loans to indebted business people in southern Italy at interest rates of up to 300%.

It is alleged that the cardinal funnelled the equivalent of almost \$500,000 to his brother and nephew, who then used it to demand exorbitant interest rates from southern Italian businesses who were in debt with the local bank.

Public prosecutors Michelangelo Russo and Manuela Comodi requested that the cardinal's brother, Mario Lucio; a nephew, Nicola; a bank manager of the Banco di Napoli bank at Sant'Arcangelo near Potenza, Filippo



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Lemma; and a number of other suspects be tried on similar charges.

'Clear conscience'

A judge is expected to decide in the next few months whether to send the case to trial.

Cardinal Giordano, whose family is from the town where the transactions were said to have taken place, is also alleged to have pocketed 200 million lire (\$106,500) from the sale of two warehouses in Naples.

He has denied all accusations made against him in the course of a two-year criminal investigation in the southern city of Lagonegro, saying that he only helped his family.

"I am calm and have a clear conscience. I am sure that up there somebody knows it," he said on Thursday before the prosecutors made their announcement.

'Judicial conspiracy'

The BBC's Rome correspondent, David Willey, says small businessmen are often bankrupted by money lenders associated with the Mafia in southern Italy.

They are forced to turn to illicit money lenders as the banks demand higher interest rates for commercial loans in the south of Italy than in the rest of the country.

Cardinal Giordano says he is the victim of a judicial conspiracy. He has pointed out that he frequently criticises illegal money lenders in his sermons.

Our correspondent says that usury - lending money at extortionate rates - is one of the seven capital sins according to church teaching, and is a very serious crime for a senior churchman to be accused of.

In September, the cardinal shared a platform with Pope John Paul II when he visited southern Italy.

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