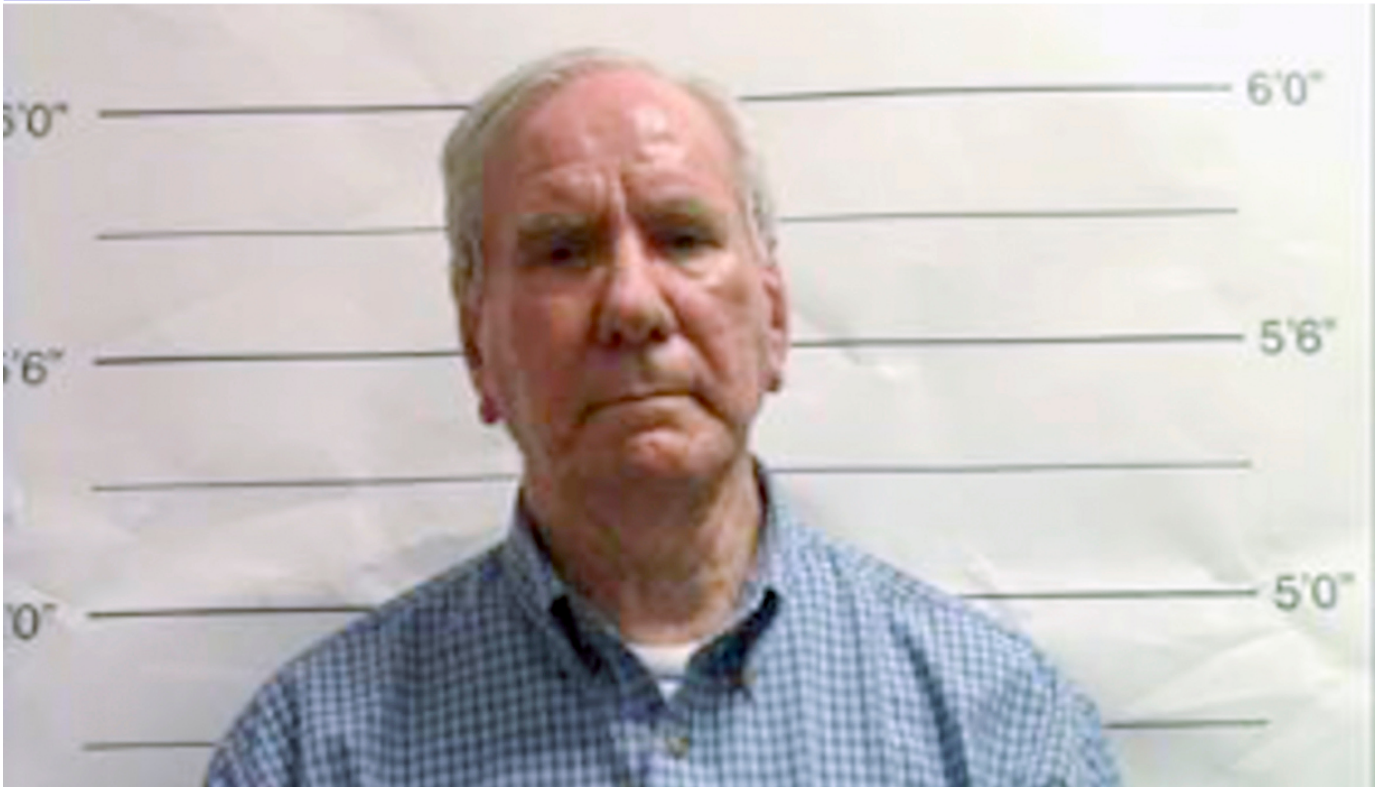
News



This Sept. 21, 2019, file booking image made from video and provided by the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office in New Orleans, La., shows George Brignac. Brignac, a longtime Roman Catholic deacon and schoolteacher awaiting trial on rape charges in New Orleans, died Monday, June 29, 2020, after a brief hospitalization. (Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office via AP)

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The Associated Press

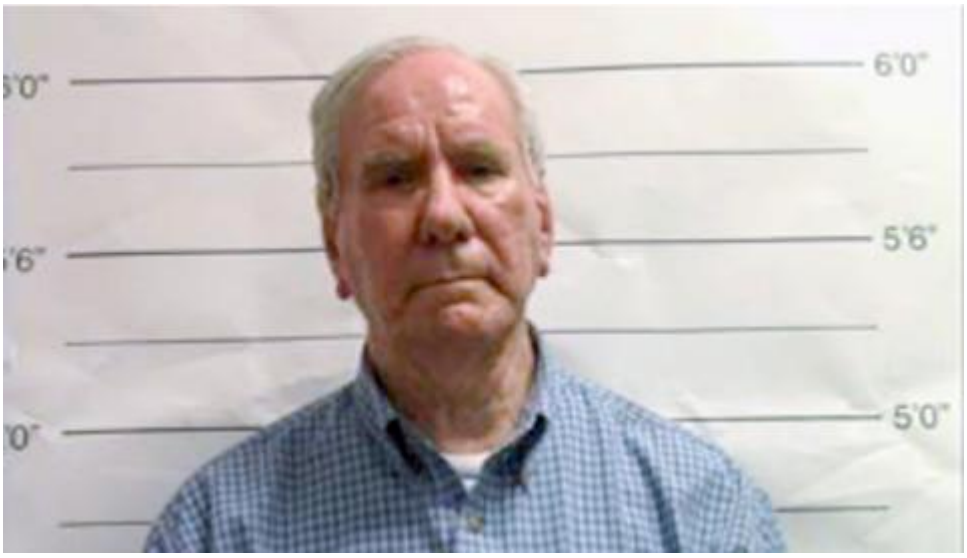
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This Sept. 21, 2019, file booking image made from video and provided by the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office in New Orleans, La., shows George Brignac. Brignac, a longtime Roman Catholic deacon and schoolteacher awaiting trial on rape charges in New Orleans, died Monday, June 29, 2020, after a brief hospitalization. (Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office via AP)

A former Roman Catholic deacon awaiting trial on rape charges in New Orleans has died, his defense attorney said June 30.

George F. Brignac, 85, had been accused of sexually abusing children for years before being removed from the ministry in 1988.

He was charged last year with first-degree rape after a former altar boy told police Brignac had repeatedly raped him beginning in the late 1970s. Police said the abuse began when the boy was 7 years old and continued until he was 11.

Brignac had been in declining health after suffering a fall in the local jail that "broke his back," defense attorney Martin Regan said. He had been out on bail and died June 29 hours after being hospitalized.

"It is a terrible disappointment," Regan told The Associated Press. "He fully expected to be acquitted in this case and he was looking forward to going to trial to clear his name."

Brignac's accusers expressed similar disappointment, even as they acknowledged the challenges prosecutors faced in bringing a decades-old case. There was little

physical evidence against Brignac, aside from a collection of love notes and greeting cards he sent the former altar boy when he was a young boy.

Kevin Bourgeois, the local volunteer leader of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said he was saddened for the "scores of men who were denied their day in court to see justice served."

"Today the world is rid of a monster that preyed on many innocent children," the former altar boy, now 48, said in a statement.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans settled several lawsuits against Brignac, a longtime teacher, and included him among the more than 50 names of clergy removed from the ministry due to "credible accusations" of sexual abuse.

Litigation involving Brignac turned up thousands of emails documenting behind-the-scenes public relations work that New Orleans Saints executives did for the archdiocese in 2018 and 2019 to contain fallout from clergy abuse scandals. The Saints recently went to court in a bid to keep the emails confidential.

Church officials removed Brignac from the ministry in 1988 after a 7-year-old boy accused him of fondling him at a Christmas party. That accusation came on top of previous claims that he abused other boys, including one that led to his acquittal in 1978 on three counts of indecent behavior with a juvenile.

But he remained a lay minister in the church and even maintained access to children until 2018, when news reports about his past prompted the church to bar his service.

New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond called Brignac's continued service a "scandal" and apologized to parishioners.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans recently filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection amid growing legal costs related to sexual abuse by priests.

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