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Gina Christian

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New Orleans — April 26, 2024

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New Orleans Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond speaks at St. Louis Cathedral in this file photo dated Feb. 17, 2021. The Archdiocese of New Orleans was ordered by a court April 22, 2024, to turn over years' worth of records on clerical sexual abuse to the Louisiana State Police, part of a widening investigation into how the archdiocese has handled allegations of clerical sex abuse.(OSV News/Jonathan Bachman, Reuters)

Louisiana State Police executed a search warrant on the Archdiocese of New Orleans April 25 for documents related to a widening investigation into how the archdiocese has handled allegations of clerical sex abuse.

Louisiana State Police Trooper Jacob Pucheu, public information officer, told OSV News by email that the search took place "during a meeting with representatives and counsel for the Archdiocese of New Orleans" and the state police's special victims unit investigators.

"The Archdiocese is actively cooperating with investigators and the terms of the search warrant," said Pucheu in his statement. "This investigation remains ongoing, and there is no additional information available at this time."

The Archdiocese of New Orleans had been ordered by a New Orleans criminal court to turn over the records, as part of a long-running criminal investigation involving multiple accused priests.

According to The Guardian, New Orleans Magistrate Juana M. Lombard signed off on the order April 22, allowing Louisiana State Police to obtain from the archdiocese files identifying all priests and permanent deacons who had been accused of sexual abuse with minors.

In addition, the archdiocese was required to account for the dates of initial complaints, and to specify whether any cases had been handed over to the police, said The Guardian, citing "multiple sources with direct knowledge of the matter."

The newspaper also said that police have requested "copies of all communications" among New Orleans Archbishop Gregory M. Aymond and "his aides, as well as their superiors at the Vatican" regarding abuse.

A spokesperson with the archdiocese told OSV News in an email that "as always, the Archdiocese will continue to cooperate in all law enforcement investigations."

Pucheu told OSV News by email that the request marked an expansion of the investigation into retired New Orleans priest Msgr. Lawrence Hecker.

State troopers provided a sworn statement to Lombard April 22 stating they suspected the archdiocese knew about, but failed to properly report, widespread abuse. Lombard's order, a copy of which OSV News has requested, did

not name any archdiocesan officials — including Aymond — as being under criminal investigation, according to The Guardian.

The 92-year-old Hecker was indicted by a grand jury in September 2023 for aggravated rape, aggravated kidnapping, aggravated crime against nature and theft. According to New Orleans Police Department reports, Hecker raped and kidnapped a victim, who was not named, between Jan. 1, 1975, and Dec. 31, 1976.

A team of forensic psychiatrists recently said the 92-year-old priest is unfit to stand trial due to short-term memory loss, according to The Guardian, citing a report reviewed by its team and local television station WWL.

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In response to an OSV News inquiry at the time of Hecker's arrest, the Archdiocese of New Orleans said in a statement that Hecker "has not had priestly faculties since 2002," and that he was "included on the list of clergy removed from ministry for abuse of a minor in 2018."

The archdiocese also told OSV News at the time that it had "reported Lawrence Hecker to law enforcement authorities in different jurisdictions multiple times since 2002," and had "fully cooperated and will continue to cooperate with any law enforcement investigation" into the retired priest.

Pucheu told OSV News that in 2022 the Louisiana State Police Bureau of Investigations Special Victims Unit had "initiated an investigation into the Archdiocese of New Orleans following numerous complaints of child sexual abuse.

"Since the inception of the investigation, investigators have executed a search warrant and arrested former Priest, Lawrence Hecker," said Pucheu. "As part of the ongoing investigation, on Monday, April 22, 2024, SVU investigators obtained an additional search warrant to collect information and documents from the Archdiocese of New Orleans."

Pucheu noted that the archdiocese "is cooperating with investigators to fulfill the terms of the search warrant," adding, "This investigation remains ongoing with no further information available at this time."

In a 1999 statement made to the archdiocese, Hecker himself had acknowledged committing "overtly sexual acts" with at least three underage boys in the late 1960s and 1970s. He also confessed to having close relationships with four other boys into the 1980s.

In August 2023, The Guardian and WWL conducted a surprise interview with Hecker at his apartment complex, with the disheveled-looking priest chalking his abuse up to the sexually permissive behavior of the time.

A few weeks later, during a brief Aug. 24, 2023, phone call with OSV News, Hecker denied his admission of abuse.

"Things get twisted around," he said before hanging up.

However, in January, prosecutors said that Hecker had admitted under oath that he views child pornography.