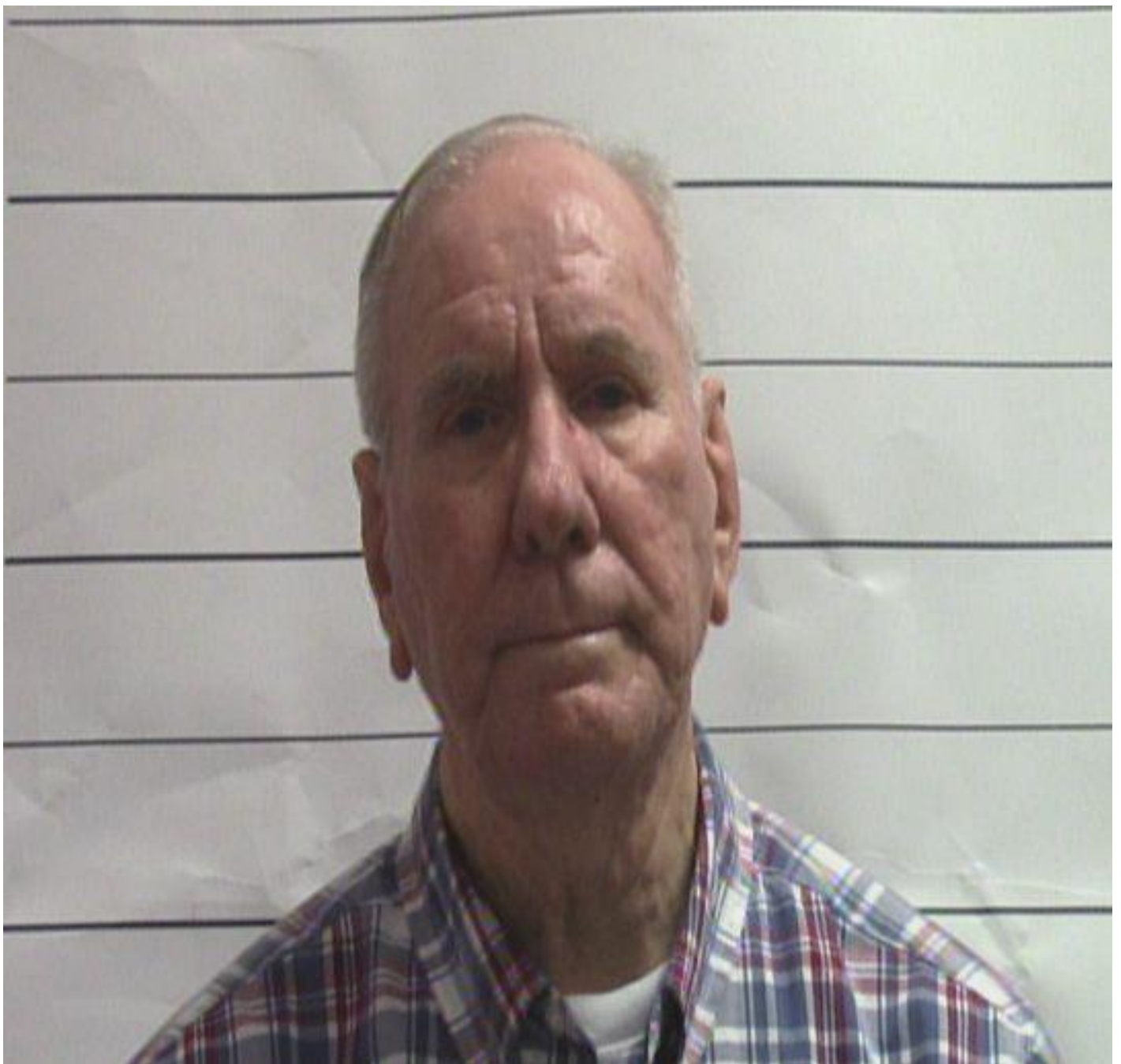


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Monster in our midst: Timeline of George Brignac's abuse in New Orleans area churches

BY RAMON ANTONIO VARGAS | Staff writer and DAVID HAMMER | WWL-TV

DEC 16, 2020 - 3:55 PM



Booking photo of George Brignac from Dec. 13, 2019

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A review of more than 10,000 pages of documents from the Orleans Parish district attorney's office reveal a timeline of George Brignac's abuse over decades in Archdiocese of New Orleans churches.

Jan. 6, 1935: George Feldner Brignac is born to Horace L. Brignac Sr. and Ethel Marie Cocke Brignac.

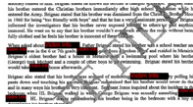
1953: Brignac graduates from De La Salle High School, which was founded by the Christian Brothers. He joins the order soon after graduation.

1960: The Christian Brothers dismiss Brignac for reasons that aren't immediately clear. Many years later, his twin brother — the late Rev. Horace L. "H.L." Brignac — says George is kicked out for being "too friendly with boys."

THE MONSTER IN OUR MIDST

A timeline on how one New Orleans clergyman stayed close to his prey. (Reporting by Ramon Antonio Vargas | The Times-Picayune and David Hammer | WWL-TV)





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1964: Brignac begins teaching at St. Matthew the Apostle in River Ridge. He also serves as a prefect of discipline.

1976: The Archdiocese of New Orleans ordains Brignac as a deacon. He is assigned to Our Lady of the Rosary Church in the Bayou St. John neighborhood. Archdiocesan leaders either never learned the reason for Brignac's dismissal from the Christian Brothers, accepted Brignac's claim that it was "for reasons of health," or didn't care.



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1977-78: Three boys at St. Matthew accuse Brignac of fondling them. Jefferson Parish authorities charge the deacon with three counts of molesting a juvenile. He pleads not guilty and wins an acquittal at a bench trial.

1978: Brignac is allowed to move from St. Matthew's faculty to Our Lady of the Rosary, where he is still a deacon.

1980: A boy alleges that Brignac fondled the child's penis, tickled his chest and asked for a kiss. New Orleans police again book him with molestation of a juvenile, but there's no indication prosecutors ever filed charges. It's unclear why.

1984: Brignac leaves Our Lady of the Rosary's school but remains a deacon at the church there. He teaches at Cabrini High School for the next four years.

1988: New Orleans prosecutors charge Brignac with groping a boy at a 1987 Christmas party. When a large group of priests shows up in court in support of Brignac, the boy loses his nerve to testify. His family agrees to let prosecutors drop the case. Brignac undergoes psychotherapy and agrees to avoid contact with children. Nonetheless, the Archdiocese of New Orleans indefinitely suspends him from the clergy. His career as a schoolteacher is also over.

I am deeply grateful to you for your excellent work in this case and your steadfast support of the Archdiocese.
I regret that the circumstances prevent further contact with you in person. If needed, I will attempt to reach you by telephone.
With assurance of my cordial best wishes and prayers, I remain,
Very truly yours,
George Brignac
Deacon of the Archdiocese

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1998: George Brignac joins the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic community service fraternity. The organization lets him hold a number of positions during his two decades of membership, including ones typically reserved for priests.

2002: After a Boston Globe investigation shows the worldwide Catholic Church covered up thousands of cases involving clergymen who had molested children, then-New Orleans Archbishop Alfred Hughes makes Brignac's indefinite suspension from ministry a permanent one. Hughes asks Brignac to voluntarily leave the clergy, but Brignac refuses.



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2009: The Rev. Robert Massett, then pastor of St. Mary Magdalen Church, invites Brignac to read at Masses as a lector. Brignac — whose Knights of Columbus chapter is based at that church — undergoes training to prevent child abuse and report instances of it. He discloses on paperwork that he had previously been arrested and fired from jobs for child abuse allegations, yet he is allowed to complete the training and Massett signs off as Brignac's supervisor.



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Circa 2011: Brignac begins taking an interest in an altar boy in a wheelchair, trying unsuccessfully to persuade the child's mother to let the boy come over to Brignac's home. Massett says he believed Brignac only spoke once to the boy before a parent put an end to it.

2013: The archdiocese quietly pays an \$88,500 settlement to a man who first came forward with an abuse complaint against Brignac in the wake of the 2002 scandal. The settlement

amount remains secret for the time being, with the archdiocese saying the victim requested confidentiality.

2017: In his role with the Knights of Columbus, Brignac speaks to a group of children at St. Mary Magdalen about a century-old miracle in Portugal and helps organize a special commemorative service featuring children.

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2018: The Archdiocese of New Orleans pays a \$550,000 settlement to a man who was an altar boy when Brignac was in charge of the altar boy program at Our Lady of the Rosary and was a student of Brignac's at the school there. He claims Brignac raped him and otherwise molested him regularly between 1978 and 1982, at Brignac's house and in his car. The man and his attorney, Roger Stetter, speak publicly about the settlement, prompting more accusers to come forward. At least 15 other Brignac victims receive settlements from the archdiocese totaling roughly \$3 million. Meanwhile, Archbishop Gregory Aymond in November

releases a list of 57 priests and deacons faced with credible child sex abuse allegations. Brignac's name is first on the roster, which spurs another wave of abuse claims against the archdiocese.

2019: New Orleans police arrest Brignac on a count of first-degree rape after speaking with the recipient of the \$550,000 settlement and another alleged victim who accuses Brignac of molesting him — and ultimately raping him — beginning when the victim was as young as 3. Prosecutors file charges. Brignac, who faces a mandatory life sentence if convicted, makes bail and pleads not guilty. Prosecutors line up roughly two dozen other men who are prepared to testify that they, too, had been preyed on by Brignac, including victims who had settled their cases, had pressed the earlier criminal cases, or were newly identified. The victims report abuses over nearly three decades, from after his 1960 dismissal from the Christian Brothers to shortly before his 1988 suspension of duty as a deacon.

Spring 2020: A courthouse closure caused by the coronavirus pandemic dashes victims' hopes that an aging, increasingly frail Brignac

might be tried quickly. The Archdiocese of New Orleans, citing financial strain, files for bankruptcy protection.

June 29, 2020: Paramedics rush Brignac, 85, from an Uptown nursing home to Touro Infirmary. He's short of breath and goes into cardiac arrest in the ambulance. He is pronounced dead soon after his arrival, sparing Brignac from ever facing criminal punishment.

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