

https://www.nola.com/news/crime_police/virgil-vm-wheeler-metairie-sex-abuse-molestation-church/article_b9fbd934-d49b-11ed-938a-a7a460aeb983.html

Virgil Wheeler, former St. Francis Xavier deacon convicted of child sex abuse, has died

Wheeler pleaded guilty to indecent behavior with a juvenile.

BY MICHELLE HUNTER | Staff writer

Apr 6, 2023



Virgil "V.M." Wheeler III

Advocate file photo

Virgil Maxey "V.M." Wheeler III, the lawyer and suspended deacon at St. Francis Xavier Church in Old Metairie who pleaded guilty in to sexually abusing a boy, died Thursday morning, according to the Jefferson Parish Coroner's Office.

Wheeler, 64, of Metairie, died of pancreatic cancer, the Coroner's Office said.

Following an investigation by the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office, Wheeler pleaded guilty to four counts of indecent behavior with a juvenile on Dec. 6 and was sentenced to five years of probation.

Wheeler was a family friend of the victim, and was accused of grooming the boy through gifts and sleepovers that eventually led to sexual abuse, according to authorities. Between 2000 and 2002, Wheeler was accused of performing oral sex on the victim and showering with him.

The abuse took place before Wheeler was ordained as a member of the clergy in 2018. The Archdiocese of New Orleans suspended Wheeler from his duties at St. Francis Xavier in August 2020 after the now-33-year-old victim revealed more details about the encounters to his father and church officials, according to a civil lawsuit.

The Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Office charged Wheeler with two counts of sexual battery and two counts of indecent behavior. Prosecutors reduced the sexual battery charges to indecent behavior under a plea agreement, according to court records.