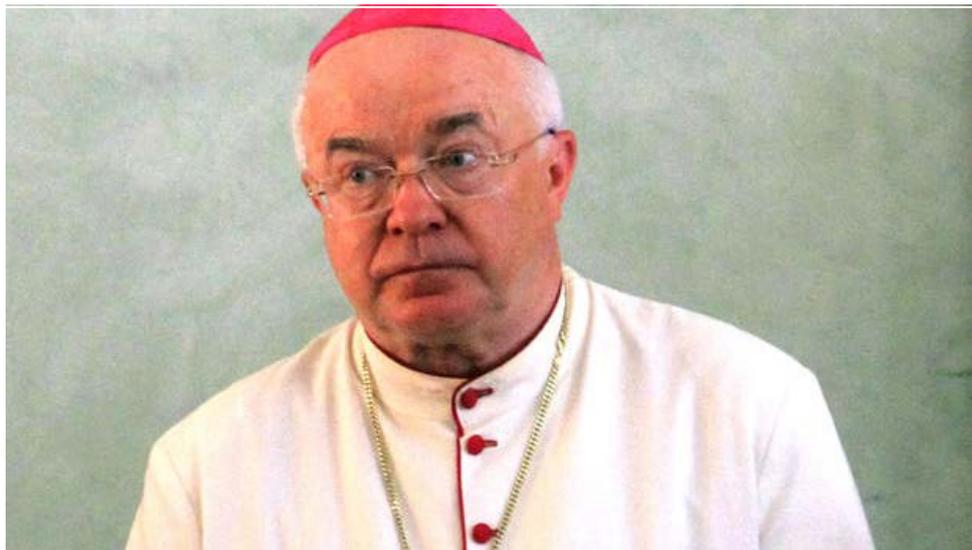




AP / August 28, 2015, 10:44 AM

# Highest-ranking Vatican official charged with sex abuse found dead



File picture taken in Santo Domingo, on August 12, 2011, of the Vatican's then-envoy to the Dominican Republic, Jozef Wesolowski. / ERIKA SANTELICES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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**VATICAN CITY** -- The Vatican's former ambassador to the Dominican Republic, the highest-ranking Holy See official to ever be charged with sexually abusing young boys, was found dead Friday as he awaited trial, the Vatican said.

In a statement, the Vatican press office said preliminary checks on **Jozef Wesolowski**, 67, "indicated that the death was from natural causes."

A Franciscan priest who works as a confessor in St. Peter's Basilica found Wesolowski dead at 5 a.m. with the television on in the Vatican room where has been held in modified house arrest for several months, it said.

The statement said the Vatican prosecutor ordered an immediate autopsy and that Pope Francis was duly informed. The Vatican said the cause of death would be released.

**Wesolowski had been due to go on trial in a Vatican tribunal** on July 11 for allegedly causing grave psychological harm to victims and possessing an enormous quantity of child pornography. But on the morning of the hearing, he was hospitalized in intensive care because of an unidentified "sudden illness." The presiding judge adjourned the trial indefinitely until he recovered.

Wesolowski was previously defrocked under the Vatican's canon law procedures but was facing possible jail time if convicted in the Vatican's civil tribunal.

The trial had been seen as a high-profile way for Francis to make good on pledges

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against Wesolowski.

Charges included possession of what prosecutors described as enormous quantities of child pornography on his two computers, including after Wesolowski was recalled to the Vatican in 2013 following the emergence of rumors that he sexually abused shoeshine boys near the waterfront in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.

Wesolowski was the first such high-ranking Vatican prelate to be criminally charged at the Holy See for sexually abusing minors.

The case was particularly delicate because Wesolowski wasn't just another priest, but rather a direct representative of the pope and had been ordained as a priest and bishop by his fellow Pole, St. John Paul II.

Dominican authorities had initially questioned the Vatican's sequestration of Wesolowski after the abuse rumors began circulating. But the Holy See insisted that it had jurisdiction over him given he was a diplomat and was subject to the criminal laws of the Vatican City State. Wesolowski lost his diplomatic immunity when he was removed and defrocked, however, and the Vatican subsequently said he could face charges elsewhere after the Vatican's case against him was finished.

Dominican authorities had said their investigation uncovered allegations that Wesolowski had paid at least six minors to watch them masturbate and had



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recorded it with his mobile phone, but prosecutors did not file charges immediately because he enjoyed diplomatic immunity.

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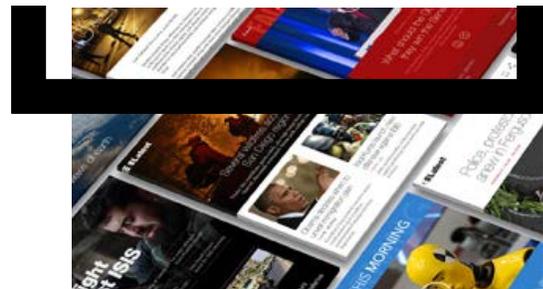
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