

Cardinal George Pell released from prison, assault charges dropped

by [Claire Giangravé](#) in the [May 6, 2020](#) issue



(AP Photo/Andy Brownbill)

Cardinal George Pell, who was sentenced to six years in prison after being convicted in late 2018 of the sexual assault of an underage choirboy in the late 1990s, was released April 7 in Australia and all charges were dropped.

Pell was the highest-ranking Catholic leader ever to be convicted of crimes relating to the sexual abuse of minors.

The High Court of Australia, comparable to the Supreme Court of the United States, voted 7-0 to release the cardinal immediately.

“It is evident that there is a significant possibility that an innocent person has been convicted because the evidence did not establish guilt to the requisite standard of proof,” the full decision of the High Court said.

Pell was convicted on December 11, 2018, by the County Court of Victoria on the single charge of sexually assaulting an underage boy and other acts of indecency in the presence of minors. The crimes allegedly took place in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia, where Pell served as bishop between December 1996 and February 1997.

The 78-year-old cardinal—who has maintained his innocence—spent 13 months and ten days in prison, mostly in solitary confinement. —Religion News Service