News



Ribbons are tied onto a fence as a protest at St Mary's Cathedral, in Sydney, Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2023. Police plan to ask a judge to ban gay rights protesters from demonstrating outside St. Mary's Cathedral during Australian Cardinal George Pell's Sydney funeral Feb. 1. (Bianca De Marchi/AAP Image via AP)

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Australian police plan to ask a judge to ban gay rights protesters from demonstrating outside the funeral of Cardinal George Pell in Sydney on Feb. 2 due to public safety concerns.

Pell, who was once considered the third-highest ranking cleric in the Vatican and spent more than a year in prison before his child abuse convictions were squashed in 2020, died in Rome this month at age 81.

The staunchly conservative church leader will lie in St. Mary’s Cathedral starting Feb. 1 and will be interred at the cathedral after a funeral Mass the following day.

The New South Wales Police Force said on Jan. 31 it has rejected an application from Sydney-based gay rights group Community Action for Rainbow Rights for a permit to protest outside the cathedral on Feb. 2 due to safety concerns.

It said police Commissioner Karen Webb will apply to the New South Wales Supreme Court on Feb. 1 to prohibit the rally.

"The NSW Police Force recognizes and supports the rights of individuals and groups to exercise their rights of free speech and peaceful assembly, however, the first priority is always the safety of the wider community,"police said in a statement.

Pell was an outspoken and polarizing figure throughout his church career and remains divisive in his native Australia in death.

The protest group has posted on social media its intention to go ahead with what it calls its "Pell go to Hell!" protest.

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"We need everybody to come out and protest on Thursday. We can’t let the police get away with denying us our right to protest this bigot’s funeral!" the group said.

As archbishop of Melbourne and later archbishop of Sydney, Pell repeatedly refused to give Communion to gay activists wearing rainbow-colored sashes.

"God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve, and important consequences follow from this," Pell told a St. Mary’s congregation in 2002 after he first refused Communion to a gay activist in Sydney.

Pell was also a lightning rod for disagreements over whether the Catholic Church has been properly held to account for past child sex abuse.

Pell and his supporters believed he was scapegoated for all the crimes of the Australian Catholic Church's botched response to clergy sexual abuse.

Protesters plan to tie ribbons in memory of child abuse victims to the cathedral’s fence on Feb. 1 as thousands of mourners are expected to gather to see the cardinal’s coffin.

"Ribbon tying on church fences has become a visual symbol of those who have suffered abuse at the hands of the church and reminder that these crimes go largely unpunished," activists posted.