



Former Bishop of Broome Christopher Saunders arrives at the West Australian District Court in Perth, Tuesday, Aug.11, 2026. (Aaron Bunch/AAP)

by Associated Press

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An Australian jury on Thursday convicted a former [Catholic bishop](#) renowned for hosting alcohol-fueled house parties of sexually abusing two young Indigenous men.

The District Court of Western Australia jury convicted [Christopher Saunders](#), 76, of 13 out of 19 charges of sexual abuse that allegedly occurred between 2008 and 2019 in his sprawling diocese on the country's tropical northwest coast.

Prosecutors alleged he lured young Indigenous men to his church-owned house in the tourist town of Broome with free alcohol and cigarettes paid for with church funds. House rules included that the male-only guests had to remove their shirts.

"The accused had a sexual interest in young Aboriginal men and a tendency to act on that interest when the opportunity presented itself," Prosecutor Adam Ebell had told the court.

The convictions included one count of sexual penetration without consent and a dozen indecent assaults.

He was acquitted of six charges that included a third alleged victim and indecent dealing with a child over the age of 16. While the age of consent in the state is 16, the law raises the effective age of consent to 18 if an older person is in a position of trust, power or responsibility.

Four charges of sexual penetration of a child younger than 13 years were dropped on the first day of Saunders' three-week trial.

Saunders is one of the most senior Australian Catholics to be convicted in a global clergy abuse scandal that has besieged the [Vatican](#) for years.

[Cardinal George Pell](#) was convicted of abusing choirboys, and [Archbishop Philip Wilson](#) was convicted of covering up child sex abuse. But both Australian clerics successfully appealed their convictions.

Saunders showed no reaction as the verdicts were announced. He had been free on bail since he was charged two years ago. He did not apply to remain on bail after his convictions and will be sentenced on Sept. 21.

Defense lawyer Tony Hager had told the jurors in his closing address that Saunders did not deny holding "boozy parties" where young men often stripped off their shirts and shorts.

Saunders' behavior had been at times unusual, boozy and "might even be sleazy," but it was never sexual, Hager argued.

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Saunders led the remote Broome Diocese from 1996 until he resigned in 2021. The Outback diocese covers an area larger than France with a population of only 50,000 people. Most of the region's Catholics are Indigenous.

His resignation followed a police announcement that they had dropped a criminal investigation into sexual allegations against him.

He had stood down from the church governance role a year earlier after news media reported the allegations.

The Vatican began its own investigation into Saunders in 2022, then handed the Western Australia Police Force a 200-page report on its findings the following year. Police reopened the criminal investigation and charged Saunders in 2024.

While the report's contents were never officially made public, they were leaked to Australia's Seven Network television news, which reported Saunders likely sexually assaulted four Indigenous youths and potentially groomed another 67 Indigenous youths and men.

The current Bishop of Broome, Tim Norton, issued an apology to Saunders' victims and the diocese after the verdicts.

"We are acutely aware that the victims of this betrayal are not just those who have told their stories to police and before the court," Norton said in a statement.

"The hurt extends to those who have placed their trust in our leadership and our church," Norton added.

A national inquiry into the Catholic Church and other institutions' responses to child abuse [found that 7%](#) of Australian Catholic priests were accused of sexually abusing children between 1950 and 2010.