



# CathCommSA

## Catholic Communications Adelaide

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**Strictly embargoed until Midnight, Friday March 22, 2002**

## CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP SAYS SORRY

Archbishop Philip Wilson has offered a "full and complete" apology to parents and their students who attended one of the Catholic schools in South Australia between 1986 and 1991.

Legal constraints preclude any more specific identification of the school or the persons involved.

Archbishop Wilson's apology relates to allegations that a currently unknown number of students attending the school during that time were victims of alleged sexual abuse by a worker.

These allegations were first raised in 1991 and were investigated by the police at the time, but it is the church's understanding that no outcome has been reached. It is believed the alleged offender absconded immediately prior to the police reporting the allegations to the principal of the school. The police are pursuing their enquiries.

In July 2001, parents of some of the students who are thought to have been possible victims brought the issue to the Archdiocese's attention once again.

Archbishop Wilson said police have been offered the Catholic Church's unqualified support and cooperation in their ongoing investigation into the alleged incidents and in their attempts to bring the alleged offender to justice.

Archbishop Wilson has written to parents of all students who attended the school during that period and has set up a hotline to provide information and access to support for parents. Parents have also been involved in a series of meetings with the church to discuss the progress of continuing investigations.

Archbishop Wilson, who has met with the Police Commissioner Mal Hyde over the allegations, has urged parents of possible victims to contact police with any information they can provide.

"I offer my humblest apology to those who may be found to have been victimised and I express my deep sorrow that such events may have occurred in the life of the church," Archbishop Wilson said.

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"As the Archbishop of Adelaide, I make a full and complete apology to those who may have been involved and to the community for this already dreadful situation, irrespective of what else the investigations may disclose.

"It's my intention to meet with the families of possible victims, to comfort them and to have discussions with them about their present concerns and their future.

"I feel great sympathy for these children and their families who may have been involved. I have assured them in writing that I am committed to their care and to the attainment of truth in the investigations.

"I am also committed to ensuring that justice is done. There is tremendous cooperation between the SA police force and the church which was reiterated at my meeting with the police commissioner.

"We are serious about this and want to emphasise in our community the importance of child safety procedures and the necessity for people everywhere not only to comply with the law but also to be really careful with child protection procedures.

"The Catholic Church is re-examining what happened in the past to find out what the facts were and is looking at its present operations to ensure that all children who are confided into its care are kept as safe as possible.

"If there are any enquiries by either State or Federal governments into these issues, we will cooperate fully with them."

Archbishop Wilson said that one of his first messages as the new head of the Catholic Church in Adelaide was that the Archdiocese will continue to be unfaltering in embracing the principles put forward in the Church's national response to dealing with sexual abuse allegations contained in the *Towards Healing* program.

***Further information telephone Chris Rann on 8211 7771 (24 hours)***