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CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP RELEASES ST ANN'S REPORT

Adelaide's Catholic Archbishop Philip Wilson today publicly released the findings of a report by leading Queen's Counsel Brian Hayes into the sex abuse of students from St Ann's Special School between 1986 and 1991.

Mr Hayes' report shows that the Church and its various agencies had failed to properly exercise their duties, both in relation to their appointment processes and their procedures for dealing with reports of child sex abuse.

Archbishop Wilson said he hoped that recognition of the serious mistakes revealed in the report and the current response by the church to address them would help the victims and their families in their healing.

"This report gives the Church some very powerful messages," Archbishop Wilson said.

"People made wrong decisions, they did not see or respect the urgency and seriousness of the matter, and failed to carry out proper processes to protect the children and the needs of the families involved.

"I am satisfied there was no deliberate cover-up of the abuse, as many in the community had feared and suspected, but it shows clearly that we made terrible errors of judgment and we need to make sure they can never happen again.

"I am committed to the ongoing care and support of the students and parents involved at St Ann's. I also want to -- once again -- express my very deep shock and sorrow at the abuse of those who are among the most vulnerable in our society," he said.

Archbishop Wilson said the Hayes report was officially subject to legal privilege, but he believed it was imperative to waive that confidentiality so the families, members of the Catholic Church and the wider community could be assured of complete openness.

"I am going against the strongest possible legal advice in releasing this report publicly but I'm convinced it's the right thing to do," he said.

On September 12, 2003, Brian Perkins, a former employee at St Ann's, was sentenced to ten years and six months jail, with a six year non-parole period, after pleading guilty to five offences involving unlawful sexual conduct with three students from the school.

Mr Hayes' inquiry was set up by Archbishop Wilson in response to the charges being laid to examine:

1. How Brian Perkins had gained employment at the school
2. Whether there was any knowledge of his background or propensities
3. When the allegations of sexual abuse were raised in 1991, how the matter was handled by those having responsibility to do so at the time

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The Catholic Church last year made gifts totalling \$2.1 million to assist the former St Ann's students. Acceptance of the gifts did not preclude any legal action that families may have wanted to take against the Church nor did it oblige confidentiality.

The Church has also implemented rigorous new policies in schools and other agencies to ensure immediate action is taken on any reports of abuse.

Archbishop Wilson said the Church was keen to address any legal concerns people might have in the most conciliatory way possible.

Copies of Mr Hayes' report have been sent to the families of the children involved and will be made available to the media and on request.

For further information or to arrange a time for an interview, please contact:

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