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CHURCH OFFERS PAYOUT TO SAY SORRY

\$2 million compensation

EXCLUSIVE

By COLIN JAMES

THE South Australian Catholic Church has created legal history by offering an unconditional \$2 million compensation package to victims of child sex abuse.

Offers will be delivered today to more than 30 families of young boys who allegedly were abused by a bus driver at a Catholic school for the intellectually disabled between 1987 and 1991.

The offers are unprecedented in that they do

not contain any confidentiality clauses and recipients do not have to waive their rights to take legal action against the church for compensation.

Full details of the package will be revealed today by the Archbishop of Adelaide, Philip Wilson, who is understood to have ignored legal and insurance advice not to make the offers on such an unencumbered basis.

Instead, he has decided to offer compensation to families under the church's "Towards Healing" process of dealing with victims of child sex abuse at amounts which exceed those recommended by lawyers and insurers.

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CROWING Mark Brownlow was congratulated at the Alma Tavern.

By MICHELANGELO RUCI and LOUISE TRECCANI

It was cheers — and beers — for Brownlow Medalist Mark Brownlow on his return to Adelaide last night.

First at the Adelaide Tavern, then at the Alma Tavern, the captain was given a rousing welcome. A loud roar erupted as he entered the room.

Church offers compensation

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The decision has national significance, as past church payouts to victims across Australia have included confidentiality clauses barring them from discussing details with third parties. Previous payouts also have been made on the strict condition victims agree not to take any further legal action or to seek more compensation.

Archbishop Wilson yesterday declined to comment, but *The Advertiser* understands he has been the driving force behind the compensation package, which will be funded from within the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide.

"He has been adamant, right from the beginning of this terrible saga, that the victims and their families must be looked after by the church," said a senior church official, who asked not to be named.

"He has made it very clear to all of us that every effort is to be made to

provide all the support that we can, pastorally and financially".

Other church officials said the decision to offer compensation as a "gift" was made by Archbishop Wilson more than a year ago, but was stalled by the prosecution of pedophile Brian Bertram Morris Perkins. Perkins, 67, was sentenced earlier this month to 10 years' jail, with a six-year non-parole period, after pleading guilty to video-taping, photographing and sexually assaulting three boys with Down Syndrome who attended St Ann's Catholic School, Marion, between 1987 and 1991.

He was extradited from Queensland in March last year to face criminal charges.

Perkins had fled South Australia in 1992 when he was released on bail over charges of indecently assaulting and photographing young boys at St Ann's, where he worked as a bus driver and volunteer in its woodwork shop.

Parents complained to the church last

July after meeting at a social gathering, where they learned - for the first time - there had been a police investigation into allegations Perkins had interfered with some of their intellectually disabled children. Many of the families have since received counselling provided by the church, while others have asked a lawyer to prepare a class action to seek damages for breach of duty of care and negligence.

They also are seeking the release of an inquiry ordered last year by Mr Hyde into why detectives investigating Perkins were ordered to drop the case when he moved to Queensland, where he was located last year living in Gin Gin, east of Bundaberg.

The parents have sought a meeting with Premier Mike Rann, asking him to table in Parliament the report of an inquiry ordered by Archbishop Wilson into the church's handling of the allegations against Perkins. The report is being written by barrister Brian Hayes, QC.