

Report: 1,100 Child Abuse Complaints Lobbed Against Australia's Anglican Church

The head of Australia's Anglican Church expressed sorrow and shame after a government report published on Friday said close to 1,100 people had filed child sexual assault claims against the church over a 35-year period.

The interim report, which said most children were around age 11 when they were abused, came a month after a high-level inquiry into child abuse was told the Australian Catholic church had paid \$276 million (\$212 million) in compensation to thousands of victims since 1980.

The report, which was published by the same inquiry, the Royal Commission Into Child Abuse, said the complaints identified 569 Anglican clergy, teachers and volunteers as alleged abusers. There were another 133 alleged abusers whose roles at the church were not known.

Melbourne Archbishop Philip Freier said he felt a "personal sense of shame and sorrow" at the way the church had apparently silenced victims.

"Anglicans have been truly shocked and dismayed [by] the scope of our failure to tackle child sexual abuse within the church," Freier, the church's primate, said in a statement on its website.

A royal commission is Australia's most powerful kind of government-appointed inquiry and can compel witnesses to give evidence and recommend prosecutions.

The current royal commission had previously heard that seven percent of Catholic priests working in Australia between 1950

and 2010 were accused of child-sex crimes, but few were pursued.

The commission's latest report said 1,082 people had lodged complaints between 1980 and 2015 about 1,115 alleged incidents while they were under the care of the Anglican church. Some of the incidents dated back to 1950.

The Anglican church had paid \$31 million to 459 of those complainants, the report said. Another report published by the inquiry last month said the Catholic church had paid compensation to about three-quarters of complainants.

"It tells us that any processes we had in place did not prevent abusers working in our church, as clergy and lay leaders and, in the roles most trusted to care for our children, as teachers and youth workers," church general secretary Anne Hywood told the inquiry.

"We are deeply ashamed of the many ways in which we have let down survivors, both in the way we have acted and the way we have failed to act," she said.

The royal commission is due to report back to the government in December. {eo}

© 2017 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.