

Catholic Church confesses to; a ‘shameful, corrosive’ history

THE AUSTRALIAN
OCTOBER 22, 2015 12:00AM

JOHN LYONS

The Catholic Church has described its history regarding child abuse in Australia as “shameful, corrosive and complicit”.

The church says it now expects its liability exposure to be potentially \$1 billion on top of payments already made.

Catholic spokesman Francis Sullivan said the church’s history was “littered with examples of cover-ups and crimes and of church leaders failing in one of the very basic tenets of their calling”.

Mr Sullivan is leading the church’s support for a national redress scheme to compensate victims of abuse. The scheme has been recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In a speech to the Australian Catholic University, Mr Sullivan said it was important Catholics did not succumb to a feeling that the commission or media were out to “get” the church.

“The facts are we are at the very centre of the royal commission because collectively the Catholic Church is responsible for more abuse than any other institution in Australia, public or private,” he said on Tuesday night.

“We are the focus because our history of child sexual abuse is shameful, corrosive and complicit.

“It is spread across at least 60 or 70 well-documented years and very likely decades more.

“It is littered with examples of cover-ups and crimes and of church leaders failing in one of the very basic tenets of their calling, to care for and protect the most vulnerable.”

So far the federal government has been noncommittal in its response to the recommendation for a national redress scheme.

Under the model recommended by the commission, the institutions in whose establishments the abuse occurred will pay the compensation to victims.

It is estimated by the commission that payments will be \$4.01bn over 10 years — they would be capped at a maximum of \$200,000, and an average of \$65,000.

Mr Sullivan said in Australia the Catholic Church had a unique opportunity.

“We should embrace this opportunity to re-establish the church as a credible organisation, willing to acknowledge failings, accept criticism and put in place reforms and move forward.”