



Congregational Leaders'  
Conference Aotearoa  
New Zealand



**Te Huinga o ngā Pihopa  
Katorika o Aotearoa**

*New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference*

## **Response to the Findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions**

**September 2024**

## Preamble

Two months ago, the final report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care was tabled in Parliament. It marked the conclusion of an important five years, which shed light on our shameful history of violence and abuse in faith-based and state care. It revealed that the Church failed young people and vulnerable adults in the worst possible way within organisations that denied and delayed accountability, and that authorities failed to respond adequately.

While the report chronicles a disgraceful aspect of our nation's past, it also provides us with a roadmap – continuing the work begun before the Royal Commission and extending into our future.

The Catholic Church, along with other churches, had asked to be included in the terms of reference of the Royal Commission because we believed it would help not only the Church, but also our country, address these difficult truths in a more comprehensive way.

Today we, the bishops and congregational leaders of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, renew our sincere and unconditional apology to all who suffered in Church settings, and to their whānau. We are deeply sorry. We know that words alone are not enough; we must demonstrate our apology by taking responsibility and through concrete actions. We have made changes, and we remain committed to continuing this work to ensure accountability and healing.

In this document, we provide our response to the key findings from the Royal Commission's final report pertaining to the Catholic Church.

In the two months since the report was published, bishops and leaders of religious orders have worked to consider the findings and provide a unified Catholic response consistent with the Royal Commission's timeline. That is contained in the following pages.

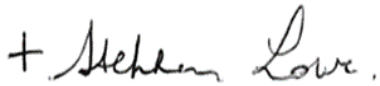
In coming months, we will continue our assessment of the final report, and especially those aspects that are specific to the Catholic Church. A response to the report's recommendations will follow in due course.

These formal documents are being prepared and published at the same time work is continuing in our dioceses, congregations, parishes, schools, social service agencies, chaplaincies and other communities to strengthen our safeguarding initiatives.

We are grateful to the dedicated staff and volunteers in our ministries who are implementing protocols and practices that we know make Catholic settings safe. Today [we restate our 10 commitments](#), first shared in January 2023. Those commitments place victims and survivors at the heart of our response to abuse. They adopt best-practice principles from within and beyond the Church for reform and ongoing improvement.

We accept the important and particular responsibility the Church has at this time. We want to be part of a wider, whole-of-community promise to use the Royal Commission's findings as a catalyst for change.

May each of us, in our own context, join a national movement that not only says – but actively ensures – that this tragic past will never be repeated, working together to achieve a future free from such harm.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Stephen Lowe."

+ Stephen Lowe  
President NZCBC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr Tom Rouse".

Fr Tom Rouse SSC  
President CLCANZ

## Tūtohi | Recommendation 130

The government and faith-based institutions should publish their responses to this report and the Inquiry's interim reports on whether they accept each of the Inquiry's findings in whole or in part, and the reasons for any disagreement. The responses should be published within two months of this report being tabled in the House of Representatives.

## Findings relating to Catholic entities

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### Part 4, Chapter 6: 1182 (k)

From the over 2,300 survivors who spoke to the Inquiry:

- ix. a higher proportion of survivors in faith settings than in State care were sexually abused. The highest reported levels of sexual abuse were at Dilworth School in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (Anglican), Marylands School in Ōtautahi Christchurch (Catholic) and at Catholic institutions in general.

#### *Response*

Catholic entities deeply regret the abuse that occurred in our institutions. We recognise that this cohort of survivors represents a subsection of those who have been abused in state and faith-based care. Catholic entities [have shared our own statistical research on reported abuse in Catholic institutions during the Inquiry period](#). Further work would need to be done to make an adequate comparative analysis with “Catholic institutions in general”.

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### Part 4, Chapter 6: 1182 (m)

At Marylands School and Hebron Trust, as detailed in the Inquiry's interim report *Stolen Lives, Marked Souls*:

- i. abuse and neglect was extensive and extreme
- ii. sexual abuse was pervasive
- iii. physical, emotional, and psychological abuse led to some survivors living in perpetual fear
- iv. evidence suggests the abuse was used as punishment as well as to intimidate
- v. there was pervasive neglect including neglect of basic needs as well as cultural, medical, and emotional needs
- vi. children and young people suffered mental and physical pain
- vii. cultural and religious abuse was extensive
- viii. survivors experienced racism

#### *Response*

Catholic entities acknowledge the harm caused to those at Marylands and the harm inflicted by Br McGrath on those at Hebron Trust.

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## Part 7, Chapter 12: 883 (g)

i. The Catholic Church was at fault for:  
the harm that has taken place in some Catholic educational institutions. That harm includes:

- serious sexual harm and inappropriate physical punishment

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

- inadequate steps taken in response to complaints of abuse and neglect

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

- putting students at risk of harm by appointing abusers to the school without effective methods in place for protecting students

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

- placing a heavy reliance on the opinions of psychiatrists in determining the ability of an abuser to rehabilitate and continue working in certain areas or in ministry, which resulted in abusers being transferred to other areas of ministry where reoffending occurred

*Response*

Accepted in part by Catholic entities.

The placing a reliance on the opinions of psychiatrists was best practice at that time. The reliance on psychiatrist opinions was accompanied by naivety and other assumptions that are now understood to be incorrect, including a belief that the individuals could be rehabilitated and a lack of understanding of recidivist offending. Catholic entities acknowledge that, with hindsight, much of the psychiatric advice it received in this period was incorrect.

Catholic entities recognise that the opinions of medical professionals remain part of the process in contemporary responses to professional misconduct or abuse. Whatever the advice, there remains an obligation on Catholic entities to undertake a risk assessment and seek to ensure adequate safeguarding plans and support are in place to prevent further harm.

ii. being slow to act when sexual abuse was occurring

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

iii. children being harmed in Catholic institutions where they should have been cared for and safe

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

iv. harm caused to children because of mistakes made by the Church which could have and should have been avoided

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

v. not doing more to prevent the pain and suffering of all those who should have been kept safe in the church's care

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

vi. the following factors which caused abuse to occur or prevented its disclosure:

- prioritising forgiveness over safeguarding and accountability for those who perpetrated the abuse and the leadership at the time with knowledge of the abuse

*Response*

Accepted in part by Catholic entities.

There was a tendency to regard abusive behaviour as a moral failure, which reflected a lack of understanding at the time of the behaviour's psycho-sexual nature. As acknowledged above, there were a number of assumptions that have been proved wrong by contemporary understandings of causes of offending and abuse.

- creating a power imbalance between religious/clergy and their parishioners

*Response*

Accepted in part by Catholic entities.

Catholic entities recognise that a "power imbalance" is inherent in the relationship between religious/clergy and their parishioners, especially during the period considered by the Inquiry.

- lack of resources of, and investment in, those with the care of children, young people and adults (when they should not have been in those positions)

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

- lack of training for those in care of children, young people and adults

*Response*

Accepted in part by Catholic entities.

During the Inquiry period, a lack of training caused abuse to occur in Catholic entities. In the earlier decades of the Inquiry period, various factors presented barriers to disclosure of abuse in Catholic entities, including a lack of training.

By the 1990s, the Church began actively encouraging disclosures of abuse. More recently, police vetting and training in safeguarding has become mandatory for all involved in ministry with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

- care for the reputation of the church

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

## Findings relating to faith-based entities generally

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### Part 3, Chapter 7: 454 (a)

People were more likely to be placed in State and faith-based residential and institutional (direct or indirect) care if they had experienced poverty, family crisis or violence, parental abuse and neglect, or were Deaf, disabled or mentally distressed; particularly if there was a lack of support for the household from others.

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities, who note the significance of this factor as an underpinning reality for many survivors.

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### Part 3, Chapter 7: 454 (d)

Parents were often convinced, sometimes through religious affiliation, that care placements outside the home or mainstream education would provide superior environments or opportunities for their children.

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

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### Part 3, Chapter 7: 454 (u)

Between the 1950s and 1970s, many unmarried pregnant girls and women were placed in faith-based homes. These homes often facilitated the subsequent adoptions of babies. These placements and adoptions were usually the result of family, religious and societal attitudes including racism.

#### *Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities, who note the power of prevailing cultural norms during this period.

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### Part 3, Chapter 7: 454 (v)

Adoption practices facilitated by the State or faith-based institutions for Māori were discriminatory and ignored whāngai Māori practices. From 1950 to the mid-1980s, adoption practices legally severed Tamariki and rangatahi Māori from their whakapapa and identity.

#### *Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

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### Part 4, Chapter 6: 1182 (k)

From the over 2,300 survivors who spoke to the Inquiry:

- i. many survivors experienced multiple forms of abuse and neglect, for example, 82 percent of survivors who spoke to us about sexual abuse also reported physical abuse

#### *Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

- ii. abuse and neglect were particularly prevalent in social welfare settings, faith settings (particularly Catholic, Anglican, and Gloriavale) and disability and mental health settings.

#### *Response*

Catholic entities deeply regret the abuse that occurred in our institutions. Catholic entities have shared [our own statistical research on reported abuse in Catholic institutions during the Inquiry period](#).

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### Part 7, Chapter 12: 882 (t)

The following faith-specific factors contributed to abuse and neglect in care:

- i. the authority and impunity of faith-based institutions created opportunities for abuse and neglect to occur and continue

#### *Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.



- ii. discriminatory attitudes, policies and practices that contributed to abuse and neglect

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

- iii. harmful use of beliefs and practices which created environments that fostered abuse and neglect

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

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**Part 7, Chapter 12: 884 (b)**

Some faith-based institutions began to introduce some safeguarding and protective factors from the late 1980s onward

*Response*

Accepted by Catholic entities.

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**Part 7, Chapter 12: 884 (g)**

Faith-based care settings either did not make changes or were slow to make changes to prevent and respond to abuse during the Inquiry period

*Response*

Accepted in part by Catholic entities. In some instances, this was true. In other instances, Catholic entities were developing responses and implementing changes on par with – or even ahead of – state-based institutions.

***From the Catholic Church's apology to victims and survivors of abuse at the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care:***

Many people asked for this Royal Commission to be established to give you, victims and survivors of abuse, a forum to be heard and acknowledged.

Today, recognising the importance of this moment, I apologise to you, on behalf of the bishops and congregational leaders of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I also apologise to you on behalf of those who preceded us as bishops and congregational leaders.

We offer no excuses for their actions, or for ours, that have caused you harm.

We have heard the survivors who have spoken to the Royal Commission so far.

We acknowledge all those victims and survivors who have spoken over the years.

We acknowledge all victims and survivors who have not yet been able to speak or may never be able to. We hear you in the silence and through those who speak for you.

We thank you all for your bravery and courage.

***– Delivered by Cardinal John Dew on 26 March 2021***

***Pope Francis' Prayer Intention for March 2023***

Let us pray for those who have suffered because of the wrongs done to them from members of the Church. May they find within the Church herself a concrete response to their pain and suffering.