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MEDIA RELEASE

Church leaders renew apology in Royal Commission response

New Zealand's Catholic bishops and leaders of religious congregations have renewed a "sincere and unconditional apology" to people who suffered abuse in Catholic settings as part of an initial response to a national inquiry.

In late July, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care's final report was published following a five-year examination of abuse in state and faith-based care. Organisations were asked to respond to the report's findings within two months.

In that response, New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference president Bishop Steve Lowe and Congregational Leaders Council of Aotearoa New Zealand president Fr Tom Rouse SSC said the Catholic Church had joined other churches and asked to be included in the terms of reference of the Royal Commission, which initially would have looked only at state care.

"We believed it would help not only the Church, but also our country, address these difficult truths in a more comprehensive way," Bishop Lowe and Fr Rouse wrote.

"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 leaders said they are "deeply sorry" to victims and survivors, as well as their whānau.

"We know that words alone are not enough; we must demonstrate our apology by taking responsibility and through concrete actions," they wrote.

"We have made changes, and we remain committed to continuing this work to ensure accountability and healing."

The Church's response focuses on 11 key sections of the final report that relate to the Catholic Church specifically or to faith-based institutions generally. The majority have been accepted, with some being accepted in part.

In coming months, the Church will continue its 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, parishes, schools, social service agencies, chaplaincies and other communities to strengthen our safeguarding initiatives," Fr Rouse and Bishop Lowe wrote.

They said a series of commitments published in January 2023 provide important additional context to the Church's ongoing promises to the community in responding to historical cases and in creating and maintaining safe settings for all people.

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“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,” Bishop Lowe and Fr Rouse wrote.

“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.”

The Catholic Church’s response to the Royal Commission’s findings can be found at:

<https://bit.ly/CatholicRCFindings>