

# A Resource for Catholic communities

## regarding the Royal Commission of Abuse into Care and Faith-based Institutions

### Introduction

This resource has been created as a reference for school and parish leaders as we approach the public hearings starting in late November 2020 where survivors of abuse in Catholic settings will be giving evidence.

It is likely that there will be heightened awareness of the Church's involvement in the Commission during this time. The hearings may also lead to increased media attention and scrutiny.

This attention may provide the opportunity or prompting for survivors to come forward to disclose abuse they endured, perhaps for the first time. The process of disclosing abuse and seeking redress is an important and difficult step for survivors on the long journey of healing.

The hearings may also be difficult for many in our communities when individuals and institutions, such as schools and parishes, are named. However, we recognise the need to acknowledge the past, examine failings, to listen, and to support this process so we may look to the future with hope.

### What is Te Rōpū Tautoko?

*Te Rōpū Tautoko is independent from the Royal Commission. It coordinates the response of the Catholic Church to the Commission.  
Learn more at [www.tautoko.catholic.org.nz](http://www.tautoko.catholic.org.nz).*

### What is the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care and Faith-based Institutions?

*The Commission is looking into what happened to children, young people and vulnerable adults in State and faith-based care in Aotearoa New Zealand between the years 1950-99. They may also listen to survivor experiences before and after these dates. Survivors seeking support can contact the Royal Commission directly on their website: [www.abuseincare.org.nz](http://www.abuseincare.org.nz)*

### Key Principles Guiding Our Involvement with the Royal Commission

The work of Te Rōpū Tautoko and the Church's involvement in the Royal Commission process is based on the following principles:

*The Bishops and Congregational Leaders believe that every person has an innate human dignity (te tapu o te tangata), therefore:*

- ▶ regard all forms of abuse as unacceptable and indefensible
- ▶ accept the responsibility to continue to act to stop abuse in the Church
- ▶ listen to, learn from, and support survivors
- ▶ act swiftly on complaints and follow them through
- ▶ ensure action on accountability is followed through for those who are proven responsible for abuse
- ▶ support the need for the Inquiry and actively cooperate with the Commission
- ▶ commit to ensuring transparency

The Bishops and the Congregational Leaders have stated that the way to learn lessons for today and the future is to examine, understand, acknowledge and address what has occurred. Therefore, office holders of various Church bodies, as well as priests, other religious, staff members and supporters, are likely to attend various Royal Commission hearings in the public seating areas, to listen to the experience of witnesses and learn from the experience of listening. Some will be called as witnesses from time to time.

**The process of disclosing abuse and seeking redress is an important and difficult step for survivors on the long journey of healing.**

Parishes and schools have been staffed by various religious congregations and by diocesan clergy. As leaders of the current community, please be in touch with the relevant congregation and/or diocese and establish contact during this time. As a practical step it will be important for you to know who the contact person for complaints is and who you can contact regarding the Royal Commission process. Having these details close to hand as the Commission continues will be important.



## Responding to Disclosures

If someone approaches you with a disclosure of abuse or harm of any kind there are several avenues they can be directed to; remember to hear them with respect and encourage them to make contact with the agencies below.

- ▶ Contact the Police - If the abuse or harm has just happened or is happening then contact the Police as soon as possible by calling 111. To report abuse or harm from weeks, months or years ago - phone or visit the nearest Police station.
- ▶ To engage with the Royal Commission, there is information on the Commission's website: [www.abuseincare.org.nz](http://www.abuseincare.org.nz)
- ▶ Complaints of abuse involving church personnel in New Zealand are referred to the Church's National Office for Professional Standards (NOPS): [prof.standards@nzcbc.org.nz](mailto:prof.standards@nzcbc.org.nz) | 0800 114 622 | [www.safeguarding.catholic.org.nz](http://www.safeguarding.catholic.org.nz)

Please keep in mind that these agencies are specialists in receiving these sensitive allegations and engaging with survivors through the process of disclosing abuse.

**Increased publicity can be the catalyst for people to come forward. We encourage anyone who has been abused by a priest or religious to contact NOPS, for your story to be heard and your complaint to be investigated.**

## Key Messages

Here are some key messages for you and your community to know and to use:

- ▶ The increased attention and discussion about the Commission's work creates an opportunity for survivors to be prompted and encouraged to come forward, perhaps for the first time, to disclose abuse.
- ▶ The Commission's public hearing process may be the first time these experiences of abuse have been discussed in a public forum. The Commission offers a place for people to tell their stories of the abuse and its lasting impacts.
- ▶ While this may be a difficult time for our communities this is an important process to go through so that we may listen to the experiences of survivors, acknowledge failings, support the justice and reconciliation process and look forward to the future with hope.
- ▶ Our bishops and congregational leaders requested that churches and faith based organisations be included in the Commission process in order to have this significant opportunity to acknowledge the past, listen and learn from the experiences of survivors, and participate in seeking justice.
- ▶ There are many and complex reasons why survivors don't find it easy to disclose abuse. Different things can prompt people to come forward to share their experiences. By talking openly about ways for people to come forward we can enable this to happen.
- ▶ It falls on this generation to bring to light the wrongdoings of the past and do our utmost to put the protection of all at the heart of the Church's work.
- ▶ It may be confronting to hear the names of our Catholic schools and parishes publicised in relation to cases of abuse. This is our community's reality. The Church participates in this process with faith in a merciful, loving God of justice and healing.

**The Church takes all complaints of abuse seriously. Complaints of abuse involving church personnel in New Zealand are referred to the Church's National Office for Professional Standards.**

## Upcoming Dates

### Monday 30 November to Friday 11 December 2020

#### *Faith-Based Redress Hearing: Phase One*

The first part of the hearing will hear from survivors who will share their experiences of abuse and the redress processes of the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, and the Salvation Army.

### March 2021, TBC

#### *Faith-Based Redress Hearing: Phase Two*

In the second phase of the hearing, witnesses for the churches will give evidence. Tautoko has started to coordinate witness statements from the Catholic Church for this part of the hearing and the Commission has requested supplementary evidence.



## Prayers for Your Community

- ▶ **God of Compassion**, we pray for survivors of abuse. May you continue to give them strength and courage to seek justice and reconciliation and share their story.
- ▶ **God of Justice**, we pray for those involved in the process of justice, healing, accountability and reconciliation for survivors and offenders. Keep them renewed in energy and in their sense of purpose and mission. May they continue to keep survivors and the principle of justice at the heart of this process.
- ▶ **God of Mercy**, we pray for communities who feel the ripple affects of the abuse and wrongdoings by those with pastoral responsibilities. Guide them in seeking to make change for the future and acknowledging the failures of the past.
- ▶ **God of Love**, keep all of us inspired to be guided by love for one another in our mission to engage and support the justice process including the Royal Commission and to seek to protect people from all forms of abuse or injustice.
- ▶ **God of Courage**, give courage and protection to survivors as they seek to share their story in whatever forum, strengthen their resolve and comfort them as they bring these traumatic experiences into the light.
- ▶ **God who takes care of our burdens**, give strength and courage to those who will come forward to disclose the abuse they have suffered for the first time. May they feel supported and encouraged in their vulnerability as they share their experiences.

## Newsletter Notices

The below notices could be used for your regular newsletters:

- ▶ Please keep in your prayers at this time the work of The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care which continues to look into what happened to children, young people and vulnerable adults in care. We pray for survivors for ongoing courage as they share their experience with the Commission.
- ▶ Starting in late November & early December, the Royal Commission will focus on cases involving the Catholic Church. While this may be a difficult time for survivors and many in our communities, this is an important process. We listen to the experiences of survivors, acknowledge failings, support the justice and reconciliation process and look forward to the future with hope.
- ▶ Our bishops and congregational leaders requested that churches and faith-based organisations be included in the Royal Commission process in order to have this significant opportunity to acknowledge the past, listen and learn from the experiences of survivors, and participate in seeking justice.

“The way to learn lessons for today and the future is to **examine, understand, acknowledge and address what has occurred.**”

## Speaking / Homily Notes

During this time you may wish to include reference to the work of the Royal Commission into your homilies, staff briefings or presentations. In addition to the newsletter notices above (which could be easily adapted), you could use the following:

- ▶ We are mindful that we are a community of faith. We have faith in a loving and compassionate God. While we may fall short of the love and compassion that we are called to show others, we also have an opportunity to acknowledge failures and call on our merciful and forgiving God to guide us. We believe in a healing God who restores all things. We pray for healing and restoration for those who have been so deeply hurt by those in the Church.
- ▶ At times we may hear the names of religious congregations who worked in our school, or people we knew or who served in our parish. Our school or parish name might be mentioned. For survivors and the wider community its not easy to hear and it may be confronting. We can reassure each other that this is a necessary part of the process; to bring into the light what occurred, to acknowledge the lasting impacts it had on people, listen to these experiences, and learn from them.
- ▶ We pray for survivors for ongoing courage as they share their experience with the Commission.

