

A Resource for Catholic School & Parish Leaders

to support their communities during the Royal Commission



Introduction

This resource has been created as a reference for school and parish leaders as we approach the second phase of the hearings that started in November 2020. In November and December we listened and heard survivors of abuse in Catholic settings give evidence. In March 2021, Church leadership will give evidence.

It is likely that there will be increased 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, our Church communities recognise the need to acknowledge the past, examine failings, to listen, and to support this process in order to look to the future with hope.

What is Te Rōpū Tautoko?

Te Rōpū Tautoko ('Tautoko') coordinates the response of the Catholic Church to the Commission. *Te Rōpū Tautoko* represents 49 dioceses and religious congregations. The group has representatives from dioceses and congregations, and is staffed by lay people. Learn more about *Te Rōpū Tautoko* on their website: www.tautoko.catholic.org.nz.

What is the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care?

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.

Should my community be in touch with anyone?

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.

Information on the Upcoming Hearing

Faith-Based Redress Hearing: Phase Two – Institutional Evidence begins on Monday 15 March 2021 and ends on Monday 29 March 2021. It will take place at the Commission's Hearing Room at 414 Khyber Pass Road, Newmarket, Auckland.

This Hearing is looking at what redress is offered to people who report being abused or neglected in institutions run by the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, and Salvation Army, and what can be done to support these survivors.

Phase 1 took place in November 2020. It was focused on evidence from survivors who have been seeking resolution for abuse that they suffered. They shared their experiences of participating in what is known as redress processes.

Phase 2 is focusing on evidence from the Churches themselves, with representatives sharing their perspective, experience, and information about Church structures and redress processes. Starting on 15 March, the second phase of Hearings will see the Commission hear from witnesses from the Salvation Army and Anglican Church. From 22 March, Catholic witnesses will give evidence and be questioned.



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.

Key Messages

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

- ▶ At this stage in the work of the Commission, Church Leaders will speak on behalf of the Church having listened to the statements of survivors.
- ▶ 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. This generation has the opportunity to impart the apology that needs to be communicated to survivors and their families.
- ▶ We need to be mindful that we must share truth even when it is unpalatable. We can proceed knowing that God has said "be not afraid, I go before you always..." therefore we can do what is right and just with courage and humility.
- ▶ 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. Alternatively you may choose to go directly to the Police, and the Church will support anyone who requires assistance to do this.
- ▶ The increased attention and discussion about the Commission's work creates an opportunity for survivors to be prompted and encouraged to come forward. There are many and complex reasons why survivors don't find it easy to disclose abuse. Different things can prompt people to come forward, perhaps for disclosing the abuse suffered for the first time. By talking openly about ways for people to come forward we can enable this to happen.
- ▶ While this may be a difficult time for many people this is an important process of listening to the experiences of survivors, acknowledging failings, supporting the justice process and looking 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.
- ▶ It may be confronting to hear names of people we know and 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.

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Attending the Hearings

The Faith-Based Redress Hearing is a Public Hearing, which means that members of the public can view the proceedings. This can be done in-person at the Commission's Hearing Room, or through the online livestream on the Commission's website.

It is important that the Church community hears and understands the experiences and information that are shared at these Public Hearings. Members of the Catholic Church are encouraged to attend or view online.

If you wish to attend in any official capacity, please contact Te Rōpū Tautoko who have helpful guides that will be shared with you. In particular, members of the Catholic Church need to ensure that their attendance doesn't re-traumatise any survivors who are courageously attending or sharing their story.

Newsletter Notices

You're invited to share these messages with your community over the coming weeks.

For the weekend of 6-7 March 2021

Please keep in your prayers at this time the work of The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care which continues to investigate what happened to children, young people and vulnerable adults in care. We pray for survivors for continued courage throughout their involvement in this process.

For the weekend of 13-14 March 2021

This week, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care will hold hearings that include church leaders making statements. We pray for those who will speak on behalf of the churches, and all those involved in this important work.



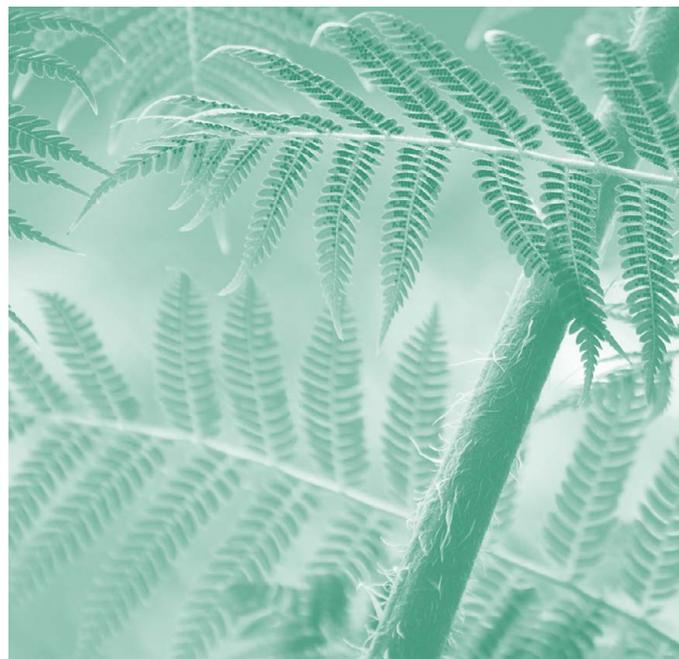
For the weekend of 20-21 March 2021

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care will hear from Catholic church leaders this week and continue to look into what happened to children, young people and vulnerable adults in care. We pray for continued courage and clarity for all those involved.

For the weekend of 27-28 March 2021

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care will this week conclude the second phase of hearings that included church leaders making statements. We pray for the Commission and their continued work on this significant and important process in seeking truth and justice for survivors of abuse.

Want to know more about how the Catholic Church has been involved so far, what work is being done, or how you can stay in the loop? Visit www.tautoko.catholic.org.nz for online resources and links.



Prayers for Your Community

- ▶ For those who will speak on behalf of the Church to the Royal Commission, we pray for courage, humility and clarity. Fix their eyes and hearts on truth and justice.
- ▶ For those who work and contribute to the Royal Commission process, we pray that they be sustained and supported through this work of truth and justice.
- ▶ For survivors of abuse, we pray for continued support and fortitude in journeying this difficult but necessary process.
- ▶ For the Church in this moment in time, may we as members of the body of Christ open our ears and hearts to hear the cry of those who have suffered and work to build a Church that protects and nurtures.
- ▶ May the Lord guide all of our words and actions during the Royal Commission and beyond; and ensure justice for those who have been harmed.
- ▶ For those who disclosed the abuse they suffered but were not believed, may the Light of Christ shine upon them, and grant them the courage to continue to share their story.
- ▶ Let us pray for the communities betrayed by those who abused; heal the wounds of all our people and keep our gaze on the Presence of Christ around us.



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 called to love, protect human life and dignity. We have often failed, lost focus, or been distracted by other things. This moment in time calls for us to pray for guidance and to fix our gaze on the truth we have heard, what we have learned and can learn from the experiences of survivors, and how we can work towards a Church that is focused on loving, protecting and nurturing people.
- ▶ Throughout scripture we are reminded that God's call can often be uncomfortable, confronting or sacrificial. Characters in the Bible are often confronted to act for God in a way which puts themselves aside for the will of God. It is always a call to act in which the choice is to say yes to God or to avoid it. Noah, Moses, Mary, Joseph, Peter, and many more all said yes to God in very difficult circumstances. As a Church community and a body of Christ we find ourselves called to act for what is just but in difficult circumstances.
- ▶ Pope Francis has said: "Looking back to the past, no effort to beg pardon and to seek to repair the harm done will ever be sufficient. Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated."
- *Letter to the People of God, 2018*

