

29 July 2024

Tena koutou katoa

Last Wednesday I sat and watched as Parliament received the report from the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care. There were speeches by the Prime Minister and various politicians. It was emotional and painful. The report is the culmination of six years' work, and it contains harrowing stories of abuse in state and faith-based organisations, including the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Some background on our Church's involvement with the Commission. Back when the then Labour Government was considering a Royal Commission, the Presbyterian Church, via the Council of Assembly, wrote and commented on the first draft Terms of Reference and said what was missing was faith-based entities. We said it should be included and if it was, we would willingly take part.

We noted to the Commission how entities such as Presbyterian schools have their own boards and governance structures, and it is the same for each of the seven regions of Presbyterian Support and for Support NZ. We encouraged the Commission to engage with each on their own merit.

We have responded to various Notices to Produce from the Commission; volunteers from congregations searched decades of material from church meetings and reports; we provided records and other information as requested. Our staff at the Presbyterian Research Centre played a great role in assisting in this process.

We were called to be present at a Hearing of the Commission where we issued an apology in our opening comments and responded to questions from the Commission.

We set up a process so that those wanting to contact us about Historic Abuse matters could do so and we could attend to those. We made this known.

We have engaged with the Crown Response Unit following the Royal Commission Interim Report.

The recently released Final Report includes recommendations, and these require response. Among these the Commission calls for leaders of the different denominations to make a public apology to survivors and this is to be done in consultation with survivor groups regarding how and when it will happen. I will be making that apology on behalf of our Church.

As people of the PCANZ and as Christians we feel the tremendous weight of the suffering of survivors of abuse; we feel the terrible shame that abuse happened in the church. The church should be a place where people can feel safe and be given dignity and worth - the way in which Jesus gave dignity and worth to all. A place which helps to instill a sense of hope in people's lives. This has not always been the case and we deeply regret that people have suffered and continue to suffer due to the actions of people and processes of our denomination. There has been physical, sexual and spiritual abuse and many are, understandably, left with a view of God and of Christianity that is very negative. This deeply saddens me.



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand



Rev Rose Luxford
Moderator

Email: moderator@presbyterian.org.nz
Phone: +64 21 2752000

At this time in the life of our Church I offer a responsive litany, below, that I've written that you may wish to use in a church service, as we continue to absorb the reality of the report and process it as a denomination, and as individuals. Let us also continue to hold in our prayers those who have been so badly impacted by actions from within our denomination, also the members of the Commission, government agencies and those who take this forward.

*'Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice'. [Psalm 130: 1]*

In Christ

Rose

Right Rev Rose Luxford

Moderator Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

moderator@presbyterian.org.nz

Litany

Holy God, this day we pause and we reflect

We are deeply saddened at what has occurred in the life of our nation and our national church

Saddened and distressed that vulnerable people have been hurt

Hurt in situations and places where they should have been safe

We think of Jesus who came so that all may have fullness of life

And acknowledge that (instead) in our church some have been denied that

We think of the courage it would have taken for people to tell their stories

And the pain and distress that would be there in the telling, and the hearing

As a church we grieve for the wounds people have to bear

And regret that this has happened within our church communities

Through time and space the church has failed to protect vulnerable people, and given a safe haven to those in power

And that weighs heavily on us all here and now

Our human condition is frail and has its shadow side

And often we find that hard to admit to ourselves and hard to bear in others

God what are we to do?

We call out to you in sincere humility and deep need

(Pause in silence...)

We give thanks that this darkness can be brought to the light of Christ

And in that light we pray that there may be healing and justice

In the light we pray that we can all learn from the mistakes of the past

And ensure that the present and future is guided by your Holy Spirit

So that all may feel safe and protected

That integrity, justice and honesty be hallmarks of our church

We pray that we can hold the tension of the reality of life and the hope that comes in Christ

And that in all things you are at work - in the brokenness, in the pain, in the healing

Gracious God, enfold your broken church in your loving embrace

And enable us to be the people that you call us to be