

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Response to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

Te Inoi whakamutunga

*He āroha te Atua,
whakatōhia mai ki roto o mātau ngākau,
o mātau hinengaro tou atawhai mē tou ārohanui tonu.
E whakaarahia ana hoki ē ia te hunga ē whakapiko iho ana.
He tika ngā ara katoa o Ihowa: He atawhai hoki ana mahi katoa.
Ka whakanui ahau ia koe ē Ihowa e Kiingi o nga Kiingi
te Ariki o ngā Ariki, kia āwhina i o mātau hoa tata anō ko mātau.*

Introduction

We, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (**the Church**), acknowledged the findings from the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry (**the Commission**) on 22 October 2024 (which is Part 1 of the Church’s response to *Whanaketia*). We totally accepted specific findings of fault, and we committed to work with the government, survivors, and other faith-based and non-faith-based providers of care to develop safeguarding environments for children, young people, and vulnerable adults so they are protected and are supported to thrive.

This document is Part 2 of the Church’s overall response. It outlines the Church’s response to date to the Commission’s recommendations, which also incorporated 95 recommendations from the Commission’s interim report on redress, *He Purapura Ora, he Māra Tipu: From Redress to Puretumu Torowhānui*.¹ The plan to respond to the recommendations provided in this response is not yet complete. It pains us to write this knowing that survivors have waited too long for justice and to see positive change. In considering the implementation timetable set out by the Commission in Part 9 of *Whanaketia*² we find that we require more time to take this work as seriously as it deserves; we need to continue to seek the experience, expertise and information required to inform our responses. We cannot be half-hearted in this work; we need full hearts for this mahi. Ours will be a survivor centric approach. There are survivors who need us to listen to them, survivors we need to truly hear. We will bring together a Survivor Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) to ensure that the voices of survivors are at the very core of our mahi. We commit to carefully consider and address each of the

¹ See recommendation 131. The interim recommendations on redress contained within Puretumu Torowhānui are imported into *Whanaketia* via recommendation 1. That recommendation urges the Government and faith-based institutions to implement the proposed redress model “as an immediate priority”.

² Chapter 9, pp 330-364

recommendations, to assign each recommendations a project plan, to monitor its progress, to follow through in the timeliest way possible, and to share updates on this work as we proceed. As a Church we will give our best to this mahi and do so for all those in our care past and present, for all those we have failed, for all those like us who believe we can do better.

Responding to the Recommendations

Recommendation 131 states:

The government and faith-based institutions should issue formal public responses to this report about whether each recommendation is accepted, accepted in principle, rejected or subject to further consideration. Each response should include a plan for how the accepted recommendations will be implemented, the reasons for rejecting any recommendations, and a timeframe for any further consideration required. Each response should be published within four months of this report being tabled in the House of Representatives.

The Church accepts the Commission's recommendations. The Church commits to participate in Puretumu Torowhānui and cooperate with the government over the adoption and implementation of a nationwide safeguarding regulatory framework.

The Church will prioritise its response to the recommendations by asking the following questions:

1. Which recommendations need to be prioritised and implemented to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are safe and protected, and that their wellbeing is supported?
2. Which recommendations will provide survivors with redress and healing?

We will focus on those recommendations that apply directly to the Church or require the Church to partner with and cooperate with the government, the proposed Care Safety regime, and work in partnership with survivors of abuse.³ Where the Commission has not directed specific recommendations to the Church, the Church nonetheless acknowledges those recommendations and will support their accomplishment.

We have also borne in mind two other challenges that arise from the Commission's findings:

1. The Church must undertake an honest audit of its current systems and establish a baseline against which to measure future progress. The recommendations from the Commission show there is still a good deal we need to do to ensure we create a consistent safeguarding framework, institutional culture and practices, In this work we plan to be assisted by the survivor's advisory group of experts.
2. The Church must confront a challenge presented by the Commission specifically to Presbyterianism in Aotearoa:

³ In reviewing the Commission's recommendations, the Church's preliminary view is that the following recommendations do not directly or indirectly apply to the Church: 4, 12, 13, 18, 24, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 77, 79, 85, 86, 88, 115, 116, 117, 122, 129, 132, 134, and 137.

“The separation of the church from the autonomous Presbyterian support organisations has resulted in the absence of a centralised governance structure providing a final level of monitoring and oversight and a lack of information sharing.”⁴

Lastly, the Church also must consider how it could participate in a nation-wide safeguarding environment where the work of both faith-based and non-faith-based institutions is overseen, monitored, and regulated effectively.

What we have done since the release of the Commission’s findings and recommendations

In July 2024, the Church established a dedicated working group to assist the Church develop its response to the Commission’s findings and recommendations. The working group analysed the Commission’s 138 recommendations to identify natural workstreams that the Church must undertake to effectively respond to the Commission’s recommendations.⁵

The Church’s response will be overseen by Council of Assembly⁶ and led by the Assembly Executive Secretary. By locating the response within a central body within the Church’s structure, the Church intends to create internal accountability for its response and provide a mechanism to monitor and report on implementation of the Church’s commitments.

The Church commits to ensuring that survivors’ experiences are not discounted or forgotten. We are also committed to caring for vulnerable people in future and ensuring that care is safe.

Specifics of the Church’s response

The Church commits to the following areas of action:

1. Participating in and implementing Puretumu Torowhānui⁷ to support and enable redress and healing.
2. Apologising to survivors and their families and whānau for the abuse, harm, and trauma they have experienced.⁸
3. Implementing a safeguarding framework and safeguarding practices nationwide and within the Church.
4. Completing an internal honest audit (by an auditor unconnected to the Presbyterian Church) of the Church’s current systems and practises to establish a baseline against which to measure future progress, and commit to external auditing, monitoring, oversight, regulation, and lines of accountability.
5. Addressing the challenge of the Church, affiliated social service agencies, and affiliated schools to create shared understanding, processes/protocols, and practices to help prevent abuse and respond safely and appropriately. The Church has heard the frustration of survivors, they have

⁴ *Whanaketia*, p 1745, at para 125

⁵ The Church accepted the Commission’s findings fully and has published its response to the findings separately.

⁶ Council of Assembly has responsibility for advancing the policy of the Church’s General Assembly.

⁷ Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based institutions. (2021). *He Purapura Ora, He Māra Tipu: From Redress to Puretumu Torowhānui*. New Zealand. See Recommendation 1

⁸ See Recommendation 3(a)(iv)

suffered enough. We separate entities must find a way to work together to make the process to be heard and seek justice as uncomplicated and non-retraumatising as possible. The Church is committed to this, and we are ready and willing to seek a way forward with our affiliated social service agencies and schools, which we will initiate.

Action 1: We commit to a process which will enable redress and healing for survivors.

Recommendations: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 20, 21, 81, 82, 83, 113, 125, 126, 130, 131, 133, and 135
We hear, see, acknowledge, and support survivors' *he moemoeā ō ngā purapura ora mo te heke mai moemoea*:⁹

... where every child, young person and adult in Aotearoa New Zealand is loved, safe and cared for in a manner that supports their growth and development into a thriving contributor to society.

The Church is mindful of the need to ensure any scheme offering survivors redress is survivor-centric, including being accessible, fair, and responsive. A scheme that has those characteristics must be carefully designed and implemented and involve survivors' input. The Commission anticipated that the sector would require 18 months to implement redress mechanisms,¹⁰ which the Church considers is optimistic. We commit to establishing a survivor's advisory group of experts to help shape, guide and inform our thoughtful and considered response to better enabling survivor redress.

Action 2: Apologising to survivors and their families and whānau.

Recommendations: 1, 3, 113, 130, 131, 133, 135, and 138.

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, together with the Moderator of Te Aka Puahou and the Moderator of the Pacific Presbytery will publicly acknowledge and apologise for abuse that occurred in the Church's care.¹¹ Our apology requires the input of our survivors. Feedback from survivors is that this sensitive process cannot be rushed; survivors will have all the space and time they need, working to a timeframe that meets their needs. The Church will announce its public apology when input from our survivors is complete.

The apology will be translated into Te Reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).

The Church will also consider how apologies may be made to individual survivors and/or their families. The Church recognises that any such individualised apology could only be made at a time and on terms guided by, and agreed upon, by the survivor and/or their whānau.

⁹ *Whanaketia* (Part 9), Recommendations, p 36.

¹⁰ *Whanaketia* (Part 9) at para 739.

¹¹ See Recommendation 3. Te Aka Puahou is the Church's Māori Synod; Pacific Presbytery is the Church's Pasifika Presbytery.

Action 3: Implementing a safeguarding framework and practices nationwide and within the Church.

Recommendations: 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, and 110.

The Commission recommended the implementation of a national regulatory system for preventing and responding to abuse in Care. A regulatory system:¹²

...is a set of formal and informal rules, norms and sanctions that are intended to shape people's behaviours and interactions to achieve particular goals or outcomes. Regulatory systems include legislation, policies, frameworks, standards, guidelines and operational practices.

The Church acknowledges and welcomes the establishment of a nationwide safeguarding regime when the government adopts and implements the Commission's recommendations in this area. Whether or not the government implements such a regime, the Church is nonetheless committed to establishing and implementing its own clear, transparent, robust and evidence-informed safeguarding framework and practices.

The Church will begin this work in collaboration with the government. We will also work to strengthen our own internal monitoring, oversight, regulation of our safeguarding frameworks and practices, including our complaints procedures, while ensuring clear lines of accountability in situations where our policies and procedures are not followed.

The Church's work in these areas will be informed by survivors of abuse.

Action 4: Internal and external auditing of the Church's safeguarding framework and practices.

Recommendations: 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,23, 26, 33, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 80, 81, 82, 83, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133, 135, and 138.

An initial phase in responding to the Commission's recommendations will be to complete an internal audit of the Church's approach to safeguarding, its current framework, standards and practices. The purpose of the audit will be to give the Church an honest appraisal of its gaps and shortcomings, while identifying and acknowledging those areas the Church has already made progress.

The Church is hopeful that the preliminary audit will find that changes the Church has made to date show its progress and willingness to make improvements where needed. However, the Commission has substantially raised the bar for all those involved in caring for children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

The Church agrees with the Commission that higher standards must be applied, and that initial and ongoing auditing of those standards will be needed.¹³ The Church commits to externally audit its progress and to publish those results publicly.

¹² Whanaketia (Part 9, Chapter 5), p 1911 at para 257

¹³ See, for example, Recommendations 52, 113, 125, 130, 131, 133, 135

Action 5: Closing gaps between the Church, affiliated social service agencies, and affiliated schools.

Recommendations: None that address this action

We acknowledge and agree with the Commission that drawing distinctions between the Presbyterian Church and the seven regions of Presbyterian Support – which are separate legal entities – is complex and survivors of historic abuse find it difficult to distinguish between us.¹⁴

This is a challenge for both organisations however we realise this is a bigger challenge for survivors, and we are committed to finding a way forward from a survivor centric perspective.

Further actions:

There are recommendations that the Church has accepted, either directly or indirectly, in this response that are either not attributed to an action or not highlighted. This is not because they are unimportant, but because they are. The Church has work to do to address these recommendations and we will do so purposely: seeking expert and culturally appropriate advice; seeking input from those most impacted; listening to those who have been most overlooked and deserve their voices to be heard; engaging with survivors in the ways they wish with kindness, compassion and empathy and acknowledging their awe inspiring bravery; doing all we can to prevent abuse from happening again in our Church and in places connected with our churches.

These recommendations, including 118, 121, 126, 127, 128, concern how the Church will put in place what is needed to: uphold the rights of those in its care who are Māori, Pacific Peoples, people from other linguistically or culturally diverse backgrounds, girls and women, deaf, disabled people and people who experience mental distress – people who have heartbreakingly been overwhelmingly represented as survivors of abuse; give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People; co-design with communities, including children, young people and adults in care, survivors, Māori, Pacific Peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Deaf people, disabled people, people who experience mental distress, and Takatāpui, Rainbow and MVPFAFF+ people; raise public awareness and training to prevent abuse and neglect, and address prejudice and discrimination.

Conclusion

We are ready and willing to undertake the work on the Commission's recommendations with the serious commitment it deserves and demands. We recognise this will be challenging for us and

¹⁴ "The Inquiry notes that there is a distinct legal separation between the Presbyterian Church and the support services organisations that ran care settings during the Inquiry period. The Presbyterian Church conceded at the Inquiry's Faith-based Institutional Response Hearing that, despite the separate legal structures, survivors do not see a distinction between the church and its support services organisations, often referring to the two collectively as "the Church"." Transcript of evidence of Reverend Wayne Matheson on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand at the Inquiry's Faith-based Institutional Response Hearing (Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, 19 October 2022, page 314, paragraph 718

regardless we are committed to changing what we need to change, learning where we need to learn, listening where we need to listen, and doing better for all the people in our care past and present.

Prayer

*Loving God of justice and peace
refresh our minds and stir our hearts.
Show us where we have lost our way.
Let us learn from our past mistakes.
Help us to see a way forward.
And in doing so
May You bring comfort, peace, and healing to all.*



Mrs Katerina Solomona
Convenor
Council of Assembly
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

16 November 2024