



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Public apology from Right Rev Rose Luxford

He mihi maioha tēnei kiā koutou ngā Whānau,

Ngā hapū, ngā iwi mē ngā Whanaunga ō ngā moutere

Ō te moananui ā Kiwa Kua tae mai nei i tēnei rā

Tēnā Koutou Katoa

This is a heartfelt greeting to you all, the families, the sub-tribes, the tribes, and the relatives of the inhabitants of the great ocean of Kiwa who have arrived here today.

Thank you all.

I acknowledge mana whenua for welcoming us into this whare today. I acknowledge Ngāi Tahu as the iwi of this land on which we stand.

Today, on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand - both past and present - I extend our sincere and unreserved apology to those that our Church and the people in it have harmed, abused, neglected and caused pain.

It was our responsibility to care for you. We failed.

The abuse occurred in places and with people where safety should have been assured.

Abuse happened in our care, because we failed to provide protection and we didn't act when alarms were raised.

We did not uphold our *own* values and commitments to you.

Such a breach of trust is unjustifiable.

We express profound remorse at this heartbreaking abuse.

We failed to uphold and honour our relationship of care under the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi. and this has led to damaging impacts on tangata whenua. 2

We failed to uphold and honour our commitment to the standards and values of our church.

This has had lasting effects.

We are deeply and sincerely sorry.

Through the work of the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, many of you have shared your experiences – of both abuse and then how you were treated.

Many of you disclosed abuse to the Church, and it was met with denial and silencing.

Survivors – today, I want you to know – we have heard you.

Hearing this apology from our Church – whether here in person or online - may be difficult. Your wellbeing is what's most important. If at any point this is too much, please stop, and watch again when you're ready.

Today, we — the Church — will:

- Own up to the abuse.
- Acknowledge the impacts.
- Address the safety of our systems.
- And explain how we can help put things right – including through redress.

Because words are hollow without action – we must strengthen safeguards to prevent future harm. We must provide survivor-centered redress.

Our apology will seem insincere if we cannot demonstrate how we've changed.

We are committed to change. We must not repeat the failings of the past. Our focus is on accountability, transparency and rebuilding trust.

Our focus is on you, survivors.

As you continue listening, I ask you to be the judge of our words. And the judge of the actions we will commit to.

Before I continue, I acknowledge our faith-based survivor advisory group of experts, who helped shape this apology and our ongoing action — with the belief that we can be better. 3

ABUSE – CONTEXT

Abuse and neglect in the Presbyterian Church reflected our failures in our systems

It took many forms such as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and cultural — and it included neglect.

The abuse took spiritual forms, where faith leaders misused religious power and authority.

Those in positions of power within the Church, instead of acting with integrity and faithfulness to the gospel, conveyed a distorted, harmful and abusive spirituality - at times, they misused Scripture and exerted pressure on survivors to immediately forgive and move on.

The Royal Commission made it clear that for many survivors, this abuse and the subsequent treatment of them have led to a now shaken sense of, devastatingly, a complete loss of faith and spirituality.

These are precious things – and were often central to a person's sense of identity prior to the abuse. Faith should provide a source of strength, support and meaning.

This treatment and attitude has had a profound and grievous impact on many.

We acknowledge and deeply regret the injustices that have transpired.

We recognise the profound spiritual impact on all of those abused by our Church.

The Presbyterian community is made up of many different cultures, including Māori, our tangata whenua, and Pasifika and Asian peoples. We acknowledge how hard it can be for many of our brothers and sisters to speak out about situations of harm and abuse.

There have been instances where we didn't address the abuse, where we have failed to remove responsible individuals, and where we lacked consistent policies and procedures to both report and further prevent abuse.

There were occasions when concerns and complaints people raised were not believed, causing further trauma and indignity, and leading to distrust in our Church. 4

We recognise how difficult it is for you to return to the Church - where the abuse originated - and raise your concerns.

Instead, due to the power imbalance, fixed attitudes and a lack of understanding, this process has served to only re-traumatise many.

The Church has acted in ways where it thought it knew best for survivors, rather than being guided by them

We regret our behaviour, and we now understand that survivors must be at the centre in our considerations and our responses.

It's led to some Presbyterian Church survivors not wishing to participate in this apology, beyond going through the process of redress. To those people, we acknowledge we've lost your trust.

ABUSE – IMPACTS

The **impacts** of abuse did not suddenly stop. They continue to this day.

We acknowledge the cruelty that has also led to inter-generational trauma and its lasting effects on you, your whānau, and your wider communities.

We have heard heartbreaking experiences of crippling anxiety, flashbacks, and loneliness.

We've heard about the loss of trust, relationship difficulties, anger, the profound effects on mental and physical health, employment and financial difficulties, and of the challenges to find safe environments.

We apologise sincerely for this immense burden.

CHANGES UNDERWAY – Church/agencies, policies, complaints, culture

I will talk now about where the Church must do better, to prevent future harm to survivors.

First, I want to address where the Presbyterian Church structures have played a part in abuse and the lack of action – particularly under the umbrella of the name 'Presbyterian'. 5

We recognise it is confusing when we have talked of the separate legal structures of the Church and agencies that carry the Presbyterian name. We acknowledge that overlapping personnel contributes to this view.

It can look like we evading responsibility, given their collective perception as 'the Church'.

I want to assure you we are not.

We acknowledge there have been instances when those lines have been blurred, and the Church has been involved in practices that have contributed to abuse or poor care.

We accept our responsibilities.

For current Church and agency people this has been difficult, especially for the many good people currently serving who are facing this reality. We are committed to change to avoid past failings.

The Church is now committed to operating transparently, to address fragmentation of complaints, and ensure they are handled efficiently without requiring survivors to re-live their trauma through continual disclosure of the abuse many times over.

We have had initial meetings with some of those agencies and seek to strengthen those bonds with the welfare of survivors, our top priority.

We acknowledge how difficult this journey has been. This has and continues to be a painful journey.

Particularly for children in our care, I would like to assure you that further changes have been implemented to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Through our mandated, protective policies, every person representing or working for the Church must adhere to our Code of Ethics policy.

Our Child Protection Policy must be enforced whenever any church members are responsible for children and young people – all tamariki and rangatahi.

We have taken additional steps to remind all those representing or working in our Church of these policies.

Remember, anyone can make a complaint about any acts of inappropriate or unethical behaviour by a Church office holder or member. 6

I can assure you that such complaints will be taken very seriously and will happen alongside, or following, any action the Police or other authorities might take.

Importantly, we must build a culture here - where speaking up is welcomed and acted on – and critically, where abuse cannot occur.

If you are a bystander to abuse, call it out and report it – we must hear about it and act.

ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMEDATIONS

As we look to make other changes, late last year, we responded to the recommendations from the Royal Commission.

We are committed to implementing the recommendations and, at this point, I want to acknowledge the hugely important work that the Commissioners and their team carried out.

The Church has started addressing many of the Royal Commission's recommendations. We are dedicated to fulfilling these commitments and expect to be held accountable for making them happen as soon as possible.

REDRESS

A key recommendation from the Royal Commission is implementing a Pūretumu Torowhānui system – hositic redress for survivors.

It was to be a centralised Government redress system for abuse survivors.

However, the Crown has now abandoned this commitment

So, today, I want to let survivors know the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is launching its own survivor-designed holistic redress system.

We have worked with our survivor advisory group — from different backgrounds — who have been essential and invaluable in helping us to bring survivor voices into our redress process

This has helped us understand, through a survivor-centered perspective.

Our commitment will include the Church's adoption of a simpler redress process. 7

Faced with the reality of what occurred in this Church, we started listening and learning ourselves from survivors about how to set up our own effective redress process, which we expect will be adopted at the Church's upcoming General Assembly.

Holistic redress could include financial payments, personal apologies and acknowledgements, ongoing wellbeing support and accountability. Apologies, both written and in-person, may be offered, and survivors could choose if they wished to meet with us for this to happen.

Survivors will have access to Navigators, independent of the Church, to guide them through our redress process.

Survivors told us that the process needs to be trauma-informed, survivor-centered, culturally responsive and holistic. We know we need to get this as right as we possibly can, and that also includes checking in and listening to any changes required as we roll it out.

This work and our learning will continue.

Full information on the process will be available on our website, and our Council convener, Katerina Solomona, will follow me to explain how it will operate.

We encourage anyone who has experienced abuse involving the Presbyterian Church to get in touch when they feel ready to do so.

CLOSING

Survivors. Your families, your whānau, your friends. Your communities. Your hapu. Your iwi.

I know that my words cannot change past events or their continuing impact on you.

But please know that we are committed to learning from you. We seek to regain your trust, so we can now help in your healing journey.

My intent in writing this apology to you, and to all survivors, is to acknowledge and accept the abuse. This happened in our Presbyterian Church, and where our name was used. I am so sorry for what happened to you.

I also acknowledge the enduring effects of what happened in your lives, convey regret, and express hope through a journey of restoration, 8

The Presbyterian Church apologises sincerely.

We acknowledge and apologise also for what you have had to go through since.

Thank you for speaking up, sadly time and time again. And thank you for courageously speaking up at the Royal Commission.

Your bravery is inspiring.

We commit to addressing every instance of abuse brought to our Church respectfully and faithfully.

The title of Royal Commission's final report, *Whanaketia*, sums up this continued journey. It reads: *through pain and trauma, from darkness to light*.

Today, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand walks alongside you survivors, listens to your voices, and ensures that our actions will reflect the *light* of justice and care.

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