



Public Apology from Katerina Solomona

Introduction

Tenā koutou katoa, ko Katerina Solomona toku ingoa. My name is Katerina Solomona. My role is to convene the Council of Assembly, which is responsible for the Church's policies and strategies.

I kōrero with you today, in humility, to talk about how we try to put right the harm caused to survivors of abuse in our care. We know whatever actions we take now, can never be enough to repair the damage we caused to people in our care. But survivor-led action now is critical; survivors cannot wait any longer.

Moderator Rose Luxford talked earlier about the Presbyterian Church committing to the Royal Commission's recommended Puretumu Torowhānui — holistic redress for survivors. We are making this commitment here, so it is on the public record.

The changes we will make are a beginning; they are not an end. Our words must be matched by action – where light can break through the darkness; conquering the wickedness that operated within the Church.

Change will take time. We will not get it right straight away. But we will do our best and we will do it quickly you have waited too long, survivors.

Survivors – you will be the judge on whether our holistic redress system is a step in the right direction: a step toward healing, justice, and accountability. We hope to show you our determination to act differently and to honour survivors' voices. But again, you are the judges of that.

[pause]

I now want to walk you through how we have been developing a holistic redress scheme within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

When we began this journey, we thought compliance and processes were enough. But we know, and acknowledge, our way of thinking was always Church-led – the church thinking it knew better than the people it harmed.

So, we formed a survivor advisory group last year. The survivors in it, confronted us with the truth: that there was still a long way to go for us to build survivor-centric redress processes and offerings. And that our former redress processes were inadequate.

They asked us the revealing question - *who is this redress for?* Is it for the Church to feel satisfied that it had ticked a box, or is it truly for survivors? The survivor advisory group's wero or challenge made us stop, reflect, and admit that our existing processes were not centred on those abused in the church. We had to face ourselves honestly and change direction.

Importantly – we needed to understand the individuality often taken from survivors, that compounded the abuse. We failed to recognise the many unique and vibrant identities of people in this church, and to protect them. Many survivors endured the removal from their cultures and languages, alongside experiences of

sexism, racism, homophobia, and discrimination against disabled, neurodivergent, and mentally ill people.

For many survivors, the abuse did not end with the initial harm. It was repeated in how their voices were disregarded, in redress processes that caused more pain, and included the destruction of their records. This is not only unacceptable, but also deeply damaging.

To keep asking us questions and holding the church accountable, we have commissioned an independent auditor to review our policies, procedures, safety risks, and to keep us on track to delivering what we commit to.

My message is clear to all people that call this church home – we must stop, reflect, and we must not weaponise religion any longer. We must change; we must do better than this

Acknowledging the Church's Failures

Before I continue, I must address this head on.

- Our redress processes have not always been survivor centred, and for that we apologise.
- When survivors and their families spoke up – our responses were often inconsistent, retraumatising and leaving families to pursue accountability on their own and at their own legal expense.
- Too often, the Church prioritised self-protection. It relied on legal strategies, avoiding moral responsibility, and in some cases, causing further harm even when abusers were removed.

- Personal apologies were sometimes offered but without meaningful follow-up, failing to bring the healing intended.
- Structural divisions within the Church limited accountability, and whistleblowers were too often silenced instead of supported.
- Those who caused harm – abusers, enablers, and bystanders – were not consistently held accountable, and clear expectations for members and ministers were lacking.
- We recognise that without the Royal Commission, much of this would not have been addressed, and that many survivors remain unheard or reluctant to come forward again because of these past failures.
- Above all else – we, the church, failed to seek the truth, make amends and stop abuse happening. We were not truthful with ourselves.

In light of what you've heard today, we must make commitments, and we must put them on public record so you can hold us to account. We commit to:

- Protecting those who speak out: anyone raising concerns will be supported, not silenced or punished.
- Ensuring abusers, enablers, and others who have harmed survivors are held fully accountable, using our disciplinary process – and involving Police in matters that need further independent investigation and accountability.
- Working across all Presbyterian agencies to break down barriers and improve collaboration, acting with urgency.
- Continuing this journey with survivors at the centre, recognising that this is only the beginning of meaningful change. That means, working with survivor advisors to this church.

- Continuing our engagement with an independent auditor to ensure we are held accountable.

We want to honour survivors of abuse in our care by showing our commitment to listening, acting with integrity, and building a church that protects and supports all people.

When we looked at other faith-based and institutional redress processes, both here and overseas, we recognised that, if our words were to mean anything, survivors themselves had to be at the table. We need to hear directly from survivors what redress looks like through your lenses.

It is with humility that the new redress system we will be implementing is a **survivor-led** holistic redress process. It is not created by the Church; it is created by survivors – their voices and their lived experiences.

It will be adopted by the Church's General Assembly at the end of October, but survivors can start accessing it from now.

I'll now step you through what the holistic redress process looks like.

It has **three key steps**, each designed with survivors and supported by independent checks to ensure accountability.

1. **The process starts with Hauora, or health, Coordinators** - as the first point of contact, and trained in wellbeing support, they will greet survivors and ensure survivors have the information and support they need. Hauora Coordinators will be contracted by the Church.
2. **The next step is with Navigators** – they are a group of people chosen by our survivor advisory group, fully

independent of the Church, to stand alongside survivors as advocates, communicators, and protectors of their voices throughout the process. They will not have an association with the Church.

Navigators will guide survivors through the holistic redress process. Survivors will determine and shape what their needs are. With the support of their Navigator, each survivor decides what holistic redress offerings are right for them. Options could be:

- Personal apologies, both written and in-person, based on what the survivor chooses.
- Wellbeing support for survivors requiring ongoing and independent care.
- Financial payments as compensation to acknowledge the harm and the impacts it has had.
- Holistic redress can mean helping people find their whakapapa, like paying for te reo Māori language classes. It can be providing cultural care, like through rongoā Māori healing. It can be providing access to education, relationship building or financial advisory services for example. Or
- A combination of all options.

For financial payments, we are currently using the Ministry for Social Development's redress payments framework, but we will be seeking strong survivor-led advice on this and whether it is adequate or not. We will shift and change if required.

When we have paid compensation to survivors previously, we have done this at the high end of the range and often beyond the range – and we encourage the Government to relook at its own frameworks for survivor redress payments. I also want to note we

will pay for survivors' legal fees, a continuation of what we've been doing to date.

Whatever form of holistic redress a survivor chooses, it is established from the very beginning of the process and tweaked throughout, not left as an afterthought at the end. What matters most is that the choice belongs to survivors, not the Church.

3. The third step is with **Rangahau (Independent Investigators)** – their role is uncovering abuse in the church, as related to survivors who come forward to seek answers. Rangahau will be experienced and fully independent from the Church. They will ensure no stone is left unturned, exposing the truth, and holding the Church to account. The Rangahau will:

- Have full access to Church archives, records and personnel with authority to seek information the survivor requires.
- Communicate with the survivor through their Navigator, support person or legal representation.
- Work with the Hauora Coordinators, Navigators and legal representations to ensure the survivor is kept informed and can drive the process.
- Rely on existing records where possible so survivors don't have to reshare their experiences over again. This includes providing copies of these records to survivors.
- Interview witnesses as needed, and report back to the church if abuse occurred or likely occurred so that the church can respond accordingly.

The redress process will be conducted with the highest respect for confidentiality.

No information will be shared without the survivor's knowledge, unless there is an immediate concern for safety.

All records will be kept safe and secure. They will not be destroyed. Records will be maintained in line with privacy legislation and the Church's archival policies, ensuring that survivors can trust their records will be preserved with dignity and care.

The holistic redress approach recognises there is no one-size-fits-all – because we have learned that every survivor's pain, journey and ways of healing are different.

This approach ensures the redress process is not about what the Church thinks is appropriate, but about what survivors say is meaningful. It is about honouring their dignity, restoring their mana, and recognising that true accountability means centring survivors in both voice and decision.

Again, we may not get it right all of the time – and change will come over the weeks, months and years – but we will be working quickly.

Final accountability

Here is what commitment from this Church looks like:

- We honour your courage and your voice, and we believe you, survivors.
- We take responsibility for the harm done, and we will act with integrity and care.
- We will listen to you and change when you tell us it is not enough.
- We will carry our apology into the future, never returning to old ways.

- We ask you to hold us to these commitments, because your voice will always guide us.

These are our commitments, but they will take time, and we won't get it all perfect. But we aim for perfection – because you deserve perfect, to help heal the horrific wounds that we caused.

Acknowledgement of SAGE

On behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Council of Assembly, I want to express our deepest gratitude to the survivors on the Church's Survivor Advisory Group. Your wisdom, courage, and honesty have shaped not only our three-step redress process but also the way we listen and act. You have reminded us that while we cannot undo the pain, we can begin to walk in the right direction. Even while carrying your own journeys, you chose to guide us, to challenge us, and to put survivors first. For your leadership, your advocacy, and your love for all survivors, we are profoundly humbled and thankful. Whakawhetai, ma fa'afetai tele lava.

Ending

I finish by saying, the Church opens its arms to every Presbyterian Church survivor who chooses to come forward. Today's public apology is only the beginning. Our focus now turns to holistic redress for survivors – being guided by them. We will honour you in ways that feel right for you. Your voice matters. Your experience matters. You will be heard, honoured, and treated with the respect, dignity, and care you deserve.

E te iwi nui e,
tu ake ki runga ra.

Tenei te tira hou, tenei te haramai nei, nga te rongopai, nga te rangi
marie, hei arahi i a tatau ma te ara o te tikanga.

Mauri tu

Mauri tau

Mauri ohoo

Mauri ora

Kia koutou katoa.