



November 2024

To all the churches in the CCCNZ/Open Brethren Heritage movement:

On Wednesday 24 July, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-Based Care released the final report of the inquiry, called *Whanaketia: through pain and trauma, from darkness to light*. (1)

The Royal Commission met for six years and heard from more than 3,000 survivors of abuse. Horrifically, the report estimates that between the years 1950-1999 up to 200,000 people were abused in care. (2)

This comprehensive and detailed report is an important document in our nation's history and examines the historical and systemic issues within New Zealand's care institutions. At the request of leaders from the New Zealand Christian community, the inquiry scope expanded to include faith-based institutions and therefore the report includes crucial insight for churches in Aotearoa.

The name of the report directly reflects the experience of many survivors, as they have gone from the isolating darkness of not being listened to or believed, to being heard and looking to the light for healing and restoration. (3) This powerful image of darkness to light is worth noticing and reflecting on as churches.

The report highlights the abject failure of leaders of state and faith-based institutions to care for the many children, young people and adults entrusted to these institutions, "Instead of receiving care and support, children, young people and adults in care were exposed to unimaginable physical, emotional, mental and sexual abuse, severe exploitation and neglect."(4) The report also highlights that in many cases religious beliefs were used to justify abuse and to silence survivors, and that "Faith leaders similarly fought to cover up abuse by moving abusers to other locations and denying culpability."(5)

The CCCNZ Board and Staff Leadership Team are in agreement with the report when it states that these actions are "a national disgrace."(6) We agree with the NZ Christian Network in stating that, "from a Christian and biblical perspective, any form of abuse is invariably wrong and evil. All such abuse goes against the core Christian values: goodness, kindness, respect, compassion, integrity and self-control."(7) Abuse is never good, and no amount or type of abuse is acceptable. It is also wrong to cover up abuse.

We acknowledge the courage and witness of the survivors who have taken part in the inquiry. We are deeply grieved by what the inquiry has revealed.

As Royal Commission Chair Coral Shaw says "We urge you to not look away. Although confronting, this report signals an opportunity to create change in New Zealand's care system so that this can never be repeated."(8) The abuse and care website: www.abuseincare.org.nz provides full access to the report and a video summary that runs for 40 minutes.

This is a significant report, with extensive and wide-reaching recommendations included. As the

CCCNZ Board and Staff Team, we commit to engaging directly with the report. It is a priority for us to understand the implications of these recommendations and communicate these clearly to the CCCNZ/Open Brethren Heritage movement of churches.

Our work as a service trust seeks to support and serve independent churches, and so we affirm and acknowledge the autonomy of each local church and leadership. We acknowledge that each church within the CCCNZ/Open Brethren Heritage movement will have unique needs, questions, and responses to the report and recommendations.

We commit to supporting church leaders within the CCCNZ/Open Brethren Heritage movement of churches in processing the regulatory requirements.

As Whanaketia describes the journey of survivors from darkness to light we are reminded that in his sermon on the mount in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus calls all who follow him to be the light of the world: “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”(9) We commit to doing good so that God may be glorified.

If you or someone you know has experienced abuse within a CCCNZ/Open Brethren Heritage Church context, we urge you to report this to the relevant authorities. For criminal activity please report this directly to the NZ Police: [police.govt.nz/advice-services/how-report-crime-or-incident](https://www.police.govt.nz/advice-services/how-report-crime-or-incident)

We ask that you will join us in acknowledging this report, and recognising that we must work together to ensure that churches in the CCCNZ/Open Brethren Heritage movement are safe communities for all that are part of them.

**Ngā mihi nui,
CCCNZ Board and CCCNZ Staff Leadership Team**

1. <https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia>
2. <https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/transcript/>
3. <https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/acknowledgements>
4. [https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/executive-summary/paragraph #2.](https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/executive-summary/paragraph#2)
5. [https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/executive-summary/paragraph #55.](https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/executive-summary/paragraph#55)
6. [https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/executive-summary/paragraph #5.](https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/preliminaries/executive-summary/paragraph#5)
7. <https://nzchristiannetwork.org.nz/an-initial-christian-response-to-the-report-of-the-royal-commission-into-abuse-in-care/>
8. <https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia/transcript/>
9. *Matthew 5:16*

If this communication has raised issues for you and you are seeking further support, [this link](#) includes a list of some of the telephone helplines or services that offer support, information and help. All services are free.