

# The Royal Commission On Abuse In Care

The report of the Royal Commission On Abuse In Care is to be released sometime before 26 June. It will inevitably include reports of abuse within churches and church institutions. Abuse did occur. We might find ourselves in conversations with people who are angry with “the Church” How should we respond?

Please consider the following. It is based on guidance from Dave Mann from Shining Lights Trust and a communication from the PCANZ.

- Many people’s lives have been seriously affected by abuse. The pain is real and widespread. We must be careful not to inflict further hurt by becoming defensive.
- We, the Church, have failed when there has been abuse within our institutions or perpetuated by our members, when we have tried to avoid responsibility, and when we have not created policies and processes to avoid similar things happening again.
- Where there has been failure, we should acknowledge that and apologise rather than become defensive. What has been wrong needs to be brought into the light. We support the Royal Commission in investigating these wrongs.
- If people are angry with the church, we can understand that. We too are sad and angry that these things happened.
  - We are doubly angry because it is our faith that has been betrayed by people who have been unfaithful to Jesus and to the teachings of the Bible.
- We have a responsibility to make our churches, institutions and programmes absolutely safe places where people are not abused. To that end, we seek to have good governance, good practices, and education enabling people to be aware of abuse in its many forms.

Dave Mann has suggested the following response.

*I am a Christian and I totally agree with you. What was done was so wrong – and I know everyone in our church is really angry about it also. This has to be brought to light and dealt with.*

## Complaint Against Presbyterian Support Otago

As you might have seen in the ODT recently, a complaint was made to the Royal Commission about abuse allegedly suffered by a child resident in a PSO home in the 1950s. The PCANZ is deeply troubled by the possibility that this happened, saying, “The sexual abuse of children is abhorrent and a crime.”

An independent inquiry has not been able to confirm or deny the allegations. That will be distressing for the complainant, and the PCANZ is committed to continuing the investigation if more information comes to light. A statement from the PCANZ is available on our website and from the church office.

If you have any information about this allegation, that can be reported (anonymously, if you prefer). The details are on the PCANZ statement.

## At East Taieri Church

We do our best to eliminate the possibility of anyone being abused in any way connected to our church. We have policies and practices clearly documented, and communicated to those in leadership positions. For example, the PCANZ requires that a police check is done before anyone can work with children or youth, or vulnerable people. We have health and safety policies and codes of practice. All people working with children are required to undergo a comprehensive PCANZ “Warrant of Fitness” Training, every 3 years.

No form of abuse should occur in any context, let alone a church context. It is wrong and completely inconsistent with the word of God. It results in enormous hurt to victims but also undermines the credibility of a church and brings disgrace to the name of Jesus.

If you do have an abuse-related complaint concerning any of our staff or leaders, there is a complaints process and there are people appointed by the presbytery (i.e. the Otago/Southland regional body) who will receive complaints and help you through the process. The Dunedin person is:

Ivan Criglington

Email: [criglington1@gmail.com](mailto:criglington1@gmail.com)

Phone: 027 302 8119

Others are listed on the complaints process notice in the church foyer.

Further information about the complaints process can be found on the PCANZ website: [www.presbyterian.org.nz](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz) or phone the Complaints Officer on 0800 424 872.

## In conclusion

Please be very aware of those who have been hurt by abuse of any kind, in any organisation. Respond with grace and compassion. Think how Jesus would respond to a victim.

If others are angry, do not be provoked to anger or defensiveness. Again, show grace and compassion. Complaints need to be taken seriously. If we at East Taieri Church can help, please contact us.

God bless,

The East Taieri elders and staff.