

*On February 1, 2018 Prime Minister, Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern announced a Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse.*

The New Zealand Government has established the Royal Commission into Abuse in State Care in recognition of calls over a number of years from many individuals and community groups for an independent inquiry into abuse in state care in New Zealand.

At the date of writing this [23 October 2018], the Government has yet to confirm the Terms of Reference for the Commission or explain how it will operate. The New Zealand Catholic bishops and the heads of all religious congregations have called for the terms of reference for the Commission to be as broad as possible to ensure the Church is included.

Their representative bodies – the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference – Te Huinga o ngā Pihopa Katorika o Aotearoa (NZCBC) and the Congregational Leaders' Conference Aotearoa New Zealand (CLCANZ) have appointed a new group to ensure that the Catholic Church provides a co-ordinated and co-operative response to the Commission from all the many dioceses, congregations and institutions of the Church in this country. The new group is called *Te Rōpū Tautoko*.

I have been appointed as chair and joining me on the group are:

- Bishop Charles Drennan from the Diocese of Palmerston North;
- Sr Katrina Fabish from the Sisters of Mercy;
- Deacon Danny Karatea-Goddard from the NZCBC Secretariat;
- Fr David Kennerley from the Society of Mary;
- Br David McDonald from the Marist Brothers; and
- Sr Jane O'Carroll from the Marist Sisters.

Our aim is quite simple – to *support* the Royal Commission. This group collectively represents senior leadership of the Church and more members may be added when we have greater clarity around the needs and expertise required to support the Royal Commission.

In creating the Tautoko, the NZCBC and the CLCANZ recognise that our pilgrim Church, like the Government, is seeking a collective approach to understanding, reviewing, and addressing the learnings of the past. The way that lessons are learnt for today and the future is to examine, understand, acknowledge and address what has occurred. We will collectively work towards healing. To do that, we must support the Royal Commission with the information they need.

*“We participate in the processes of the Commission as a wounded whānau. Because of, not in spite of, our own brokenness in regard to abuse, we offer our lessons. These [lessons] come from a place of deep humility. All we have to offer is our own experiences and the call to justice, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, Hehu Karaiti.”* – Te Rōpū Tautoko terms of reference.

*Catherine Fyfe is a lay person with extensive experience in human resource management and organisational development.*