



4 August 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This week the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care has published its case study report concerning the Brothers of St John of God.

Even though I am away on pilgrimage with a group attending World Youth Day in Portugal, I wanted to write and share with you my thoughts on the release of this report.

As part of its investigation into the Catholic Church, the Royal Commission has prepared a case study into abuse in the care of the Brothers of St John of God. The case study focuses on institutions run by the brothers for a period of time in Christchurch – including Marylands School (1950s-1980s) and Hebron Trust (1980s-early 1990s). The events relating to Marylands and the Hebron Trust have been the subject of many court cases and settlements with survivors and resulted in much media coverage during the 1990s and 2000s.

The evidence in this case study has also informed the Commission's wider investigation looking into whether there are any systemic, structural, or other factors in the wider Church which contributed to abuse occurring and any inadequacy of response by the Catholic Church.

The report highlights the horrific abuse and the failures of individuals to ensure the safety of people in their care and provide adequate support for those harmed.

The abuse by those representing the Catholic Church caused so much harm. Church leaders should have been more vigilant and done more to ensure the safety of those in the care of the Church and support those abused.

As the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch, I state categorically that I am committed to ensuring that safeguarding culture standards established for the Catholic Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, are implemented fully. I require everyone working in Church roles within our Diocese to adhere to these standards and follow the procedures in place.

Just as we improve safeguarding and confront our history, so we must also assist those who have been harmed. We are committed to supporting victims of abuse. To this end, I urge victims who have not yet come forward to do so. Please contact the Police or the Church's National Office for Professional Standards (NOPS).

There is no escaping the abhorrent nature and scale of the abuse documented in the Commission's report. The fact is that the abuse described in this case study – and any abuse - should never have happened.

The Church must also continue to confront the difficult truths of the past, including the inexcusable abuse and suffering that is described in the case study report.

The Order involved in this case study, the Brothers of St John of God, no longer operates any works in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Ownership and management of the facilities and works referenced in the case study report are now closed, or transferred to the state, or have been transferred to other entities. However, we cannot be complacent and say this is all in the past. We must continue to act and improve practices put in place throughout the Church and support those who have been harmed.

As a Catholic family, our tradition when facing grave evil is to support those impacted, respond with clear safeguarding principles and respond on a spiritual level with prayer and fasting. I invite you to join me this coming Friday, August the 11th, to collectively offer dedicated prayer and penance of your choosing in reparation for the harm done and for the survivors of abuse, especially those this report concerns.

To conclude, I echo the words of Pope Francis who, in 2018, said:

Looking ahead to the future, no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such situations from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated. The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults.

Yours in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Gielen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† **Michael Gielen**
Bishop of Christchurch