

**ABUSE IN CARE ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE HEARING**

Under The Inquiries Act 2013

In the matter of The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

Royal Commission: Judge Coral Shaw (Chair)
Dr Anaru Erueti
Ali'imuaamua Sandra Alofivae
Paul Gibson

Counsel: Mr Simon Mount QC, Ms Kerryn Beaton QC, Ms Katherine Anderson, Ms Tania Sharkey, Mr Michael Thomas, Ms Kathy Basire and Ms Alisha Castle for the Royal Commission

Ms Rachael Schmidt-McCleave and Ms Julia White for the Crown

Ms Sally McKechnie and Ms Brooke Clifford for Te Rōpū Tautoko, the Catholic Bishops and Congregational Leaders

Ms India Shores for the Anglican Church

Ms Maria Dew, Ms Kiri Harkess and Mr Lourenzo Fernandez for the Methodist Church of New Zealand and Wesley College

Ms Lydia Oosterhoff for the Survivor Network of those Abused by Priests

Mr Brian Henry for Gloriavale Leavers' Support Trust

Mr Chris Shannon and Ms Clare Sykes for Gloriavale Christian Community

Venue: Level 2
Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry
414 Khyber Pass Road
AUCKLAND

Date: 13 October 2022

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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8 **MS BEATON:** Madam Chair, I invite Rosanna Overcomer on behalf of the Gloriavale Leavers'
9 Trust to speak now.

10 **CHAIR:** Thank you.

11 Good morning and welcome to the Commission.

12 **OPENING STATEMENT BY GLORIAVALE LEAVERS' SUPPORT TRUST**

13 **MS OVERCOMER:** Kia ora. My name is Rosanna Overcomer and I am, if you can't see me, a
14 tall brunette wearing a white blouse and an oatmeal-coloured blazer. I am a survivor
15 standing tall and proud of what I have overcome.

16 I am both a member of the Gloriavale Leavers' Support Trust and an ex-member of
17 Gloriavale. Today Gloriavale is part of this hearing essentially because of the dreadful lack
18 of care from Government agencies in the past. After our leader Hopeful Christian was
19 convicted and served a short prison sentence for his crimes, he was allowed back into our
20 community, the community where I, a child, lived. The people that should have cared for
21 the children and vulnerable allowed a sex offender not only into a close-knit community
22 with inadequate living quarters but back into the senior position of leadership as the
23 Shepherd of the church.

24 If the right actions had have been taken all those years ago, I believe I would not be
25 standing here today.

26 We the children and vulnerable of Gloriavale were let down by the Government
27 agencies that should have been protecting us. What was not dealt with appropriately went
28 on to become the culture I was raised in. When people in positions of power have no
29 accountability, they create a path of hurt and destruction. Systems left unchecked don't
30 improve, they deteriorate. This is what has happened at Gloriavale. What began as a
31 sharing life became "take your share". In the same way, those small symptoms of control
32 and abuse have morphed into a culture where abuse is most unfortunately normal and
33 almost okay.

1 The people have suffered emotional, physical, sexual, and racial abuse as well as
2 neglect. Neglect of their everyday needs and rights, neglect to educate and the ability to
3 function as healthy individuals in society, including the racial injustice of the Māori people
4 of Gloriavale and the Indians in the Indian community.

5 The methods Gloriavale has used in the past to deal with any issues is to character
6 assassinate, to publicly shame and this begins from as young as pre-school-aged children,
7 removing children from families, sitting them separately in a large room in school. Not
8 allowing peer interactions and meaningful friendships to form is harmful.

9 How can these deep-rooted methods change when it is the same people in
10 leadership? Where have the people been that could have made a difference? The agencies
11 that have known for over 50 years the truth of what has been happening there. Have they
12 turned a blind eye, or was it simply put in the too-hard basket?

13 Gloriavale has maintained for many years a belief that they are capable of dealing
14 with the instances of abuse that occur in their community. Should the survivors be
15 expected to trust the very people who caused the abuse, the Shepherds and Servants who
16 are in those positions of authority to conduct a thorough and appropriate investigation? We
17 need these very people to be held accountable for the damage they have caused. An
18 apology would go a long way, but a true apology comes with meaningful change.

19 We would like to see the systemic issues addressed, policies and robust systems put
20 in place to stop this level of abuse ever happening again.

21 However, one simple policy change to tick a box for the public eye will do nothing
22 to deal with the dysfunction that exists across multiple layers of the Gloriavale society, if
23 the same leaders are left to make those changes. The same leaders that have covered for
24 abusers for years, lied to protect family names, and learned that to deal with a victim is only
25 to shame and accuse them of being the offender themselves.

26 This is not about one perpetrator or one man. This is about a system that enables
27 abuse. The survivors have an understanding of what needs to change. If only someone
28 would listen. Why should the survivors be re-traumatised over and over again whilst
29 begging to be heard when they risk giving evidence only to add to the public saturation of
30 all too many similar abuse stories and the constant shame and guilt put on them by the very
31 people who should care the most?

32 Where the leaders at Gloriavale have been put almost in a position of God and held
33 in the utmost esteem, have created a culture of shifting the blame, minimising the trauma

1 and deeming the victim the offender, we know we will be mocked by our own. We know
2 we will be called bitter and angry. But we speak up for the children, the future.

3 We survivors are a forgiving group of people. We can cope with what's in the past.
4 We can hope and heal and work for a better life. But we want lasting change for our
5 families still inside. We want a safe place for our nieces and nephews to grow up in. We
6 want them to have the same liberties, opportunities, education and care any New Zealander
7 deserves. We need to know there will be significant changes to the systems and leadership
8 that brought us here today.

9 And if I can draw attention to paragraph 16 in Gloriavale's response:

10 "The child protection policy is reviewed annually. We will review the policy in
11 November. A number of our own people are making submissions to the trust which drew
12 up the original policy. The trustees will consider these submissions and modify the policy
13 as they can to make it more practical."

14 That is a lie. It is not the charitable trust that runs Gloriavale, it is the Shepherds
15 and Servants and it is these men that need to be held accountable for what they have
16 allowed to happen in Gloriavale, for the abuse that continues today, for the neglect that
17 continues today, and I'd like to see that accountability happen. Thank you.

18 **CHAIR:** Kia ora, Ms Overcomer. I must say that your name says it all. Thank you to you, thank
19 you to the other survivors who have had the courage and the fortitude to stand up. You've
20 revealed the pain beneath that and we acknowledge that and we want to assure all the
21 survivors that you are listened to and you are being heard. Thank you, please now go and
22 look after yourself. **[Applause]**

23 **MS BEATON:** Madam Chair, I think it's time for the morning break and after that we'll have --

24 **CHAIR:** Certainly. What time shall we come back?

25 **MS BEATON:** Perhaps 5 to 11.

26 **CHAIR:** All right, we will resume again at 5 to 11. Thank you.

27 **Adjournment from 10.41 am to 11.04 am**