

**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'imuumua Sandra Alofivae
Paul Gibson

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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
Mrs Fiona Guy-Kidd, Mr Jeremy Johnston and Ms India Shores for the Anglican Church
Ms Maria Dew KC, Ms Kiri Harkess and Mr Lourenzo Fernandez for the Methodist Church and Wesley Faith
Mr Brian Henry, Mr Chris Shannon and Ms Sykes for Gloriavale
Ms Sarah Kuper and Mr Matthew Hague for the Presbyterian Church
Ms Helen Smith and Ms Sarah Kuper for Presbyterian Support Central
Mr Sam Hider for Presbyterian Support Otago
Mr Andrew Barker and Ms Honor Lanham for Dilworth School and Dilworth Trust Board
Mr Karl van der Plas, Mr Jaiden Gosha, Ms Rachael Reed and Ms Ali van Ammers for the Dilworth Class Action Group

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

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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18 Good morning, Mr Shannon. Thank you for appearing again today. Would you
19 like to introduce yourself and then we will be happy to hear from you.

20 **MR SHANNON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My name's Chris Shannon, I'm appearing with Ms
21 Sykes for Gloriavale, I'm a Pākehā male, middle-aged, glasses, perhaps need a haircut, and
22 wearing a blue suit. And I'm non-disabled.

23 **CHAIR:** Just bring the microphone a bit closer to you, Mr Shannon, we're just having -- I'm not
24 sure it's going to make any difference. Thank you.

25 **MR SHANNON:** Can you hear me better now?

26 **CHAIR:** Yes, that's a little better, thank you.

27 **CLOSING STATEMENT BY GLORIAVALE**

28 **MR SHANNON:** Thank you. Parents at Gloriavale, like Rachel Stedfast, have hopes and dreams
29 for their children just as other parents do. They want their children to live healthy lives
30 unaffected by the blight of abuse. Rachel Stedfast has said that (inaudible) grandparents,
31 aunties, uncles, teachers, leaders, we all want our children, to protect our children and make
32 sure they're safe and well cared for and of course (inaudible) want new policies, ongoing
33 education and amended practices to prevent abuse of our children. This is a natural human
34 response we wanted these changes for ourselves.

1 So it is that Gloriavale has made changes in its practices, changes in terms of
2 policies, in terms of education and in terms of family time. And that's been supported by
3 external agencies, as Howard Temple realises that the community can't walk alone with
4 these changes. It's been percolated from the top down, as he told you, and there are hopes
5 that you'll have the notes that he had when he was educating community members on the
6 child protection, safety and well-being policy.

7 In this closing I'll deal first with some preliminary comments, then with the aspects
8 of the evidence, then last with a brief response to some of the leavers, and conclude.

9 In terms of preliminary comments, as you know, this Inquiry is not about freedom
10 of religion or freedom of association. Rachel Stedfast, Howard Temple and other members
11 within Gloriavale are entitled to choose their own religious beliefs, to wear whatever
12 clothing they like, just as other New Zealanders, and our laws recognise such freedoms
13 which protect us all.

14 Some segments of the media choose to continually criticise Gloriavale and its
15 residents. They label it a cult and generalise and judge the people there. There's a risk of
16 that approach promoting intolerance, of taking the unacceptable behaviour of certain
17 individuals and generalising towards a whole group. If something bad happens in the
18 suburb of Sockburn you don't say that Christchurch is a bad place, but too often that
19 distinction is not applied to Gloriavale.

20 Many groups in our society face prejudice, prejudice for being different, wearing
21 the wrong clothes, for not being mainstream, or for holding conservative beliefs.
22 Gloriavale residents are no exception to that.

23 Now, that's not to say that there have not been issues with the historic handling of
24 abuse; there have been. Howard Temple accepts that. Gloriavale's particular history is tied
25 up with Hopeful Christian who died in May 2018 and there's been a change of leadership
26 style since Howard Temple took over as Overseeing Shepherd. Howard Temple consults
27 more and has a more open leadership style.

28 You would have seen during his evidence that Mr Temple just tried to tell the truth
29 irrespective of how that came across. He didn't seek to defend the indefensible, he's no
30 autocrat. He went to Police himself in 2020. He and other leaders have taken expert advice
31 from Oranga Tamariki, Safeguarding Children, and others, and changes have been made in
32 implementing a child protection leads group, and Rachel Stedfast told you about how there
33 were women and young people on that group to increase avenues for reporting.

1 And despite the extensive scrutiny this community has undergone, neither Police
2 nor Oranga Tamariki have suggested any lack of cooperation or reluctance to participate
3 and change on their part in recent times. Indeed, in 2020, Police acknowledged the clear
4 support both the leadership and the community had provided to the Police in that
5 investigation.

6 There was a question, one of the Commissioners asked about whether a transcript or
7 video would be sent to members of the community so they could see what was going on for
8 themselves. Well, the morning after the hearing a - an- email was sent with a link to the
9 video so that members of the community could see the video for themselves and that was
10 sent to households, and that's come with -increasing transparency of what's going on.

11 The predominant fact allowing incidents of abuse and inappropriate behaviour in
12 the past was personal more than doctrinal, I suggest. The impact of a particular leader,
13 Hopeful Christian, on the then culture is a circumstance which is perhaps unique to
14 Gloriavale compared to the other faiths that you will have heard from. Under a different
15 leader the community has changed significantly and in beneficial ways.

16 Turning to the evidence, the Commission heard evidence-in-chief from Gloriavale's
17 witnesses for just over 10 minutes, that was followed by about four and a half hours of
18 cross-examination and Commissioners' questions. Now, having time spent on
19 cross-examination that's approaching 40 times longer than evidence-in-chief inevitably
20 tends to accentuate the negative. No re-examination time is allocated.

21 Now, the public hearings are necessarily a snapshot of all the evidence that you've
22 received beforehand and they can't show the whole picture, we're only seeing, publicly, part
23 of it. There were many questions about the What We Believe document from 1989 and that
24 was being -- sections of that were impugned in the questioning. However, it is an historic
25 document from over 30 years ago. It reflects a different leadership, a different time and is
26 very different to the current version.

27 The 1989 document is over 150 pages long and a few clauses from it (inaudible) in
28 questioning. The current version is only about 11 pages long. And in questioning a literal
29 interpretation was taken of that 1989 document, assuming no divergence between practice
30 and what was written on paper.

31 However, the 1989 document included things like "Therefore, as Christians, we
32 must fulfil Christ's main commandment. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in
33 heaven is perfect." No mention was made of that and no literal interpretation was made.

1 There was quite a bit of questioning about the travelling away from the Church and
2 the need to have the full approval and blessing of leaders and it was suggested that that was
3 for control in the 1989 document. However, practices differed. Rachel Stedfast says,
4 "While I may at times advise community leaders of my travel plans if I happen to be in
5 discussion, many/most times I travel away I do so without their knowledge."

6 There were also questions about Police reporting on their Police Operation
7 Minneapolis in 2020. Three points are made about that.

8 First, Police said 61 young people are identified as involved in harmful sexual
9 behaviours either as offenders, peers or victims. The status of someone as a peer seems
10 unfair and there's not (inaudible) as to numbers in each category.

11 The second point is that the focus of that operation was on interactions between
12 some young people and that's a different issue between adults and children. And that was
13 why it was important to keep a closer eye on what young people did and to educate them on
14 appropriate behaviour.

15 Third, many or most of those young people referred to will be victims that still live
16 in Gloriavale. The question then is, how can we help them? Counselling and support are
17 being offered, and all victims should be treated with respect wherever they are. There
18 shouldn't be two categories of survivor, one that's the vocal leavers group, or some vocal
19 leavers, on the one hand, and then those that are inside the community or outside the
20 community but just less vocal.

21 Constant criticism of Gloriavale runs the risk of insensitivity to survivors within the
22 community.

23 On the topic of victims of abuse, Howard Temple was asked about during the
24 hearing whether some victims were required in the past to apologise before the whole
25 congregation or to forgive offenders before the whole congregation and he said that was
26 possibly the case, his response was vague. However, Rachel Stedfast has confirmed in her
27 second witness statement that in her entire life in the community, she's never seen nor heard
28 of someone appearing in front of the full congregation to forgive a perpetrator.

29 It's submitted that she's right about that, and Howard Temple has accepted that on
30 reflection he can't recall a victim ever appearing before the congregation to forgive an
31 offender.

32 Towards the end of the hearing one of the Commissioners suggested that the
33 community is slow to respond to abuse allegations but for the presence of Government
34 agencies. That's not accepted. When community leaders and members learned about the

1 findings of Police Operation Minneapolis, they wanted and implemented changes. It wasn't
2 about obliging State agencies but it was about the welfare of their families. Who loves a
3 child more than their own parents, grandparents and wider whānau?

4 There were some references in the evidence to State agencies. However,
5 Gloriavale's experience is that agencies such as Oranga Tamariki and Police have been
6 professional, helpful and offered a degree of expertise that the community simply didn't
7 have without them. And Howard Temple recognises that the community can't walk alone
8 and no blame has been placed on State agencies. Their support has been welcomed and
9 embraced.

10 During the hearing questions were asked about the treatment of Prayer, the
11 14-year-old girl who tragically choked and died, choked on a piece of meat and died in
12 about 2015. You'll remember Rachel Stedfast's reaction to that, how emotional she was. It
13 reflects that Prayer was a much-loved member of the community. Counsel Assisting the
14 Commission asked about the circumstances surrounding Prayer's death and cited the door
15 handle had been removed from the door.

16 Well, generalised references about Gloriavale having done that conceals that one
17 person was responsible for removing a door handle and that wasn't the cause of Prayer's
18 death. The Coroner confirmed the cause was asphyxia caused by a piece of meat blocking
19 her airway.

20 The Coroner states that a number of people went into the room to try and help her
21 via a window and the Coroner determined that the disabling of the door handle did not
22 contribute to Prayer's death in any way. Magill forceps are the tool that ambulance officers
23 usually carry to try and extract obstructions but households -- almost no households will
24 have such a tool, and the community as a whole shouldn't be impugned as responsible for
25 this terrible accident.

26 A few comments on the incorporation of Māori culture in the community. The
27 community is not part of the State and is under no obligation to practise aspects of Māori
28 culture, although the school and early childhood centres may be subject to obligations in
29 that respect. That said, the community does voluntarily teach and use te reo Māori, waiata
30 and other tikanga and has done for years.

31 As Rachel Stedfast explained, this comes from a genuine passion for learning our
32 national language and a core part of New Zealand's culture and history. She explained that
33 culture can have different meanings and that Christianity is the dominant culture in
34 Gloriavale and so she explained that Māori culture will be taught and incorporated up to the

1 point that it conflicts with Christianity, for example Māori gods and origin stories are not
2 taught as that differs from the community's religious beliefs.

3 The community has no objection to learning and using te reo Māori and aspects of
4 tikanga, and do so.

5 Ms Stedfast explained (inaudible) aligned with Gloriavale's beliefs and practices,
6 the tradition of communal living, family relationships that extend beyond the nuclear
7 family, as with whānau, and a spiritual leadership model that's common in both
8 communities.

9 Finally, I'll respond briefly to the witness statements of Ms Overcomer and other
10 leavers. Ms Overcomer made an opening address on behalf of the Gloriavale Leavers'
11 Trust at the start of the hearing with this aspect and she described key causes of abuse in the
12 community as Hopeful Christian holding the Overseer's Shepherd role, the community
13 seeking to resolve issues internally without involving external agencies, prioritising
14 communal living over family relationships, and a lack of written policies and procedures in
15 place for addressing abuse allegations.

16 As explained in the evidence of Howard Temple and Rachel Stedfast, each of these
17 possible contributing factors has been addressed in the nine years since Ms Overcomer left
18 the community. A change has been made, it doesn't represent the current position nor the
19 position for some years.

20 The Leavers' Trust represents a small group of individuals who have left the
21 community who regularly bring litigation proceedings against members of the community.
22 This particularly vocal group of leavers doesn't include every person who's left the
23 community. Necessarily, people who have left the community years ago will not have
24 recent experience of what it's like to live in Gloriavale.

25 The Leavers' Trust cannot be considered representative of the wider Gloriavale
26 community or representative of those who have left.

27 The Leavers' Trust have never been transparent about how many people it speaks
28 for and with what authority. Undoubtedly, it speaks for some but it's not clear who and for
29 what purpose.

30 Questions were asked of Howard Temple about not reaching out to survivors before
31 now. However, there are a number of ongoing civil proceedings brought by leavers against
32 Gloriavale leadership and care needs to be taken about when and how any reaching out is
33 done in light of live proceedings.

1 Now, all of this is not to say that there haven't been instances of abuse and issues in
2 the past. Gloriavale has repeatedly and openly acknowledged mistakes were made.
3 However, the leavers have provided evidence to the Commission through an historical lens
4 without the benefit of living through the period of change that's occurred in the community
5 since.

6 To conclude, you've received evidence from two Gloriavale witnesses explaining
7 these changes, both of them expressed genuine attempts to continue the culture shift at
8 Gloriavale to ensure that any abusive practices in the past are never repeated.

9 (Inaudible).

10 **CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Shannon. Just in relation to the extra evidence that was being provided
11 by Ms Stedfast and Mr Temple, I can assure you we have received those and they will go
12 up on our website in the interests of clarity and transparency. Thank you for your
13 confirmation that the video of the proceedings or the link to that has been sent to the
14 community, that is helpful.

15 And thank you for presenting so clearly the concerns of Gloriavale in relation to the
16 hearing and putting the balance in their view back. That is important. We have listened
17 carefully and everything that you have said today will certainly be taken into account when
18 we are reaching our decisions.

19 Just so that everybody knows, this isn't the end of the opportunity for all parties to
20 comment. There will be a -- we have a strong natural justice process whereby whatever we
21 write, if it's adverse against a group or an individual, that person will have the opportunity
22 to comment before we reach a final decision on that matter. So just to assure your clients,
23 the Gloriavale community, that we will continue stringently to follow that natural justice
24 process.

25 Thank you very much indeed to you for your submissions and thank you to
26 Mr Temple and Ms Stedfast for making themselves available during the hearing, and for
27 providing, through your team probably, all the information that has been a very valuable
28 contribution to our work. So thank you very much, and --

29 **MR SHANNON:** (Inaudible).

30 **CHAIR:** Thank you.

31 That brings us then to the submissions for the Methodist Church and I invite Ms
32 Dew.

33 Kia ora, Ms Dew.