



Br Darren Burge, Star of the Sea Provincial Apology to Survivors of Abuse Aotearoa New Zealand

Tena koutou katoa.....Good afternoon to each and every one of you.

I come here as a stranger from another land. It is with personal sorrow, humility and great respect that I join you today. I appreciate that I will never fully comprehend the burden you carry or the language and traditions that have guided you to this point. Above all, I come here today with sadness and remorse for the harm you experienced and to continue listening, learning and responding in the ways you need. I recognise that attending an event of this nature may be especially challenging for some individuals and understand that it can evoke a range of emotions.

My offering is small but sincere, and it's all I have. I hope it may contribute to some healing for you.

To all those who have suffered as a result of child abuse within Marist Brothers Institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, with deep respect I acknowledge the immense pain, anguish, betrayal, and lasting scars caused by the actions of Brothers and staff members—crimes that have hurt young people, their whanau and families and the wider community. I am sorry.

The abuse itself was an insult to you and on you: your person, your dignity, and your innocence as a child. The abuse were shameful acts that should never have occurred. The abuse was perpetrated by men who were in a position of authority, who not only abused you, but also their position as a member of the Marist Brothers, as a teacher and as a brother. Those in positions of authority have a responsibility to protect students from harm. The growth and development of children and young people rely on this standard of behaviour. Children and young people have a universal right to feel and be safe from harm. We failed to protect you and your rights.

The abuse has come in many forms. There has been sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse. And there have been physical, sexual, mental, emotional, relational, cultural and spiritual impacts on the lives of survivors because of this, including intergenerational and long-lasting impacts. There has been systemic failure that has enabled the abuse to happen in the first place and lasting secondary abuse due to our inadequate processes for response and redress.

It is with deep regret that children and young people were ignored or not supported when they needed it most, allowing for abuse to continue when it could have been prevented. I know that many survivors have found it unsafe to disclose, but many still did disclose and were met with denial, punishment, silencing and even cover-up. There were poor responses that were not survivor focused. Inconsistent responses have also compounded this suffering and caused further harm.

The Marist Brothers made the mistake of deciding for survivors what they needed for their healing. We were concerned with self-protection and failed to listen with an open heart to survivors' pain and what was needed for their healing.

There has been a contradiction between the Christian principles publicly professed by the Brothers and the abuse that has occurred, including our responses to these. We have fallen short of our very purpose as Marist Brothers, to educate and uplift children and young people, helping them envision a hopeful, promising future and a fulfilling path through life. Yet the abuse of vulnerable children has caused harm, mistrust, fear, loss and confusion, destroying those hopes and inflicting damage that cannot be excused. This damage, for some, may have destroyed their faith and their own spiritual life. We are sorry.

On behalf of myself and the Marist Brothers, I apologise for these crimes and abuse. I offer our unreserved and heartfelt apology for all that has transpired. It is a source of profound shame that child abuse of any type occurred under our care. That young lives were grievously harmed by those entrusted with their wellbeing is a burden we carry with great sadness. That parents who placed their trust in us to safeguard and care for their children and young people were betrayed, is a source of enduring sorrow.

I do not doubt that the abuse each of you suffered remains with you to this day. This too saddens me and fills me with remorse.

On behalf of all Marist Brothers, I am sorry that we did not listen to survivors like you, to others who were harmed and to parents and whanau. We apologise for failing to respond adequately and minimising the impact this abuse has had on you, both at the time and in the years that followed. We are sorry.

I also acknowledge the many innocent victims, survivors, their whanau and loved ones who are no longer with us. We recognise the shortcomings in our responses when these crimes were brought to light, and we deeply regret the pain caused by our past failures. I also acknowledge the difficult and long journeys many survivors have undertaken in pursuit of healing and justice. It shouldn't have been that way; you should have been heard.

Our apology is not offered without the assurance that the Marist Brothers are continuing to implement corresponding actions. We are committed to a future free from the failings and betrayals of the past. Today, the Marist Brothers are dedicated to ensuring that the experiences and suffering of so many are never forgotten, and that every step we take from here is guided by the best interests of children and young people. It is our hope that this be a moment of acknowledgement, remembrance, and renewed hope for all those affected. May it also be the sign of our ongoing commitment to the wellbeing of all children and young people who have any connection with Marist Brothers and their ministries.

Let me assure you the Marist Brothers and our educational institutions, and indeed the Church, have made progress around safeguarding children and young people. But the task of safeguarding is not yet complete. We have more to do, and we must always be vigilant. Today, safeguarding is a key priority in our education. There are clear protocols and procedures for the screening of staff members in schools, be they brothers or lay teachers. We are committed to ongoing training activities for staff members and brothers, and awareness raising activities that are embedding safeguarding into the fabric of our practice.

Pope Leo XIV recently reaffirmed that safeguarding lies at the heart of the Church's mission, emphasising the importance of engaging with survivors as a central reference point for every action. Today's gathering, shaped by survivors working with our Safeguarding Officer, Jonathan, demonstrates this commitment.

We know that an apology like today's cannot be delivered without concrete actions to effect change. We are genuinely placing resources and effort into actions that are not necessarily seen publicly but that help survivors. This is based on dialogue with individual survivors because we appreciate that everybody has a different experience; we seek to assist with processes that enhance the possibility of healing and seek to empower the survivors. We will welcome any survivors who get in touch.

The Marist Brothers recognise that there has been a lack of responsibility and accountability, as well as an intent to move Brothers when allegations or suspicions were raised. Those actions created opportunity for further abuse and harm and a tragedy we continue to acknowledge and attempt to rectify with better transparency and reporting across the Marist Institution.

The Marist Brothers are committed to holding abusers and enablers accountable, along with those who have mistreated survivors who have shared of their abuse. We are steadfast in our commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to any behaviour that could harm children, young people and vulnerable adults. While our focus will also be on preventing abuse in its many forms, our commitment is broader and deeper. We want to contribute to making our part of the world a place where children, and all with whom we have contact, may flourish.

We expect, no, *we demand*, that every Marist Brother, staff and all who work with us, will uphold this high standard, and that their principal goal each day is and will always be the safe flourishing of the person and their spirit. Safeguarding is a commitment to human growth for all and to a transparent, total commitment to vigilance. There will be no tolerance of any breach to this obligation.

The Marist Brothers expect that those who are working with survivors and offering redress are professional, have regular training, and have the appropriate supports in place to enable them to complete their role effectively.

While today I offer you our apology publicly, personal apologies will continue to be given to survivors who choose them. Our approach allows for survivors to have choice in their futures. This apology today is a new phase of our journey: the Marist Brothers has set up a clear redress process and commits to ongoing monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure that we continue to learn and grow. There will be a yearly progress report that will be made public. I understand it will be difficult for survivors to trust this apology, and I appreciate that trust and forgiveness must be earned over time.

To the survivors here and online today, I acknowledge your courage in reporting abuse, for attending today and I also recognise those who have in the past received inadequate support from us, and those who are not yet ready to come forward. I hope and pray that this will bring some healing and peace to you now and into the future. However, I know that the shadow of abuse will always be nearby.

This apology and gathering is an enduring reminder that invites us to never forget; that warns us against ever becoming complacent; that declares unequivocally that we must always act in the best interests of children and young people; that challenges us to never lose from our collective memories the abuse of what so many have suffered.



Br Darren Burge
Provincial, Marist Brothers Star of the Sea Province

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