

Meditations on the Way of the Cross



through the life of **Suzanne Aubert**

Stained glass windows by John Drawbridge, photographs by Nina Cuccurullo
Reflections by Bridget Taumoepeau
Reflection on the Resurrection Window by Paul Ramsay

Nau mai, haere mai *Welcome* *to the Chapel of Our Lady of Compassion*

The Sisters of Compassion first built on the hilltop site in Island Bay, Wellington, New Zealand, back in 1907. Over the years the Chapel had always been within the building itself. But in the 1980s it was time to design and build a Chapel that would stand alone.

The stained glass windows were designed by John Drawbridge, an Island Bay artist, and the glass work was completed by Peter Kirby of Paraparaumu. Drawbridge chose compelling primary colours— blue, red and yellow, relieved by blocks of white. Occasional touches of green, pink and orange are there to surprise the eyes.

Although it is not mandatory for a chapel to have the Stations of the Cross represented, the Sisters of Compassion wanted to include them because of their particular significance for the Congregation, based on the example of Mary, the woman of the compassion who stood at the foot of the cross.



The Way of the Cross



I. Jesus is condemned to death.

Suzanne Aubert knew all about those who were not accepted by their community—the disabled, the unwanted, the poor. Those who others had washed their hands of. Her life was one of service to them.

Who have I been unkind to, or not included? Those who are “on the edge”, who are different to me? Can I see Christ in them? Wouldn't Jesus have embraced them?

Prayer: Lord, we ask you to give us the gift of kindness; never to condemn anyone around us, seeing God in everyone.

Lord hear us
E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer
Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



2. Jesus is made to carry his cross

Suzanne had many crosses to bear—her ill-health; the disapproval of her parents; difficulties in setting up her mission, and more. But she devoted herself to lightening the crosses that others had to bear.

Do I struggle under the weight of my own crosses, the things that I find hard? Where do I draw strength to carry on?

Prayer: Lord, we ask you to give us strength to carry on when life is hard. May we use your example and the example of Suzanne Aubert to encourage us to be strong.

Lord hear us
E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer
Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



3. Jesus falls for the first time

Suzanne Aubert must have sometimes felt that the many difficulties she faced were a great weight on her, like the cross was for you, Lord. She had been told by St John Vianney that she would 'fall' several times. However, she did not let these difficulties stop her in her mission.

What happens when I feel down or discouraged? As Pope Francis has reminded us—it is not the falling down that is the problem, it is how we get up and carry on that is important. Can I pick myself up, strengthened by my love of God?

Prayer: Lord, help us to get up when life is hard and we fall. May we always keep our eyes on you, knowing that you will always lift us up, even when we feel hopeless.

Lord hear us

E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer

Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



4. Jesus meets his Mother Mary

Suzanne and Mary share many qualities—they gladly said “yes” to the call of God. They showed caring and faithfulness, but also strength, determination and loyalty. Mary’s life cannot have been easy and neither was Suzanne’s.

Do I turn to Our Lady, knowing that she has experienced great sorrow? Do I let her accompany me and comfort me?

Prayer: Our Lady of Sorrows, we ask you to intercede for us with your Son. You know our sadness, our regrets and our disappointments, which you can present to Our Lord on our behalf, so that we may gain strength to always follow Jesus.

Lord hear us

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5. Simon of Cyrene helps Christ to carry the cross

Suzanne helped so many to carry their crosses. And she also experienced that help herself—the support for her throughout New Zealand was considerable. When she died huge crowds turned out for her funeral.

Can I use my experience and my gifts to help others and lighten their loads? Do I look for opportunities to help those who are struggling?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the gifts you have given us. We ask you to help us see those who are suffering in our parish and in our other communities. May we be more like the Good Samaritan and less like the Levite who turned away.

Lord hear us
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6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

A beautiful act of compassion, of love for someone else, and of gentleness. Suzanne's life was devoted to compassion, in many small ways—how many wounded faces has she wiped?

How do I show compassion? Do I walk away from difficult situations, so I don't have to give of myself to others?

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the beauty of compassion. May we always remember that you have taught us to be merciful and compassionate to others.

Lord hear us
E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer
Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



7. Jesus falls for the second time

In life we don't just fall once—it happens again and again. Suzanne knew this. There must have been times when she felt discouraged and that something was too hard, but her faith carried her through.

Do I despair? Do I give up on God or on my friends? Can I look at what has happened and pray about it?

Prayer: Lord, help us always to choose hope over despair. May your message of hope for the world always inspire us.

Lord hear us
E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer
Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

The women were faithful. They did not run away and hide. They were there at the foot of the Cross, in the hardest of times. They conquered their fear and stayed with Jesus. Suzanne was also able to gather wonderful faithful women around her.

Would I have stayed with Jesus? Would I have thrown my lot in with Suzanne? Would I have given up so much to devote myself to the poor and needy?

Prayer: We pray for the gift of faith, of steadfastness, of loyalty. May the women at the foot of the Cross remind us that resurrection always follows death.

Lord hear us

E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer

Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



9. Jesus falls for the third time

Many of Suzanne's difficulties came from those she would have expected to help her. Did she feel discouraged? If she did, she did not give up. She had great faith in divine providence—God's care and plan for us.

Sometimes I am let down by those I trust and love. This is harder than when people I don't know very well let me down. Do I persevere and keep trying? Do I try to keep loving those who have let me down? Do I try to heal wounds and move forward, trusting that things will improve?

Prayer: Lord, give us the ability to see beyond the hurts that may be inflicted on us. May love conquer our difficulties.

Lord hear us

E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer

Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



10. Jesus is stripped of his clothing

Suzanne understood how people could be stripped of their dignity. She saw Christ in everyone and so, for her, everyone had worth and beauty.

Do I recognise everyone's dignity as a child of God? Do I judge people in different ways? Do I like to surround myself with those who seem more popular or socially acceptable? Do I remember that Christ was despised and humiliated for me?

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember your teaching about caring for everyone. When we give help, support, and love to the least in our communities, we are serving you.

Lord hear us
E te Ariki

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Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross

This is the most violent and shocking of the Stations. Suzanne was not daunted by shocking situations. Those who were excluded from families and communities were embraced by her.

Do I look away when someone is hurt or needs help? Can I open my heart and mind to those with the most suffering and not turn away?

Prayer: Lord, help us to see the suffering around us and in the world. May we find many small ways that we can help and bring comfort, according to our gifts.

Lord hear us
E te Ariki

Lord hear our prayer
Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



12. Jesus dies on the Cross

Jesus showed us how much God loves us by dying for us. While Suzanne did not die for her faith like the martyrs, she gave all her life for God and his people.

What am I prepared to do for God and our faith? Do I give up when it is too hard? Do I try to follow the example of those who have dedicated their lives to God?

Prayer: Lord, help us to dedicate our lives to you in everyday ways. Strengthen us when we feel criticised or left out because we choose to follow you. Help us to remember you love us always.

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Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



13. Jesus is taken from the Cross

How was this done? Was it done roughly, by the soldiers, glad that their work was finished, or was it done with gentleness, respecting the body of Christ? Suzanne knew all about tenderness, nursing the dying and the incurable. She would have been with the women who anointed and cared for the body of Jesus.

Do I show gentleness and tenderness? Do I try to understand when others are sad? Do I treat others well every day?

Prayer: We ask you for the gift of gentleness and tenderness, knowing that this is your way. Banish unkindness and judgement of others from our lives. Help other people to know you through our good example.

Lord hear us
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Lord hear our prayer
Whakarongo mai rā ki a mātou



14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

Joseph of Arimathea was brave enough to ask for the body of Christ. He had been a secret disciple, but now he was ready to declare his faith and loyalty. Suzanne was always courageous; not afraid to be open about her love of God and to turn that into actions to care for God's people especially the most vulnerable and needy.

How brave am I about showing my faith? Do I show God's love to others, by what I do and how I treat others?

Prayer: Lord, we ask you for the gift of courage. May our love for you shine forth in our lives, drawing people to you by our joy.

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15. The Resurrection

As a new day dawns, the women discover the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Christ. Through Him, death has been defeated and we have new life. The world has been changed and things will never be the same again.

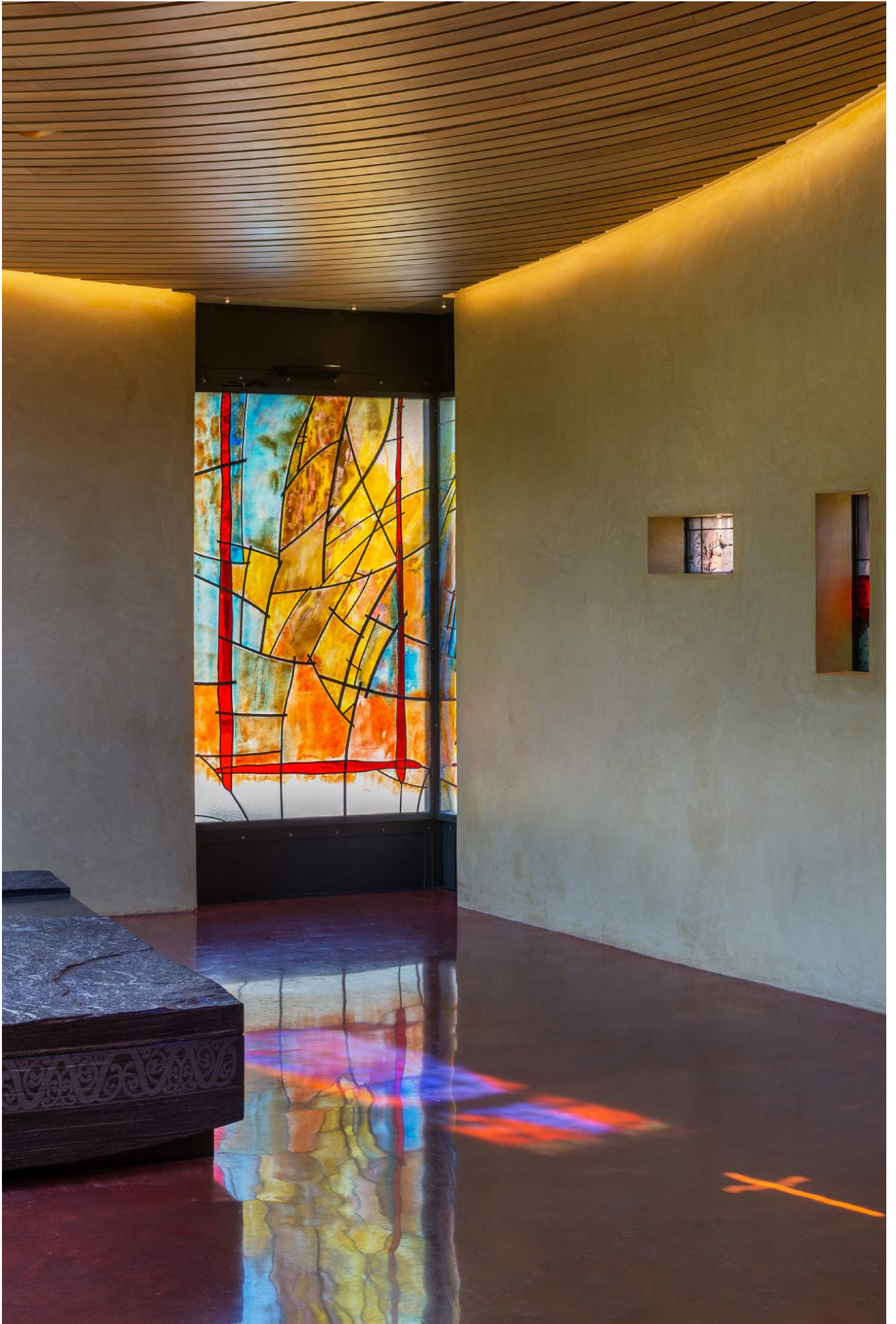
The light of the risen Christ shone in and through Suzanne, touching the lives of all she met regardless of race, gender or religion. She saw everyone as being deeply loved by God: "Jesus has come for all, he invites all."

What can I do to share the light of Christ in my life? How can I show compassion in action?

Prayer: Lord, you have given us new life and renewed hope. Help us to be the people you have called us to be and to do what you have asked us to do.

Lord hear us
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The Resurrection Window



This stunning window dapples light across the Resting Place of Suzanne Aubert, Meri-Hōhepa, representing the promise of Resurrection which was so much a part of her belief. "The Resurrection Window" was gifted to the Sisters of Compassion by the Family of the late John Drawbridge and the John Drawbridge Memorial Trust.

John Drawbridge (1930-2005) was the Wellington Artist who designed and oversaw the creation of the windows depicting the fourteen traditional Stations of the Cross in the Chapel of Our Lady of Compassion. He had spoken during his life of a fifteenth window "Resurrection" complementing the existing windows, an ambition his wife, Tanya Ashken wished to bring to reality.

Twelve years after his death this watercolour was found among his papers, perhaps a representation of his personal ability to "relax and astral navigate as a 'piece of light' travelling through time, dimension and space." A closer examination reveals the constellation of the Southern Cross, a representation of the stigmata of Christ. At the request of the Drawbridge Family, Olaf Wehr-Candler of Pukerua Art Glass Studio translated this wonderful watercolour into the glorious art glass of Resurrection that stands sentinel over Suzanne Aubert's last resting place.

Venerable Suzanne Aubert Meri Hōhepa

founder of the Sisters of Compassion

Suzanne Aubert grew up in a French provincial family. Lyon's missionary spirit brought her to live with Māori girls in war-anxious 1860s Auckland.

She nursed Māori and Pākehā in Hawke's Bay as the settler population swelled in the 1870s.

In the 1880s and 1890s,
at the Whanganui at Hiruhārama,
she broke in a hill farm,
published a Māori text,
manufactured medicines,
set up the only home-grown Catholic congregation,
and gathered babies and children through the family-fracturing years of economic depression.

The turn of the century sent her windswept skirts
through the streets of the capital.
There she would be a constant sign of warm caring
and tolerance until she died in 1926.

Jessie Munro



www.compassion.org.nz