

# THE VOICE OF COMPASSION

Te Reo o te Pūaroa



## Venus, rebuilding life and hope

"When am I going to get in touch with my mother? That's another fear I face every day," says a worried Venus, the protagonist of a difficult and moving story.

Her life changed abruptly when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. She was forced to flee, with her life in danger and protecting her two children.

Before that, everything was different. Together with her husband Jaweed and their sons Mohammed Jaheed and Mohammed Jaser, aged 2 and 5, they lived in the western Afghan city of Herat. "It's a big and beautiful city, and we had a beautiful life there."

"I was a judge, and my husband was a military judge," she says proudly, recalling her steps to have a successful career. Getting there was not easy for her, especially in a country where women are often relegated to domestic roles rather than professional jobs.

"I studied at University for four years. Then I did a judicial course for two years, and I used to work until 3 am to prepare for it. My family was in Herat when I moved to Kabul to do the course. I finished it and I ranked second in that examination".

Venus is moved by the memory of her work in Afghanistan. "I liked my job. I studied and worked very hard to join the court. I was the first woman in Herat that appears on television in a trial against the Taliban. It was difficult to get to that point. I miss doing it".

Her life changed one day when she was at work in Herat and a security guard warned her that the Taliban had arrived in her town. While the staff preferred to leave, she decided to continue working on cases of people, who under the Taliban administration would have been in danger. "I sacrificed my safety for the people and their applications because a lot of their lives depended upon it," she says.

Venus helped many even though she knew the risk she was taking. As judges, she and her husband Jaweed had sent many Taliban to prison, which is why their lives were at stake, as the Taliban targeted them. "The Taliban had a list of names and photos of people and where they worked". Going back home was no longer an option.

**"That day I didn't know where to go. The Taliban came to the street where my parents lived, so going there was impossible. I called my aunt to see if we could stay with her. She said we could stay the night but had to leave the next morning as we would also put their family in danger."**

While their children were safe with their grandparents, Venus and Jaweed quickly had to move around, changing their identities, and wearing masks to avoid being recognised.

Once reunited with their children, they decided to evacuate Herat and begin an 18-hour bus ride to Kabul, which had already been captured by the Taliban. "There were a lot of checkpoints in place by the Taliban, often every 10 minutes. They checked who was on the bus. They didn't check people wearing a burka or hijab, which is against their law. That saved me from showing my face".

After Herat was taken over by the Taliban, they were contacted by Dame Susan Glazebrook - a judge of the Supreme Court of New Zealand and President of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ). The organisation began organising rescues of women judges and their families from Afghanistan. "They found a list of vulnerable women judges and obtained details about them and the number of family members to get us out of the situation".

After a failed escape from Kabul airport because of an explosion that left many dead and wounded, Venus and her family had to wait in that city for two months in a locked room provided by her extended family. A new contact from the association nourished their hope. "They advised us to move to Mazar. That is a 10 hour's drive from Kabul. There were more checkpoints. The stress kept building up".

With their belongings stolen and no money, Venus, her husband, and children spent three nights in Mazar, in provided accommodation and surviving on what they had. "At that moment, I had the feeling of giving myself to God. I didn't know if I was going to be killed or leave Afghanistan. I was ready to take whatever chances I had left for the safety of my children".

**"I have lost all that I have, my job, our house, and everything. We worked so hard to get a house, and losing that effort and dream hit me, because I will never return to my house."**

Later, they were able to reach the airport there and finally managed to escape from Afghanistan to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, where they were held in an immigrant camp, safe and fed.

They were contacted again by Dame Susan Glazebrook, who personally assisted them with the necessary paperwork to secure a visa to New Zealand.

**"It hit me that I was leaving my family. I knew that me, my husband and my kids would be safe, but my extended family would still be in danger in Afghanistan."**

After two months of uncertainty and a lot of paperwork, they arrived in New Zealand to start a new life. "I was happy and peaceful. I choose the country because of Susan, in gratitude for what she did for us. She was an example of how kind and generous New Zealanders are to help people out," she says.

As she speaks, the smile returns to her face. Venus, along with five other Afghan female judge families, received immediate help from different organisations and individuals from the very first minute.

"We are thankful for all the people who have helped us, from the government of New Zealand, personnel at the airport, Susan, the judges that visited us in Auckland, the school and kindergarten that accepted my kids, and organisations like Catholic Social Services, Changemakers, Red Cross and Sisters of Compassion".

Venus and her family stayed at Our Lady's Home of Compassion in Island Bay, where they lived until Immigration NZ found a suitable home for them. "The Sisters of Compassion made a huge difference. Without the support we received, we wouldn't be where we are now, especially with two children."

With Christmas weeks away, for Venus, it's a time of hope. "It will be my first Christmas here. I don't have any special plans. I want to see what others do for Christmas and learn, so I can do it next time. Now I can celebrate both Christmas and Nowruz, which is the celebration of the New Year for us."

"Leaving your country and everything behind without having made a choice is difficult. Now, I am taking English classes and, in the future, I want to pursue the career I graduated and worked hard for 20 years and was dedicated to. It was my dream and I worked hard to achieve it, and I want to live that dream".

Venus wishes that the New Zealand Government would pay attention to their families who are stranded in Afghanistan, as she would like them to be rescued. Additionally, she would like the New Zealand government to recognise her academic credentials so she can pursue a career here.

With the help of many, Venus and her family can look forward to a new future.



## MESSAGE FROM SISTER MARGARET ANNE

Tēnā koe,  
Greetings,

I continue to be blessed by the generosity of the Wellington community and beyond. Every day I receive letters with contributions for our mission. Each letter is from a person with whom I have built up a relationship. An email letter of thanks is not enough acknowledgment. I am compelled to post a card to a resident at a nursing home, to friends in Japan, and many more. Along with many Sisters of Compassion, I have developed relationships with our benefactors through correspondence or even a meeting at the supermarket or at events. Recently I was at the Requiem Mass of Frank O'Shaughnessy. Memories of the faithfulness of many benefactors and their families came to mind. The picture/inset below shows Jack Howard, Vince Keating, and Frank O'Shaughnessy. They were part of the life, of the Soup Kitchen Team at Sussex Street.

Your generosity enables the Sisters of Compassion to support families, provide nourishing meals at the Compassion Soup Kitchen, and offer a peaceful quiet space in the surroundings (including the chapel) at Island Bay. Stories are shared and like the stories in this newsletter we gain a glimpse into people's lives and at times how hard it can be for them.

Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert saw Christ in everyone. The foundation of her spirituality and good works was the Gospel, she was inspired by a passage close to her heart.

**"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."**  
**Matthew 25: 35-36**

Thank you for your generosity and prayers.

Kia whakapaingia koe i a Meri Hōhepa.

May you be blessed by Suzanne Aubert.

**Sister Margaret Anne Mills**  
Congregational Leader



**"Thank you for your generosity, your prayers and support in many ways, especially the gifts of food at Christmas time. I pray that you, your family and friends receive many blessings always. Mā te Atua koutou e manaaki, e tiaki hoki. May God bless you and also protect you."**

**Sister Margaret Anne Mills**  
Congregational Leader



## GOLDEN JUBILEE Sisters Kalasia Ha'ungatau and Adi Litia Vakameitangake

During the Golden Jubilee celebration of Sister Kalasia and Sister Litia, a family member announced "if this jubilee was celebrated in Tonga, the whole village would be celebrating it."

On a beautiful spring morning, 17 September, 50 Years after their First Profession as Sisters of Compassion, the two sisters celebrated their Golden Jubilee in the presence of the Sisters of Compassion, family, and friends. Father John Wall celebrated the Mass of Thanksgiving and in his homily, he mentioned the combined 100 years of service the two sisters had given to living the gospel as Sisters of Compassion.

Both sisters arrived together from Tonga and completed their religious training in September 1972. Since then, Sister Kalasia has nursed in our Homes of Compassion at Island Bay, Timaru and Fiji. Sister Litia has also nursed in our different homes but will be remembered for her challenging ministry in the Whanganui Prison.

Both have inspired us with their generosity and goodness.



## NEW HOPE FOR ST. JOSEPH'S CARE HOME

Positive news for residents and staff at St Joseph's Home of Compassion residential care home, after the confirmation that its doors will remain open, following an agreement with Heritage Lifecare, one of New Zealand's largest providers of Residential Aged Care services.

"While there is a lot of work in front of us, the partnership provides the local community with a positive way forward" says Dr. Chris Gallavin, Tumu Whakarae of the Sisters of Compassion group.

This decision brings new hope for St Joseph's Home after the announcement in August that it would close due to the challenges felt across the health sector, and the lack of registered nurses and caregivers required to continue operating. To operate, the centre requires 15 registered nurses to ensure and provide appropriate and safe care to our residents. Te Whatu Ora have also worked hard to provide additional staff support alongside Heritage Lifecare.

With a rich history of providing care for older people in Upper Hutt for nearly 100 years, St Joseph's currently has 87 beds, 16 of which are dementia care, and the rest are a mixture of elderly and hospital-level care.

Norah Barlow, Heritage Lifecare's Chief Executive Officer, says, "This home is vitally important to the many residents, their whānau, as well as many retired sisters and priests, and the partnership will be ensuring that their way of life continues as we work through this time".

**"This is good news for the people of Upper Hutt, and for all the families and friends of the older people in St Joseph's care."**

**Dr. Chris Gallavin**  
Tumu Whakarae - The Sisters of Compassion



# “ THIS PLACE IS A LIFELINE FOR MANY PEOPLE ”



"I'm living on the street". That's the first thing Kevin says when he tells us about his life, as he looks out at the rain through the window on a cold Wellington morning.

Holding a cup of coffee, he reminisces about his childhood in Lower Hutt and his little trips to Wellington CBD. "When I was a kid, I came to school and came to Wellington. I remember my mum worked in the CBD for a little while. And I used to come and visit mum", he says.

At the same time, he remembers his first visits to the Compassion Soup Kitchen for meals. "It was three or four years ago. I came to town and met a guy named Cody, who first brought me here."

"It wasn't easy at first", he says. Kevin doesn't know many people and for someone living on the street, socialising is not an everyday thing. "The first week or so, I was a bit uneasy. But then I said, well, I've got to get it."

*“ Even if you hear the same thing and conversation all the time, at least you have some kind of human contact. You can sit here at the Compassion Soup Kitchen and not participate in the conversation if you don't want. But in the end, coming to the Soup Kitchen is a good thing. ”*

For many of the guests, the work the staff and volunteers do at the Compassion Soup Kitchen helps them get through the day, and meets their need for a hot plate of food, clothing, health care, haircuts and laundry.

## EVENTS WITH COMPASSION

Our Lady's Home of Compassion had a slow start to events this year with the heightened COVID-19 restrictions but they hit the ground running in May with a pōwhiri to welcome new staff followed by the birthday celebrations in June. The birthday theme this year was the quote: "Let us have a heart like an artichoke, and such a big one that everyone can have a leaf of it." - Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert.

The usual events have restarted - including Christian Meditation, Taize, and Quiet Days with Sr Sue, and also a varied array of activities this year from the Bee Awareness Information Day to a Wikipedia Edit-a-thon.

Our Lady's Home of Compassion were also lucky enough to host 'With Art To Ukraine' in October - an art exhibition to

raise funds for a specialised children's hospital in Ukraine.

On November 26th and 27th will be the Advent Retreat with Joy Cowley and Father John O'Connor. This is a spiritual retreat exploring the Christmas story and its relation with our own personal spirituality. Tickets are available for purchase through Eventfinda, and more information is available on the website. Also in November there will be the launch of the book 'The Lord's Prayer For Everyone' by Father James Lyons, a thoughtful exploration of the Our Father for different life situations.

Keep looking for up coming events and for new surprises. Visit our website for more information: [www.compassion.org.nz/events](http://www.compassion.org.nz/events) or get in touch with our events team: [events@compassion.org.nz](mailto:events@compassion.org.nz)



## GETTING BACK TO NORMAL WITH STUDENT VISITS

Nearly 500 students from St Patrick's Primary School Kilbirnie, St Mary's College Thorndon, St Patrick's College Kilbirnie, St Catherine's College Kilbirnie, Cardinal McKeefry School Wilton, St Teresa's School Karori and Sacred Heart College Lower Hutt, are among the schools who have visited Our Lady's Home of Compassion in Island Bay following the re-opening of its doors in May.

During their visits, students learned a little more about the life of Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert and how her expression of Compassion in Aotearoa is more relevant than ever in 2022. Students engaged in activities in the Heritage Centre Exhibitions, experienced reflection and prayer in the Chapel, Resting Place, and at the Grotto, and when the weather allowed explored the grounds, and up into the hills where the Historic Reservoir is located.



"Some people out there have no money, mental health issues and other problems, but without this kind of place, it would be very difficult."

He values the work that the Sisters of Compassion started 121 years ago, as it's not just about going out to eat but also the ability to get help if you need it.

*“ This place is a lifeline for many people. Without the Soup Kitchen, I would say homeless people would be in a really bad situation living on the street. ”*

"If you're down and your back is against the wall, these people here can help you."

Kevin sighs. His cup of coffee is finished. For him, it is the start of his daily activities. "I've come for breakfast. Now I'll go for a walk around Wellington. Then I'll drop off at the library, go to St Peter's probably, and then come back here for dinner."

Thank you for your support which helps our Soup Kitchen provide daily hot meals to people in our community like Kevin.

## IN OUR MEMORIES

Sister Kathleen was born in Blackstoops, Ireland, in 1938 as Kathleen Theresa Crean, one of the daughters of John Crean and Mary Angela Kirwan. She started her life on one side of the world but travelled to New Zealand in 1959, following the Lord's call.

She entered the Sisters of Compassion on 28 October 1961 and was professed on 15 August 1962. After that, Kathleen trained as a registered nurse graduating in 1968. She worked in different apostolates of the Sisters of Compassion, including Broken Hill and Wilcannia, Australia, and for six months in Fiji.

One of the highlights of her religious life was working in Romania in two different periods with orphan children with physical and mental disabilities between the ages of 2 and 16 years.

In 2013 on returning to Romania she noticed a big difference from her first visit there in 1990. The place was clean and bright, the

children were well dressed, and the food had improved.

Sister Kathleen enjoyed a good conversation and was knowledgeable about most things. As a keen gardener she spent many hours on the bank opposite Crombie House. She delighted in attending to the former grave site of Venerable Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert, keeping it tidy, and caring for the garden.

Back in New Zealand in 2015, she was transferred to Marian Court at Heretaunga, where she was involved in visiting the sick and restoring sacred images.

After suffering from ill health for many years, Sister Kathleen died peacefully at St Joseph's Home of Compassion on 30 March 2022.

**Until we meet again Kathleen, may the Lord hold you firmly in the palm of his hand.**



Sister Kathleen Crean

### Sister Shirley Tunnicliffe

On the eve of going to print we have just learned of the death of Sister Shirley Tunnicliffe, Memories of sister will be included in the next 'Voice of Compassion'

## DANNY KARATEA-GODDARD ON AIR!

An entertaining interview was given by Danny Karatea-Goddard, Tumu Whakarae of the Home of Compassion, on Community Network Wellington's radio show on Wellington Access Radio, where he talked about his personal history with the Sisters of Compassion.

"I'm a Wellington boy. When I was four years old, I was run over by a truck opposite our house in Balaena Bay, and Wellington Free Ambulance grabbed me off the road", said Karatea-Goddard.

"I remember spending just over a year in Wellington Hospital, and I started going to school in a wheelchair. I had to have a bit of corrective surgery through the years when I started school".

"We were a poor family, so the Home of Compassion, back then in Island Bay, had a hospital with a surgical wing, so anyone who was poor could go to the Home of Compassion and have surgery done, and they would find a community doctor that would come to perform the surgery. So ever since I was a child, I had this sort of relationship here", remembered the Tumu Whakarae.

Danny Karatea-Goddard says he started working this year with the Home of Compassion in a new position as a co-CEO, along with Chris Gallavin. "The Home of Compassion was really keen on holding us committed with the Treaty of Waitangi or Te Tiriti o Waitangi, so they formed this new position. Now, we are here to serve the mission of our foundress Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert", he said.



## DONOR PROFILE

**A valuable alliance based on family values**  
**LT McGuinness**

LT McGuinness has long been present as an essential partner of the Compassion Soup Kitchen and Sisters of Compassion for many years.

For LT McGuinness, "the great legacy and initiative of the Compassion Soup Kitchen" is the main motivation they have to help, as they believe the

work started by Mother Suzanne Aubert 121 years ago aligns with their family and business beliefs and values.

For its founders, the connection with the Sisters of Compassion comes from a religious family, but also because they are neighbours. "Our headquarters are located on Tory Street, across the road from the Compassion Soup Kitchen," LT McGuinness said.

The company hopes that the Compassion Soup Kitchen will continue to do the great work it has done so far. "We hope that our partnership will be a valuable and long-lasting one".

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE

**"I felt a need to give back"**  
**Tony Gormley**

Tony Gormley is a volunteer at the Compassion Soup Kitchen. As an employee of LT McGuinness, he found out through an email from the company that volunteers were needed to assist with breakfast and dinner services at the Compassion Soup Kitchen.

After some time as a volunteer, Tony said "the overall feeling is rewarding, and it's very satisfying to be able to help others, especially those in need". He adds "the experience of being there makes me realise how lucky I am with my family".

On reflection, Tony believes that "volunteering at the Compassion Soup Kitchen not only provides the opportunity to help, but also to realise and get a small glimpse of how hard life can be for some people and the lack of access they have for help".



## DONATE NOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

### WAYS TO DONATE

**Website:** [www.compassion.org.nz](http://www.compassion.org.nz)

**Phone:** (04) 383 7769

### Online Banking

Account Name: The Mother Aubert Home of Compassion – Trust Board

Account Number: BNZ 02-0500-0017474-00

## GET IN TOUCH

**Address:** 2 Rhine Street, Island Bay, Wellington 6023

**PO BOX:** Sisters of Compassion PO Box 1474, Wellington 6140

**Email:** [islandbay@compassion.org.nz](mailto:islandbay@compassion.org.nz)

**Phone:** (04) 383 7769

### NEWSLETTER

If you would like to receive our e-newsletter, please email your details to [donations@compassion.org.nz](mailto:donations@compassion.org.nz)