

# THE VOICE OF COMPASSION

Te Reo o te Pūaroa



**"How lucky I am, they made a place for my family."**

"Take me out, just take me anywhere," Zerai said when he was told about the possibility of leaving Sudan. After 15 years of living in the North African country, where he arrived from his native Eritrea, he began to have problems with officials from Sudanese government organisations.

"In my last months in Sudan, I was taken to a military camp after being accused of being an informant for the western world," Zerai recalls.

Zerai was born in Eritrea in a peaceful and communal home, where life was divided between raising animals, sharing with family, and going to school. However, these memories vanished due to border problems between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which left considerable casualties and thousands displaced.

Zerai was among those who had to flee the country in those years, leaving his family behind. "I left Eritrea. I went to Sudan, and I just started working. I got a good job early, so I did not struggle at all".

His life went smoothly for 15 years, and he married and had five children. He worked as a financial officer at the Red Cross and had a good job, but after a while, government organisations became suspicious of him and he started being harassed.

"I could feel the tension. One day, they just came to my house and asked how many kids I have and said things like 'I heard you have a connection with your government'. Zerai recalls that from one moment to the next, the daily threats and harassment gave way to violence.

"One night, I was taken from my house at around 1:00 am. I tried to understand what they were telling me. After getting kicked and wounded, I was sent home late in the morning, and warned not to tell anybody". After that episode, Zerai was ordered to go to a military camp for almost a month. During that time, he was accused of being an informer for the Eritrean government and payment was demanded to ensure his safety.

**"I could feel the tension. One day, they just came to my house and asked how many kids I have"**

Over the following weeks, the threats continued, and Zerai understood that they would not stop. At one point, he told his attackers, "don't beat me, I'll leave the country".

The decision was made; he had to leave Sudan. Zerai contacted the Protective Services of the United Nations and sent them a letter. He knew the person in charge, who was

aware of what was happening. He said, "this is my situation, I have a major problem here, and I need to leave".

Within a month, a person from New Zealand, who worked for an organisation that helps migrants and refugees, got in touch and put him on the list for an interview. After a few days, it was confirmed, "ok, you are coming to New Zealand".

Six months later, Zerai left Sudan and flew with his family for a new life. On arrival, he experienced the hospitality and generosity of the people of Aotearoa.

Initially living in Auckland, they moved to Lower Hutt in 2000. "We were looked after, we had everything we needed, and everything was ready. We were spoilt". From that moment on their life had a new beginning and a hopeful future.

However Zerai always remembered his family, who were still scattered between Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia. After a few years he began the process of bringing his brother Mewes, along with his wife and four children, from Sudan to New Zealand.

They had to wait a long time for the immigration and visa process. With the urgencies arising from the Covid pandemic, many family reunification visa applications were held up for a long time.



In addition, for Zerai, the whole process required a significant financial effort, which was one of the problems to be solved.

"The first support I got was from a refuge trust, and the person I met was Amanda, who has a good connection with The Sisters of Compassion. So there were a lot of expenditures, and the Sisters helped me," recalls Zerai, who is grateful for the help he received.

**"They made a place for my family. Just imagine, I was thinking, 'where am I going to put them?'"**

After years of waiting, he finally received confirmation that his brother's family could travel to New Zealand, but the problems continued. "Now I was struggling to find a place. Where would I find a place where I can accommodate all these people? I was having headaches," he said.

Months of anguish finished when the Sisters of Compassion offered Zerai a place to his brother. "They made a place for my family. Just imagine, I was thinking, 'where am I going to put them?'. I was thinking of sending them to different places, but the Sisters of Compassion said, 'we can give you a place. This is how lucky I am".

Last month, after years of waiting and uncertainty, Zerai and Mewes finally embraced each other again and started a new life together in a safe place. At the same time, he hopes that the rest of the family still in Ethiopia will soon be able to join them. With the help of many organisations, they can now look forward without fear to a better future.

"I'll never forget how my family and I were looked after by The Sisters of Compassion".

## MIGRANT COMMUNITY PROGRAM

**58 people** have been accommodated at Our Lady's Home of Compassion in Island Bay since August 2021.

Changemakers, Red Cross and Refugee Family Reunification Trust are the partner organisations of Our Lady's Home of Compassion in the Migrant Community Program.



## MESSAGE FROM SISTER MARGARET ANNE



Sister Margaret Anne Mills  
Congregational Leader

Tēnā koe,  
Thank you for your support of the Compassion ministries. The services cannot be provided without your generosity. The stories in this issue link the Compassion Whānau values, in particular with partnership. Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert and her sisters have and continue to rely on the support of volunteers, organisations, and people from the community.

Sister Rachel Moreno takes time to work with the St Vincent de Paul Society, and The Family Reunification Trust to support refugee families. The sisters are supported by other organisations like Changemakers, Red Cross, and Catholic Social Services who provide appropriate assistance to families who stay in Compassion homes.

It is a joy to be able to award the Suzanne Aubert Tertiary Scholarships. Occasionally there is a compassion connection. A sister was heard to say, "Oh you remember Ellie, she came at least twice, with her class while at St Catherine's College". The sisters know Taylor Broad's family, from Te Awa Whanganui. They taught members of the Broad Whānau who were pupils at the Ranana School. In the past, many of our children and elderly residents have received generous care from the medical profession. Doctors are needed, I encourage you, Liam, with your medical studies.

The Grotto on the property is a special place of peace and prayer for individuals and the Assyrian community who have devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes.

With the encouragement of Sister Veronica Hurring, volunteers were inspired to work together to clean and repaint Our Lady's statue. Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert's letters, recording a specific period in our history, have become part of the global documentary heritage. Everyone can read how Meri Hōhepa's letters offered encouragement and fostered friendship and advocacy to others.

"The works of God are done little by little, by beginning and progress; so then, we must act gently, pray much, and work conjointly with our fellow labourers."

- Meri Hōhepa

The effects of the recent floods and cyclone are concerning. I ponder how best the Compassion Whānau can partner with groups working tirelessly in places like Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, and Northland where we have sisters and friends. St Vincent de Paul and Parish Communities are natural partners for the Compassion Whānau. Aubert Centre in Flaxmere is an evacuation and distribution centre. Members of this community have shared with me that the sisters set the foundation of working in partnership with others, like the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Māori and Pacifica Communities to support people in need. Jim Leogreen the president of the local St Vincent de Paul Society commented "The Aubert Centre is buzzing." Sister Shirley (RIP), talked fondly of her time working with others in Flaxmere. Sister Annette Green, a founding member at Aubert Centre, experienced the support of this community working together.

I thank you once again for your generosity. May God bless you all.

*Sister Margaret Anne Mills*

Sister Margaret Anne Mills - Congregational Leader

## GROTTO OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

The Grotto at the Home of Compassion - Ngā Whaea O Pūaroa, Island Bay, has a refreshed face after dedicated work by Ian Logan, Jenny, and Robin Hartley, who cleaned and repainted the statue in January.

The Grotto was originally built by Willhem Kraus after visiting France's famous Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in 1958. After his return, he started planning what was to become one of his major projects at the Home of Compassion: a replica of the Lourdes Shrine.

One-quarter of the size and almost identical to the original, the Wellington Lourdes Grotto was magnificently set on a hillside just above where the hospital building used to be. The statue of Our Lady of Lourdes was given to the Sisters of Compassion in 1961 and was kept waiting for a fitting home since then.

After spending many hours over 12 months and guided by photographs and his memories, on 15 September 1973 Kraus witnessed the unveiling of the Grotto in a blessing ceremony officiated by Bishop Sneddon.

It was a great occasion, with a large crowd of about 500 people attending the ceremony. Since then, The Grotto has been available to anyone who wants to pray and meditate, fulfilling Kraus's wish "May all who rest and pray here find peace."

The valuable work by Ian, Jenny, and Logan is part of the now underway project for the cleaning and upgrading of the Grotto's surrounding areas, which includes the provision of a contemplation space.



## THE LETTERS OF MERI HŌHEPA SUZANNE AUBERT

The Letters of Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert were added as new inscriptions to the Memory of the World Register at a ceremony held at the National Library of New Zealand in Wellington last December.

The letters written by Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert, were nominated by the Sisters of Compassion Nga Whaea Tapu Pūaroa, and convey much of the social and political context in Aotearoa New Zealand from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. They cover the war and influx of settlers with its traumatic consequences for Māori, and a developing country that still lacked social welfare provisions.

At the ceremony, Sister Josephine Gorman said, "Through her letters she reached out to others offering encouragement, support and friendship, advocating on their behalf and expressing appreciation and friendship". Sister Josephine added that "The 825 letters written by Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert, who copied most of her letters in case of loss, have been collected and preserved in the archives of the Sisters of Compassion. In some cases, all that remains is a draft."

The Memory of the World Register programme was launched in 1992 by UNESCO to identify and recognise the documentary heritage of global significance, similar to how the World Heritage Convention and UNESCO's World Heritage List recognise important natural and cultural sites.



## “ EVERY TIME I COME HERE I FEEL GOOD ”

Angela sits down to drink a cup of tea and talk openly. For her, the Compassion Soup Kitchen is her place, the refuge that has welcomed her for over 20 years when she wants to take a break from everyday problems.

"Every time I come here, I feel good. Sometimes I don't feel 100 per cent, but I say to myself 'I'm going to get up, go to the Soup Kitchen and try to enjoy the day'".

Despite the hardships of her life, she coped because she was able to get closer to God. "I could have been an alcoholic. I could have come into my problems with addictions. I lost a lot of things in my life, but I came to know Jesus Christ. That was the best moment of my life," she says.

*“ Every time I come here, I feel good. Sometimes I don't feel 100 per cent, but I say to myself 'I'm going to get up, go to the Soup Kitchen and try to enjoy the day.' ”*

Two decades ago, a friend took Angela to the Compassion Soup Kitchen for the first time in her life when she had no money to be able to buy food. "It was twenty years ago. Then I realised that people don't come here to just eat, but also to get help".

"This place is wonderful," Angela adds. "When you come, you don't have to be afraid to

## WHĀNAU CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS AT THE COMPASSION SOUP KITCHEN

A beautiful and special celebration was enjoyed by about 180 guests who came to the Compassion Soup Kitchen to enjoy an early Christmas dinner on 17th of December.

In an atmosphere of music and merriment, the guests enjoyed a beautiful Roast Ham, Chicken and array of salads, as well as soft drinks and Eton Mess, all prepared by our staff and volunteers.

Everyone was delighted to receive Christmas gifts, which were provided thanks to the generous donation from LT McGuinness, who supports the Compassion Soup Kitchen activities every year.

A special thanks to everyone who helped and worked hard to organise and prepare the venue, making it a special day for everyone who was there.



come in here. The people are lovely. Sometimes a Father comes and talks to the people."

Angela says she can't afford anything at the moment, but she relies on the Compassion Soup Kitchen, which has helped her for years. "Soup Kitchen is not just for street people, it's for everyone, and that's a big thing and the reason why donations are always welcome here".

And she is clear, "If you want to be good, that's here. Yes".

## STUDENTS AWARDED SUZANNE AUBERT TERTIARY SCHOLARSHIPS

Three students have been awarded The Suzanne Aubert Tertiary Scholarship to help them complete their studies in 2023.

The Suzanne Aubert Tertiary Scholarships are awarded to students in their third or subsequent years of study and are made possible thanks to the Board of Trustees of the Home of Compassion.

This year's award winners are Ellie McLaughlin, Taylor Broad and Liam Rodgers. They are pursuing different careers, all of which have in common the desire to make a difference and make a contribution to the community.

The Sisters of Compassion congratulate these students on their successful applications.



**Ellie McLaughlin**

Ellie is a Mechanical Engineering student at the University of Waikato who would like to use her career to develop more environmentally friendly forms of transport.



**Liam Rodgers**

Liam Rodgers studies physics at Otago University and hopes to enter medical school afterwards. Liam says, 'I hope to become a doctor so I can help people and make a real difference.'



**Taylor Broad**

Taylor is studying for a Bachelor of Nursing Māori at Whitireia. She says, 'As a young Māori woman, I will strive to ensure equity and equality for all tangāta I have the opportunity to work with. I will do this with the korowai of my tūpuna, who I know will watch and guide me through everything I do.'

## IN OUR MEMORIES

Margaret Shirley Tunncliffe was born on the 16 February 1936 in Owaka, in the Catlans, to Margaret Liston McAra and Cyril Alexander Tunncliffe, both early pioneer families of the area. Shirley, the eldest of four children, was baptised Margaret Shirley.

When Shirley was five, the family moved to Oamaru where she received her education from the Dominican Sisters. Shirley entered the Sisters of Compassion and was received into the novitiate on 15 September 1954, when she was given the name Sister Mary Aidan. She and her three companions were professed on 15 September 1956. On both occasions, she had the joy of her family being with her. Sister was finally professed on the same day in 1959.

Sister Aidan commenced her general nursing training in 1959, graduating in 1963 and assigned to the theatre, where she learned the practical knowledge needed in this branch of nursing.

By 1964 Sister had taken over the responsibility of the operating theatre, a position she held until 1984. During this period, Sister

Aidan completed a six-month Post-Graduate course in Intensive Care at Wellington Hospital.

In the 1980s, Sister changed from her given religious name to her baptismal name and since then has been known as Sister Shirley. From 1985-1990, she moved to Hastings and worked in the broader community with families in need, providing religious instruction to children not attending catholic schools.

In 1990 Sister was appointed co-ordinator for the community and administrator for the complex at Our Lady's Home of Compassion at Island Bay, representing the Homes of Compassion on the committee that looking into the future of Catholic Health Care Facilities in New Zealand. Years later, she was elected as an observer at a conference for Religious Women in Health Care held at the Vatican in Rome in 1997.

In 2003 Sister was transferred to St Vianney's in Timaru until the home closed in 2006 when she returned to Flaxmere.



Sister Shirley Tunncliffe

One of the joys of her religious life was receiving the Benemerenti Medal in 2016 for services to the Catholic Church.

Throughout her life and particularly in recent decades, Shirley was grateful for all she had received; the love from her parents, family, friends, and the Sisters of Compassion. She made Meri Hōhepa Suzane Aubert's prayer her own:

**"Thanks be to God for all He has done and is doing for me."**

## EVENTS AT COMPASSION

This year many of the regular events, some exciting new activities and spiritual programs will return to Our Lady's Home of Compassion Te Piringa Pūaroa o Te Whaea Tapu.

The following activities have already started:

- Miha Mass, on Sundays at 11:00 am.
- Morning Prayer/Mass with the Sisters, Wednesday to Friday at 8.30 am, and Saturdays at 9:00 am.
- Christian Meditation sessions, on Monday evenings at 7:00 pm, and Thursday mornings at 11:00 am.
- Craft Group, on Wednesdays at midday.

This month Quiet Days with Sr Sue Cosgrove has begun with reflective session days based on the spirituality and teachings of

Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert. Every second Thursday of the month at Our Lady's Home of Compassion. Taize, a meditative night focusing on music and chanting is held on the first Friday of each month until December.

This year Our Lady's Home of Compassion, Island Bay will join the South Coast Arts Trail - a series of exhibitions and events across the southern suburbs of Pōneke. Also coming is an exhibition from the Sisters' own collection, and closing off the year with a summer fair. In June the Birthday celebrations will return and the annual Anointing Mass will be held in October.

To learn more about our events go to [www.compassion.org.nz](http://www.compassion.org.nz)



## VOLUNTEER PROFILE

**"I like to help the Sisters and all the staff"**

**Andrew Greening**

For Andrew Greening, volunteering at Home of Compassion is a tradition that runs in his family, which has been involved with the Sisters of Compassion since his great-great-grandfather worked with Mother Suzanne Aubert.

Andrew considers himself a jack of all trades. "I do any chore. Sometimes I clean floors, or vacuum,"

adding that he enjoys helping and seeing people happy.

"It's enough to be told 'I have a little job for you,' and I enjoy it", Andrew says. At the same time, he says he enjoys the place and talking about Mother Suzanne Aubert.

"I've been here so long that I know the ins and outs of the building. I knew it when it was a hospital and nursing home."

"Whenever someone wants help, I'm there, I just like to help the Sisters and all the staff."

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE

**"The Soup Kitchen gives me the opportunity to make a positive difference in other people's lives".**

**Rafael Purificacion**

Rafael has been a Soup Kitchen volunteer since December 2019. After seeing a Facebook post, he asked how he could help and started the training. "I was originally rostered fortnightly, but I soon requested to be on the roster weekly for easier planning on my part".

He is now volunteering twice a week, as a member of the triage team on Mondays and with the dinner service on Fridays.

He summarises his motivation for volunteering with a famous quote: "My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference."

He is grateful to the Compassion Soup Kitchen for allowing him to make a positive difference in other people's lives. "Serving our whānau side-by-side with the Soup Kitchen staff and volunteers has been very psychologically rewarding".



## 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)