

Suzanne Aubert

New Zealand's Saint in the making



*“Today as we commemorate the 90 anniversary of the death (1 Oct) of Suzanne Aubert. Let us give thanks to our Heavenly Father for this true servant of God. May her life, working among the needy of New Zealand and founding the Sisters of Compassion, inspire us to foster faith, courage and unconditional love. We pray, too, that Suzanne Aubert will one day be officially recognised as a Saint”
Lord hear us*

Mother Aubert’s Anniversary of Death

When Suzanne Aubert died in 1926 her funeral was the largest ever given to a New Zealand woman. Humble yet determined she had made an extraordinary impact on society, and thousands – from the upper echelons to the very poor - lined the streets of Wellington to pay their respects as her body was drawn through the city. For 66 years of her life in our land she had brought hope and courage to all especially to the needy.

Today Suzanne continues to inspire us by her writings and example. Many of the social challenges and injustices Suzanne faced are still with us now. This anniversary prompts us therefore to ponder deeply our response to the social, health and educational needs of Māori, Pākehā and indeed all those who today call New Zealand home.

Suzanne Aubert founded the Sisters of Compassion in 1883 and still today the Sisters continue her pattern of service founded on faith, love and compassion. Please pray today for the Sisters and may our nation be blessed through further vocations to the Sisters of Our Lady of Compassion.

1835 SUZANNE AUBERT IS BORN: Marie Henriette Suzanne Aubert is born on 19 June 1835 in St -Symphorien-de-Lay near Lyon in France. In many ways, her early childhood experiences shape her later mission.

1859 ACCEPTING THE CALL: In 1859 Bishop Pompallier visits his home town of Lyon to recruit missionaries for his Auckland diocese. Suzanne accepts his invitation, encouraged and advised by two Marist priests, Father Yardin and Father Poupinel.

1860 FROM FRANCE TO NEW ZEALAND: Suzanne sets sail for NZ on 4 September 1860 on a whaling ship unsuitable for passengers – and on a voyage that would test her courage. On the morning of 19 December, they have their 1st glimpse of New Zealand, celebrating Christmas Day above Cook Strait. Suzanne, the 22 other missionaries onboard and Bishop Pompallier joyfully land at Auckland on 30 December. The awaiting crowds are equally as joyful to greet their Bishop. A Māori hand is the 1st held out to Suzanne on that beautiful day.

1860 HAWKE'S BAY BOUND: Bishop Pompallier dies in Paris in 1871, his diocese in total nancial collapse. Thomas Croke, the new Bishop of Auckland opposes Suzanne's work so, in 1871, she leaves Auckland to revive the Catholic Māori mission at the Marist mission station at Meanee in Hawke's Bay.

1874 MISSION REVIVAL: Suzanne pins her hopes of a revival of the Māori mission on Bishop Redwood who is appointed as Bishop of Wellington in 1874. In 1879 Father Soulas arrives from France and familiarises himself with Māori families in Hawke's Bay and constructs a new church at Pakipaki.

1882 JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM! In 1882 Māori from the Whanganui River area ask Bishop Redwood for a priest. The following year Suzanne, Father Soulas and two Sisters go to Hiruharama – Jerusalem – to revive the Catholic mission. Suzanne is appointed to set up and lead a branch of the Marist Third Order Regular of Mary.

1885 BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS: In 1885, the Sisters help dig the foundations of a new church and Father Soulas sets the first pile in place. The local people join forces with a Wanganui building firm for its construction and, on Christmas Day, Bishop Redwood blesses St Joseph's Church.

1888 SUZANNE ON TOUR: Three years after its completion, St Joseph's Church is burnt down and Suzanne and Sister Magdalen set off on a nationwide year-long collection tour to raise money to replace the church. They raise £1000... enough for a convent as well.

1892 THE DAUGHTERS ARE ESTABLISHED: With the Society of Mary in France unhappy with the direction of the Hiruharama community, Archbishop Redwood intervenes and, on 14 October 1892, appoints Suzanne as Mother Superior of the newly established Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion.

1899 TAKING TO THE WELLINGTON STREETS: In 1899 Hiruharama is deemed too isolated for a children's home and Suzanne and two Sisters arrive unannounced in Wellington. They immediately begin their work with the suffering and destitute of the city planning a home for disabled people and setting up a soup kitchen and crèche for children of working parents.

1907 THE HOME OF COMPASSION OPENS: Land is bought in Wellington's Island Bay for a new children's home and a fundraising committee is formed. In 1907 the Home of Compassion is opened, initially for the care of children and babies.

1913 SUZANNE HEADS TO ROME: In 1913 a report claims that the Sisters' capacities are overstretched so Suzanne – at 78-years-old – travels to Rome to present her case to the Pope. More than four years later, Pope Benedict grants the Decree of Praise to the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion.

1920 BUILDING A FUTURE: A frail, but triumphant Suzanne returns to Wellington in early 1920. Back at the helm, she continues her work, organising the construction of a surgical section to the Home. The Sisters start training in general nursing.

1926 SUZANNE DIES, NEW ZEALAND MOURNS: On 1 October 1926 at the age of 91, Suzanne Aubert dies surrounded by her Sisters. Crowds gather in the streets for her funeral and the church overflows. Condolences and tributes pour in from around the world.

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