

NGĀTI KAHUNGUNU PILGRIMAGE: MĒRI HŌHEPA 1926-2026

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Hawke's Bay Māori Apostolate pilgrims with Bishop John at St Mary of the Angels.

The Hawke's Bay Māori Apostolate has undertaken a special pilgrimage to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Mēri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert. The pilgrimage commenced on 1st October with the lighting of a pilgrim's candle at the Church of the Immaculate Conception Pakipaki. The group then travelled to Te Rākatō Marae, Te Māhia, for a pōwhiri and Miha Māori celebrated by Pā Arthur Toothill SM and Brother Denis O'Brien SM.

The welcome at Te Rākatō Marae brought together the people of the Pakipaki and Te Wairoa Māori Missions on the Feast of St Thérèse de Lisieux, Patroness of the Mission, and as one, the pilgrimage continued to Whangawehi, where Bishop Pompallier and Father Claude Baty SM first arrived in 1841. Here we heard stories of how the chiefs Te Toki and Pūhara Hawaikirangi had sent an invitation for the Bishop to visit and establish a mission in Ngāti Kahungunu. To conclude the time at Whangawehi, the pilgrim candle was lit, and prayers of remembrance were said. Poignantly, there were difficulties extinguishing the flame.

The pilgrimage then travelled to Taihoa Marae to be welcomed for the night. After the pōwhiri the pilgrims moved to St Peter's Parish Hall where a Whare Korero was held. Parishioners came to share stories of Hata Mēri Hōhepa in Te Wairoa and the work of her Sisters of Compassion 1997-2023. A special rongoā demonstration took place with pilgrims making kawakawa lip balms.

Friday 2nd October, Memorial of the Archangels; The pilgrimage continued early with a visit to St Therese's Church and the site of Tawhiti a Maru Marae, impacted by Cyclone Gabriel. We heard stories of Pā Wiremu Te Awhitu, the first Māori Priest, sleeping in the church on his visits to Te Wairoa.

We then joined the Parish for Miha Māori and shared in morning tea. We then said our farewells and returned to Pakipaki to prepare the marae for the arrival of Te Wairoa for the next leg of the pilgrimage. We shared dinner and then prayed the Holy Rosary to close the day with the history of Houngarea Marae before bedtime.

Saturday 3rd started with morning prayers at 0630hrs, breakfast and preparation for the days Whare Korero *Talking House*. The Whare Korero was well attended by parishioners from Hastings and Napier, local historians and RE Teachers.

The Whare Korero opened as a forum to share stories of Mother Aubert, and the contribution from all in attendance made the day very interesting with a mix of formal presentations and informal dialogue. Presenters included Maru and Dcn Danny Karatea-Goddard on Peata Hokimate, the first Māori Nun with Suzanne Aubert and the Congregation of the Holy Family. Mother Aubert was professed as Sister Mary Joseph and became known as Mēri Hōhepa to Māori.

Vicki Hughes Archivist at the Home of Compassion spoke to a display of items from the archive. A baptismal register from the 1870s in particular was brought to life by linking the names of those in the register to their portraits hanging in the meeting house. 1870s-80s photographs of unnamed Māori from Pakipaki were shown in the hope that they may be identified.

Charles Ropitini illuminated the life of Mother Aubert in Hawke's Bay with stories of the people listed in the baptismal register, reading historical letters and showing photographs of Pakipaki during the 1870s.

Liz Remmerswaal shared stories from the Hughes whānau and their association with Mother Aubert and Pakipaki. The stories were brought to life with wonderful photographs of Mother Aubert in Wellington.

Rev. Zhane Tiopira-Tāhau was the final speaker who presented on Renata Kawepō, chief of Ōmāhu who described Mother Aubert as the 'Doctor of Doctors'. Renata Kawepō was the first Māori Missionary of Ngāti Kahungunu, who was taken into captivity as an 11 year old boy during the Musket Wars. He was trained by the Church Missionary Society in the 1820s as a slave in captivity.

The day closed with a Vigil Mass celebrated by Pā Marcus Francis and Pā Chris Martin SM. After dinner parishioners joined the pilgrims for evening rosary with special readings written by Sr Josephine O'Gorman DOLC relating the life of Mēri Hōhepa in Hawke's Bay to the mysteries of the Rosary.

Sunday 4th October, the pilgrimage left Pakipaki early with a breakfast stop at the Cathedral at Te Papaioea. On arrival to Wellington the pilgrims stopped for prayers at Mother Aubert's Creche building on Buckle Street and then carried on to the Home of Compassion at Island Bay to be welcomed by the Sisters.



Hawke's Bay Māori Apostolate pilgrims arrive to the Home of Compassion.

Bishop John Adams joined us at the Home of Compassion along with Bishop Richard from the Diocese of Hamilton. Together we gathered for the pōwhiri and prepared to lay down three mauri stones from Ngāti Kahungunu. One stone is from the Ruamahanga River near Masterton. One stone is from Kairākau Beach near Waipawa, and two stones are from the Kopuawhara Stream near where Bishop Pompallier landed and baptised people in Te Māhia.

After the pōwhiri we shared in lunch with the Sisters, Cardinal John, and Bishops, and then moved to St Mary of the Angels to join with over 500 people for Mass which was in Te Reo Māori, French, and English. Girls from St Joseph's Māori Girls College lead the Māori chants and waiata with Tawhiti a Maru and the pilgrims providing support.

We then had afternoon tea and our pilgrims then came together for our final prayers and poroporoaki farewells as we went our separate ways after completing our four-day pilgrimage.



Hawke's Bay Māori Apostolate Pilgrimage 4th October 2026 at St Mary of the Angels.