



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Centenary celebrations for Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert

Rau Tau Pūaroa | Celebrate Compassion 2026

By Michael Fitzsimons

This year marks the centenary of the passing of Venerable Meri Hōhepa (Mary Joseph) Suzanne Aubert. When she died in Wellington, aged 91, October 1, 1926, she was widely acclaimed as a holy woman who for over 60 years worked tirelessly among people in need.

The founder in 1892 of New Zealand's Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion – known as the Sisters of Compassion – was a remarkable woman who was deeply committed to social justice. She dedicated her life to caring for the most vulnerable people – the homeless, the sick, abandoned children. For Suzanne, Christ was in everyone, 'all creeds or none'.

Her funeral was the largest ever held for a woman in New Zealand. She is a towering figure in the history of our church and country.

Throughout 2026, the Compassion Whānau has a programme of events to celebrate the memory of Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert's life and to inspire us in living out our own faith.

Rau Tau Pūaroa | Celebrate Compassion 2026 began in January with the blessing of a Centennial Candle at the annual Tōtara Point Mass in the Hokianga, in the Far North of the North Island. This Mass commemorates the first Catholic Mass celebrated in New Zealand in 1838 by Bishop Jean Baptiste François Pompallier at the home of Irish settlers, Thomas and

Mary Poynton. It was Bishop Pompallier who in 1859 invited a young Suzanne Aubert to travel from Lyon in France to join his Auckland Diocese mission.

On February 6, Celebrate Compassion 2026 was included at the annual Waitangi Day Mass celebrations at St Mary of the Angels Church in Wellington, with the Sisters of Compassion Processing the Centenary Candle. Each year the Mass, which honours the Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840, is jointly hosted by St Mary of the Angels Parish and Te Pariha o Te Ngākau Tapu, the personal parish for Māori in the Archdiocese of Wellington.

In March, Hiruhārama | Jerusalem, on the banks of the Whanganui River, Suzanne Aubert's base from 1883 to 1899 and the 'Cradle of her Congregation', will be officially re-opened, following renovations at the convent and St Joseph's Church site.

Other events planned include a celebration of the work of Wellington's Compassion Soup Kitchen in June, commemorating 125 years of service to the disadvantaged and vulnerable; a celebration of Suzanne Aubert's phrase book and prayer book in conjunction with Te Reo Māori Language Week in September; a special prayer book for the Month of the Rosary in October; and hīkoi connecting Māori Eucharistic Communities and their Meri Hōhepa links.

The year will culminate with a 100-year Memorial Mass at St Mary of the Angels Church, Wellington in October.

A variety of other events, including pilgrimages, retreats, talks by award-winning Suzanne Aubert biographer Jessie Munro and visits to Suzanne Aubert sites, will engage many more people in this year of celebration.

Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert was many things. She was a visionary, a holy woman, a multi-lingual missionary to Māori people, a teacher, a nurse, a healer, a herbalist knowledgeable in traditional Māori remedies, a woman of courage ready to stand up to church authorities, a woman of prayer and compassion.

Deeply committed to social justice, she dedicated her life to caring for the most vulnerable people – the homeless, the sick, abandoned children. For Suzanne, Christ was in everyone, "all creeds or none".

Where did her heart for the vulnerable come from, her great empathy and solidarity with the suffering?

A clue may lie in her early years. She was born on 19 June 1835 in St Symphorien-de-Lay, near Lyon, France. Her brother suffered from hydrocephalus and died young. She herself fell through a frozen pond at the age of two, causing injuries that left her temporarily crippled and

blind, with a lasting, permanent cast in one eye. These childhood challenges, requiring her to wear splints until age five, made her the subject of ridicule. In the spiritual realm however, these setbacks developed in her an enduring empathy for the disabled and vulnerable.

These early experiences coupled with a profound faith made her indomitable. Her energy was tireless and her faith and imagination knew no limits. She left her Sisters a treasure-house of spiritual insights that reflect her deep faith – a selection of her sayings was published in 2015 in *Suzanne Aubert's Spiritual Tonics*.

In her own words: “Charity never says ‘it is enough’.”

And again, “Let us have a heart like an artichoke, and such a big one that everyone can have a leaf of it.”

More information about Celebrate Compassion 2026 is available on compassion.org.nz and facebook.com/sistersofcompassion

Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert is on the path to becoming New Zealand's first Catholic saint, having been declared ‘Venerable’ by Pope Francis in 2016.

Ends

Quote: “Charity never says ‘it is enough’.”

– Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert

Photo Captions:

Danny Karatea-Goddard formally presents the Compassion 2026 Centennial Candle to the Bishop of Auckland, Bishop Stephen Lowe, for blessing at the annual Tōtara Point Mass in the Hokianga.

Sisters and members of Compassion Whānau and Te Ngākau Tapu Whānau after Waitangi Day Mass at St Mary of the Angels Church, Wellington.

Photos: Supplied

Image: Venerable Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert

For more information please contact:

KIRSTY PRENTICE

Fundraising, Communications & Marketing Team Lead — Pou Whakatuarā

M: +64 21 381 316 | **E:** kirsty.prentice@compassion.org.nz