Atawhai kI uta, atawhai ki tai, kia horahorahia ki te rito o te Ao Marama.

Karanga Atawhai

Karanga Atawhai - The Voice of Whānau Mercy Ministries

October 2026

Reflections from Hīkoi Atawhai 2026

"We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

This well-known stanza from TS Eliot's Little Gidding came to mind as we journeyed through the Hokianga last week, encountering important stories and personalities from te ao Māori, the Catholic church and Mercy ministry, near the birthplace of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

We enjoyed generous hospitality, endured chilly weather, savoured delicious kai and got to know our fellow pilgrims, from all five Mercy colleges, Mercy Hospice, Whānau Mercy Housing, Te Waipuna Puawai and the Trust team.

Our hikoi was a rare chance to immerse ourselves in tikanga Māori, deepening our appreciation for the way in which the Mercy values of aroha, whanaungatanga and kaitiakitanga are lived out on marae and within Māori communities, encompassed within overflowing manaakitanga.

It also offered a deep dive into the vexed politics, injustices and both human and cultural suffering that surrounded Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as its early promise gave way to serial transgressions, betrayal and dispossession. The call from Māori to the Crown to honour its word has endured through the nineteen decades since, sadly still urgent and needed in our own time.

The early history of the Catholic church in Aotearoa New Zealand is traced in small kauri churches and stone memorials, far from any cathedral. Totara Point, Pūrākau, Kororākeka and Motuti describe the arc of Bishop Pompallier's own hikoi, including his eventual return to where he started.

The story of Mercy in the far North is similarly etched in the land and the memories of those who still live there – at Pawarenga, in the Valley of Faith. Over fifty Sisters of Mercy lived and ministered there from 1927, with one (Sr Margaret) still a regular visitor, bringing her reassuring presence and healing touch to people and animals alike. It is a story of partnership and mutual care – Mercy given and received.

A personal highlight for me was to visit the burial site for Dame Whina Cooper and to acknowledge her as both an inspirational leader and a woman of faith.

I strongly recommend this hikoi to the Mercy whanāu, as it speaks so powerfully to our origins and with such relevance to the journey we are still on. Ka mihi nui to our leaders, organisers and cooks – Bill, Natasha, Suzanne, Josie and Sophie.



Gerald Scanlan
Trustee & Chair

Te au hininga tai
Te au hininga iwi

(The currents that bind tides / The currents that bind people)

Hīkoi Atawhai: a pilgrimage to retrace the path of Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier and the Sisters of Mercy, honouring their partnership with Māori.

The 15 members of our rōpū came from all corners of Aotearoa, with nearly all Mercy institutions in New Zealand represented. We began our journey in Kororāreka, visiting Bishop Pompallier's printing station, explored the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, and through our 5 days travelled across the region to Pawarenga. It was a true privilege to visit the settlements, churches, and mission houses across the motu. We gained a deep appreciation for the adversity the Sisters of Mercy faced — arriving by boat after long months at sea, climbing hills, and crossing rivers to connect with and support local communities.

A highlight for me was being welcomed by mana whenua, hearing the stories of their land, and experiencing Te Ao Māori in a genuine and meaningful way. The Sisters of Mercy were successful because their core values — manaakitanga, aroha, and whanaungatanga — aligned so naturally with the values of the people they met. Our rōpū was warmly welcomed, fed, and cared for everywhere we travelled. Our days were filled with karakia, waiata, and rich whakapapa connections.

I chose the whakataukī above because it reflects our ongoing work as Mercy leaders and how it binds us together to strengthen our shared purpose.

This was a memorable experience that I will cherish forever.
Ngā mihi nui ki te whānau o Ngāpuhi mō te whakatau mai, te manaakitanga, me te aroha. Ngā mihi ki te Whānau Mercy Ministry for this amazing opportunity and your wonderful organisation.

Amélie Kelder
Principal of St Catherine's College, Kilbirnie







Hikoi into the Valley of Faith

It is a rare thing to walk in the footsteps of others and feel every bit as welcomed and at home as they would have. It is fair to say, however, that none of us could have appreciated just what a personal journey this would be.

In the week following Labour weekend, a group with connections that touch every part of Whanau Mercy activity, set off from Waitangi in the north on a hikoi that would go from coast to coast, from the early Christian mission work in Kororareka-Russell in the east to Pawarenga, truly the 'Valley of Faith" and all things Mercy in the west. On one level, this was a journey to check out an important area of Mercy mission and history and to see at first hand the land that proved both welcoming and difficult in that endeavour. The experience, of course, went much deeper than that. The reason for undertaking this hikoi is simple enough. Whanau Mercy Ministries has a strong strategic commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, so a return to the "birthplace of our nation" to strengthen our understanding of our own history is a great place to visit - often.

We all know a little, or a lot, about Te Tiriti, so none came to this hikoi completely unaware. What may have been a surprise, was to learn more about the principal characters in the years leading up to 1840 and subsequently, the tensions and betrayals, the divided loyalties and alliances that set off a sometimes bloody and always dramatic landscape of conflict thereafter. Later we would visit Panguru and the resting place of Dame Whina Cooper. A statue of her, walking stick and moko at hand, stands oriented towards Wellington, an iconic image of another hikoi that set our nation on a path of deep cultural discussion and discovery.

The story of our own Bishop Pompallier, an important figure in securing a commitment to religious freedom from the British Crown representatives, was told as we sat in the grounds of the Mission House in Kororareka-Russell. The phenomenal work involved in drafting, printing, binding and distributing Te Reo prayer books was both a revelation and a call for humility from each of us. Our journey took us of course, to Motuti and to the beautiful St Mary's Catholic Church, Pompallier's resting place. It may not be far in distance from Totara Point where he said the first Mass in Aotearoa, but we can assume the strains of Mo Maria the hymn he famously composed, helped to karanga him back to this place in 2002, from where he died and was initially buried in Paris.
The roads throughout the region are a character in the story too and a reminder that while a century has passed since Mercy Sisters found their way to Pawarenga by boat, then dinghy then horseback then foot, travel in this area remains a fully-interactive experience.

The story of each place, the people then and now, the hospitality, generosity, the laughter and sadness – these and much more are the fuel for a lifetime ahead. To be immersed in Mercy tradition, to physically be where so many stories come from and to look to a future not yet formed is a blessing to be treasured and put to use.
We were welcomed with open arms, open hearts, waiata and plenty of kōrero at every step. Some of us were familiar with marae protocol, some not so confident. All had plenty of gentle encouragement and opportunity to reflect and speak and by our last evening, we could sing as a group; an old song, new singers.

Suzanne O'Rourke
Kaihapai | Projects Lead

It is as Māori that the Lord calls you

On 22 November 1986, Pope John Paul II stood before thousands gathered at Auckland Domain and spoke words that continue to resonate forty years later:

It is as Maori that the Lord calls you; it is as Maori that you belong to the Church, the one Body of Christ.

As we approach the fortieth anniversary of his visit, I have found myself reflecting on these words, particularly following our recent Whānau Mercy Ministries hīkoi through Waitangi and the Hokianga.

The hīkoi was an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, our shared history and the story of Catholicism and Mercy in Aotearoa. But for me, it was also a personal haerenga, a journey that invited me to reflect on my own identity, whakapapa, faith and belonging. We travelled through places where histories of faith, our whenua and people are deeply intertwined.

At Waitangi, we were reminded of the promises and responsibilities of Te Tiriti. In the Hokianga, we encountered communities where faith has been lived and handed down through generations, and where the story of Mercy is woven into the lives of whānau and the whenua itself.

In his homily, Pope John Paul II spoke of the gifts that different cultures bring to the Church, recognising that none came empty-handed. He went on to say:

The strengths of Maori culture are often the very values which modern society is in danger of losing: an acknowledgment of the spiritual dimension in every aspect of life: a profound reverence for nature and the environment; a sense of community, assuring every individual that he or she belongs; loyalty to family and a great willingness to share; an acceptance of death as part of life and a capacity to grieve and mourn the dead in a human way.

Māori do not come to the Church empty-handed. Nor are we asked to set aside our identity, culture or whakapapa in order to belong. These are part of who we are and how we encounter God.

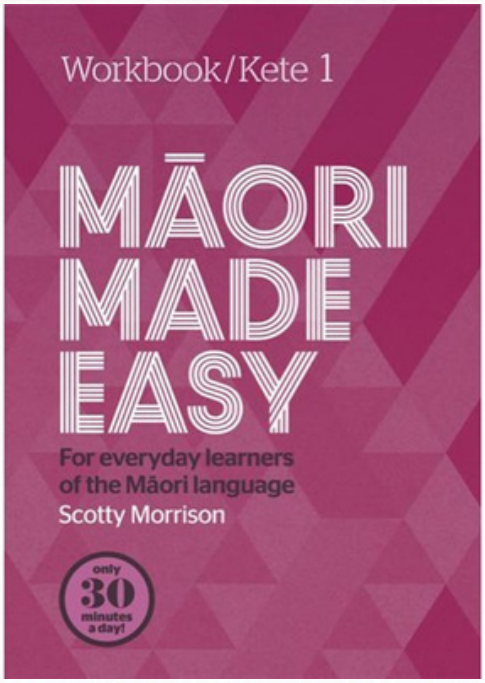
Our hīkoi took me to the Hokianga, a place that holds a personal connection for me. The journey stirred something deeper than only an encounter with history. It reminded me that belonging is about more than knowing where we come from. It is also about the relationships, stories and responsibilities we carry, how the journeys of those who have gone before us continue to shape our own.

Pope John Paul II reminded those gathered that we are a pilgrim people, a people of hope. That is what has stayed with me most. A pilgrimage is not simply about reaching a destination, but about the encounters, questions and discoveries that change us along the way.

Forty years after his visit, perhaps the invitation is not simply to remember his words, but to ask how fully we have lived them. Have we truly listened to the gifts Māori bring? Have we allowed ourselves, and our Church, to be changed by them?

I returned from the Hokianga with a full heart, but also with a deeper sense that this haerenga is only beginning, there is still much to ponder. That is the nature of pilgrimage, we do not return unchanged. We carry something of the journey with us, and find ourselves invited to keep walking.

Natasha Watson
Pou Atawhai



Kia kaha te reo Māori! Join us on a reo learning journey

Keen to learn or grow your confidence in te reo Māori? Join us as we work through Scotty Morrison's Māori Made Easy together!

We'll spend three weeks each month learning at our own pace, then come together online once a month to share our progress, ask questions, test ourselves with a Kahoot quiz, challenge ourselves to learn new kupu (words), and practise kōrero Māori (speaking Māori).

Whether you're just beginning or wanting to build on what you already know, this is an opportunity to learn together in a relaxed and supportive environment.

Interested in joining us? Email natasha@whanaumercy.nz.

Kaitiakitanga named the world's most beautiful word

The Māori word kaitiakitanga has been named the world's most beautiful word by language-learning platform Babbel, recognised for its depth of meaning and cultural significance.

Often translated as guardianship or protection, kaitiakitanga encompasses a much broader responsibility to care for people, relationships, culture, the natural world and future generations.

As one of Whānau Mercy Ministries' foundational values, alongside aroha and whanaungatanga, it reminds us of our shared responsibility to nurture, protect and care for all that has been entrusted to us.

Discernment in Practice: An exceptional opportunity to learn from Susan Pascoe AM

What does it really mean to discern together, rather than simply make decisions? And how might that change the way we lead, govern and work together?

On **Tuesday 24 November**, we have a wonderful opportunity to explore these questions with Susan Pascoe AM, who served on the Vatican's Methodology Commission and helped facilitate the Synod on Synodality in Rome.

Susan brings a wealth of experience in helping people listen deeply, navigate differences and discern a way forward together. And this time, we have the opportunity to learn from her in person, ask questions and explore how discernment works in practice.

This is a chance to engage directly with someone who has been at the heart of the Church's synodal journey and consider what her experience might offer our own leadership, governance and decision-making.

Tuesday 24 November | 2.00–4.00 pm
St Mary's Convent, 7 New Street, Auckland
Online participation also available.

If you can be there in person, we strongly encourage you to come. Opportunities like this don't come along often!
Find out more and register

REGISTRATION

Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga

13 – 15 December 2026

An exciting opportunity for our future leaders!

The Catherine McAuley Symposium, Atawhaingia ō tātau kāinga, 13–15 December in Wellington, includes a special student programme offering Year 12 leaders the chance to explore big questions about faith, leadership and society.

Students will hear from inspiring speakers, engage in thought-provoking discussions, connect with other young people from across Aotearoa and experience a taste of university life.

Student registration is just $50!

Registrations close 1 December. Students under 18 must have a staff member attending the symposium.
Register students here | Find out more

New 2026 NZCEO handbook



Refreshed from the 2020 edition, the Handbook reflects current legislative and regulatory requirements and provides clearer guidance on the responsibilities of boards, proprietors and the Crown.

With improved navigation and easy access to supporting resources, it is a valuable reference for board members, whether newly appointed or experienced, supporting informed decision-making and the stewardship of Catholic education.

Explore the 2026 NZCEO Handbook

Please forward this on

We would love to reach more people and share the mahi we are doing and connect to our wider community as well. Please feel free to share this newsletter widely, and we encourage people to subscribe. The QR code will take you to the Karanga Atawhai Subscription page.

whanaumercy.nz

WHĀNAU MERCY MINISTRIES

Te Ngākau Atawhai – Heart of Mercy: In Aotearoa, the Mercy Cross, central to Catherine McAuley's spirituality, is supported by a pair of koru. The koru represent the unfolding of new life and link our Mercy story to the spirituality of Māori and the ancient lore of this land

Karanga Atawhai is the newsletter of Whānau Mercy Ministries, a Ministerial Public Juridic Person (MPJP) under Canon Law.

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