



Bishop Pompallier

New Zealand's first bishop, Jean Baptiste François Pompallier, was born in Lyon, France, on 11 December 1802.

Bishop Pompallier received the education of a gentleman. For a time he served as an officer in the dragoons and he is said to have worked in the silk trade with his stepfather, Jean Marie Solichon.

In 1823 he entered the seminary of St Irenaeus in Lyon aged 22 years. On 13 June 1829 he was ordained a priest by Archbishop de Pins and worked for seven years in the Archdiocese of Lyon. He had a close association with Society of Mary (Marists) founder Father Jean-Claude Colin, and assisted Marcellin Champagnat to form the Marist Brothers.

On Trinity Sunday 1835, Pope Gregory XVI created the Vicariates of Eastern and Western Oceania. On 13 May 1836 Pompallier was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Western Oceania and Bishop of Maronea. On 24 December 1836, with four priests and three brothers of the Society of Mary, he sailed from Le Havre in France for Western Oceania and Aotearoa New Zealand on the Delphine.

The Delphine sailed around Cape Horn to Valparaiso in Chile. Father Claude Bret died on this leg of the journey. On 10 August 1837 Bishop Pompallier and the remaining priests and brothers embarked on the Europa bound for Tahiti. Before arriving at Tahiti, Europa stopped at Gambier Island and Pompallier took the opportunity to meet Bishop Rouchouze, Vicar Apostolic for Eastern Oceania. In Tahiti Pompallier met his first Maori person – the son of a ship's officer and a Maori woman, whom he baptised and confirmed.

On 5 October 1837 Pompallier sailed for Tonga on the 60 ton schooner Raiatea. Although they were refused landing then, in 1842 Tonga would be Pompallier's third mission area after Wallis/Futuna and Aotearoa New Zealand. Father Bataillon and Brother Joseph were to start the mission at Uea Wallis Island on 1 November 1837.

Father Pierre Chanel and Brother Marie Nizier started the mission at Futuna. Father Chanel was martyred for the faith on 28 April 1841 and became the first saint for Oceania. Pompallier travelled to Rotoma but was unable to leave anyone there. On arrival in Sydney he learnt about the Aotearoa New Zealand mission from Bishop Polding.

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On 30 December 1837 Pompallier sailed for the Hokianga and arrived at the home of Thomas and Mary Poynton on 10 January 1838, celebrating the first Mass in New Zealand at Totara Point on 13 January 1838.

Bishop Pompallier's work in Aotearoa New Zealand falls into three well-defined periods, each ending with a trip to Europe:

The Marist Period from 1838 -1850

Based in Auckland in the 1850s

New Zealand Wars Period 1860 - 1869

With the personnel sent by Father Jean-Claude Colin (Marists) and the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, started in France by Marie-Pauline Jaricot, Pompallier established the following mission stations: Hokianga 1838; Kororareka (Russell) 1839; Mangakahia, Kaipara, Tauranga, Akaroa 1840; Matamata, Opotiki, Maketu 1841; Auckland and Otago 1842; Wellington 1843; Otaki, Rotorua, Rangiaowhia and Whakatane 1844. In the course of setting up these missions Bishop Pompallier made four voyages down the East coasts of the North and South Islands.

On 8 April 1850 he returned from Europe with two priests, ten seminarians and eight Irish Sisters of Mercy.

Pompallier became a naturalised British subject on 17 July 1851, recorded for all time in the statute books of the land of his adoption.

On 30 December 1860 he returned to New Zealand with eight Franciscans, eight seminarians, and four French women to start a new order, the Sisters of the Holy Family. The party included his nephew Antoine, his niece Lucie and Suzanne Aubert.

By 1868, the transfer of the capital from Auckland to Wellington and the financial depressions had impacted on Pompallier's health. He returned to France in 1868 and died at Puteaux, near Paris, on 21 December 1871.

As founder of the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand, Pompallier lived and worked for over 30 of the most eventful and stirring years of the country's history. Of particular note is his role in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840.

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Invited by William Hobson to witness the proceedings at Waitangi, Pompallier was determined to make sure that legal discrimination against Catholics, which had only just stopped in England in 1829, would not be present in the new colony of Aotearoa New Zealand. With the support of many Maori leaders, he insisted that a clause be added to the Treaty which would guarantee the right of religious freedom for all and of free and equal protection to Maori and other religious customs.

He was respected by Maori, British and European people alike because of the way he viewed and dealt with cultural and spiritual difference. Bishop Pompallier's continued influence on the country's Church was recognised in 2002 with the return of his remains to Aotearoa New Zealand. He is now buried in St Mary's Church, Motuti, in the Hokianga region north of Auckland.

From the 1970s, past and present members of the Tai Tokerau Regional Pastoral Council in Northland wanted to recognise Bishop Pompallier's significance by having his remains returned to Aotearoa New Zealand.

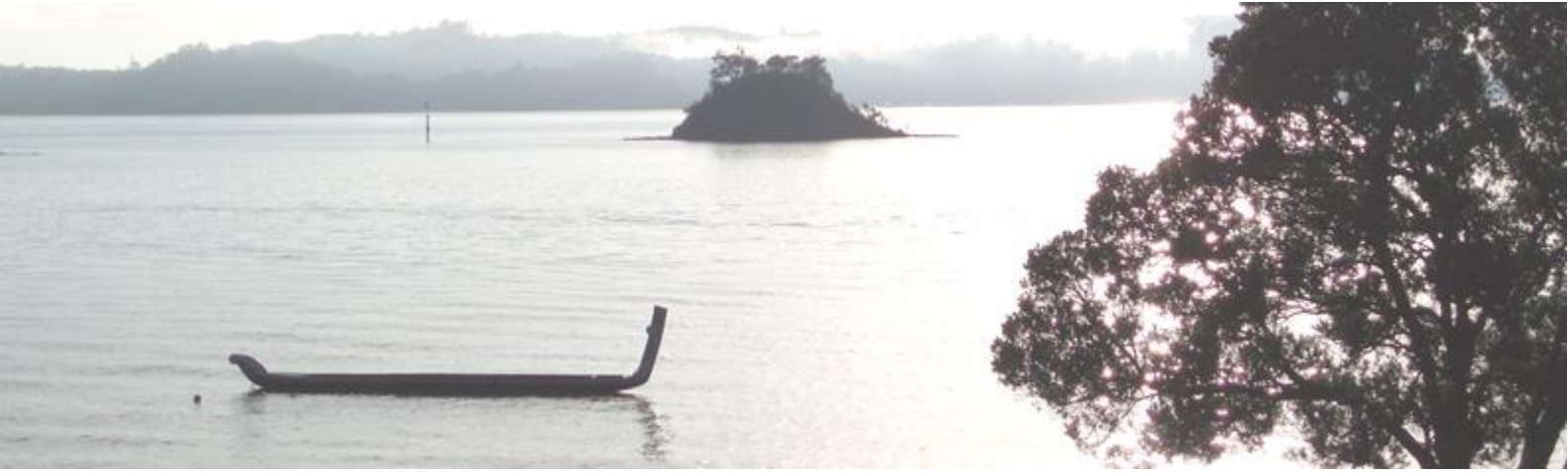
In 1999 a kaupapa (set of principles and plans which act as a foundation for action) was put forward to Diocese of Auckland Bishop Patrick Dunn and relevant Church councils. After much consultation and planning, a group of New Zealand representatives travelled to France, where Pompallier was buried, to bring his remains back to New Zealand.

On 30 December 2000 a group of 37 pilgrims embarked on the hikoi (journey), led by the tenth successor to Pompallier, Bishop Patrick Dunn, and Auckland priest, Pa Henare Tate. The pilgrimage group was made up of kaumatua and kuia from the Hokianga, Marist priests and brothers, Compassion and Mercy Sisters and others with a connection to the kaupapa.

The first destination was Rome, where the pilgrimage group met with Pope John Paul II. This was followed by a visit to Lyon, France, which was the place of origin of Pompallier and others associated with the Catholic mission in the Pacific and New Zealand, such as Mother Suzanne Aubert.

On 9 January 2001 the pilgrims gathered at Puteaux Cemetery in Paris where Pompallier's remains were exhumed. Following this was a solemn procession of the coffin, which was covered by a korowai (Maori cloak), through the opened great doors of Notre Dame de Paris.

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Pompallier lay in state all day in a side chapel, which became a marae for the occasion. The group kept vigil, praying and singing, until the entrance procession for the final evening Mass, which was celebrated by Bishop Dunn and the Apostolic Nuncio in France.

All hymns were in Maori, with Mo Maria being the first Maori hymn to Our Lady to be sung in the 900 year old history of the church.

Pompallier's remains arrived in New Zealand on 24 January 2002. A tour of his remains began in Dunedin and included all of the dioceses. The remains were accompanied 24 hours a day and ended up in the Hokianga, where they were re-interred under the altar at St Mary's, Motuti on 20 April 2002.