

# St Anne's School Manurewa, New Zealand

## *"Kia Ora"*



I was a little nervous as I drove into the grounds of St Anne's School, Manurewa, on the morning of March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2003. This was my first visit to a New Zealand school and the beginning of a fairly ambitious tour.

I was made to feel very welcome firstly by Valerie Karl, the Director of Religious Studies (the NZ equivalent to an APRE or REC) and then by the principal, Mr Philip Cortesi. And I don't say that tritely because not everyone is adept at making others feel welcome but these two were especially welcoming.

I was also nervous because most New Zealand primary schools go from Year 1 to Year 8, meaning that the Year 8s can be 13-14 years old, which was a bit daunting for someone who was not used to dealing with kids of that age and not sure how they'd respond to that interesting double of Religion *and* music.

Before I began with my first workshop, Philip welcomed the group. And very deliberately he welcomed everyone in Maori, with the words of welcome "Kia Ora" and then what I presumed must have been Maori for "May God bless you".

This struck me for a couple of reasons. Firstly, he welcomed them *first* and that said, as did his words, that he valued these children who he spent each and every day with. And in speaking Maori first, he said that he valued their culture, their heritage, and the shared heritage of those who had travelled from many parts of the world to make new and peaceful lives in this beautiful nation. (I think that New Zealand has perhaps the most beautiful anthem of all, and even I, a proud Aussie, get a tear in my eye when it's sung in Maori).

I noted this (as an outsider) throughout my two-week tour, how well New Zealand, as a whole, acknowledges and embraces its ancient history and culture (if you ever go to Wellington, please visit their national museum, Te Papa). And this was particularly evident in the Catholic schools I visited.

Another brief testament to Philip. The following evening, I presented a teacher workshop in Papatoetoe and he purchased another couple of CDs. Knowing that his school already had them I asked what they were for. Philip explained that he was about to spend two weeks in Samoa, visiting some missionary Catholic Schools there, one of which was staffed by a former teacher and Mercy Sister from St Anne's. He was taking "These Hands" and "This Day" as gifts from his community to theirs.