

Sister Alei Telesia Leilua

Born:	17 July 1955	Fatausi, Savai'i, Samoa
Postulant:	26 July 1981	Safotulafai, Savai'i, Samoa
Novice:	10 October 1982	Christchurch, NZ
First Vows:	8 December 1984	Christchurch, NZ
Final Vows:	17 January 1991	Fusi, Samoa
Died:	21 February 2019	Savai'i, Samoa



Alei was born in Fatausi, Savai'i, Samoa on 17 July 1955. She was the eldest daughter of Kelemete Leilua and Leti Matamua.

She attended St Theresa's School in Fusi and then Logoipolutu College. After attending the Teachers' College in Apia she taught at a government school before taking the step to join the sisters. She moved to Christchurch, New Zealand to begin her novitiate in 1982. This must have been a great shock to her as she came to this new way of life. But like so many changes in her life Alei took it in her stride and lived it to the full.

After first profession in Christchurch Alei returned to Fusi to St Teresa's and spent a year teaching there.

In 1986 the sisters were asked to begin a mission in Sataua, Samoa and Alei willingly took up the challenge. The three sisters, Monika, Geraldine and Alei broke new ground working with the parish priest and catechist and the people of the parish.

Alei attended the young sisters' seminar in Bangladesh in 1989. This time was full of new adventures and was a sound preparation for her future missionary life.

From this experience Alei was asked to go to the Kimberley. She taught at a school in Beagle Bay and loved the people. She enjoyed her time in this paradise, not so different from Samoa. She would go out fishing with the people, was a great listener and took a real interest in the children.

During this time and in preparation for her Final Vows, she had the opportunity to do a 30-day retreat in Sydney. This was a high point in Alei's life as she spent this extended time with God. From this experience she was freely able to gift her life to God as a sister of Our Lady of the Missions for her entire life. Her final vows took place in her home parish of Fusi in a wonderful celebration at the beginning of 1991.

She returned to Beagle Bay for a further three years and was always ready for fun. When she had a term relieving for Sister Margaret Scott in 1984 at the very isolated station of Gibb River she would have Sister Frances playing Chinese Checkers instead of doing the house work on a Saturday morning.

She left the Kimberley early in 1994 and had a back operation in Australia before returning to Samoa in 1995 when Alei became principal of St Teresa's School, Fusi. During this time, she took up a leadership role among the sisters and was named the Regional Coordinator for Samoa.

In 1999 Alei had an opportunity for renewal in England at Cliftonville. This was a wonderful experience of growth and development for her. As part of the course she had the opportunity of visiting the Holy Land. She loved being able to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

On her return from this renewal Alei moved to work with refugees in Auckland, New Zealand. She lived in Manurewa and trained as a home tutor and tutored refugee women. She was well loved by many and made some lasting relationships with women from many different countries who came with some very sad stories. Alei enjoyed this work and knew how to enjoy life. She had a great sense of humour and loved celebrations.

From June 2003 to March 2004 Alei returned to Australia to care for her sick sister and look after the family. Family had always been important for Alei and this was a time of being able to give something back. She felt responsible for the care and welfare of her aunts, siblings and extended family whom she loved deeply.

On her return to New Zealand in 2004 Alei moved to the small country town of Stratford in Taranaki in the North Island of New Zealand. Here she became involved in caring for the elderly in their own homes.

In 2005 Alei spent a year in Australia completing a Clinical Pastoral Education programme in preparation for work as a Hospital Chaplain. On her return she took up a position as Chaplain at Auckland Hospital. Alei worked here for 10 years and was much loved by the patients and staff.

It was here that Alei's back problem became more painful and early last year she had a major operation. Although this went well and she recovered, it meant she could not walk as much as she wanted to and so had to resign from her position as Chaplain. This was a great sadness to Alei but, as she did throughout her life, she took up the challenge and moved into volunteer work. She was a regular visitor to our sisters in the rest home in Auckland and would spend hours with them bringing her trade mark sense of humour to their day.

Samoa was always home for Alei and she loved it. She spoke of the pain and growth of being transplanted from one culture to another – Samoa to NZ, Samoan life to religious life, then came life in Australia, life with the indigenous people of Beagle Bay and life in hospitals. She had a true missionary spirit.

People felt at home with Alei, she was non-judgmental and listened well. She would never say an unkind word about others. She was compassionate and always made you feel welcome. Alei had practical common sense, a calm manner, patience and was unsophisticated. She had a deep sense of prayer, was generous, kind and thoughtful. She fitted in wherever she was.

Alei faced life with great courage. She suffered pain most of her life but that didn't stop her and she didn't complain.

Alei was on holiday in Samoa visiting the Sisters and her family when she became unwell. Her death was a shock to us all. Her funeral in Samoa followed the traditional Samoan customs. The family gathered around her on the night before the burial and several local groups came to offer sympathy and to pray with them. The following day the Requiem Mass was celebrated by her brother Fr Mauola Leilua joined by several local priests. She was laid to rest in the grave with her mother and grandmother.

In Auckland a memorial mass was held on 11 March. The large number of people in the chapel was testament to the number of people whom Alei has touched over her life. It was a celebration of Samoan culture and love for her. Monsignor Bernard Kiely used the fine mat as an image of Alei's life with all the threads that had been woven together to form the beautiful and treasured life that was hers.

May she Rest in Peace.