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Te Matau-a-Māui

Hawke's Bay TODAY

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Kahungunu's links to magical Māori hymn **P5**

Councillor threatens legal action over water plan **P2**

'Horrific' triple homicide shocks Hastings

Police probe three deaths in Avenue Rd East incident

Malisha Kumar

The deaths of three people in what police are treating as a homicide will ripple through the community, the mayor of Hastings says.

Emergency services were called to a property on Avenue Rd East at about 6am after reports of several people being seriously injured.

One person was found deceased at the scene while two others were in a critical condition. Another person was found in a serious condition.

All the injured were transported to Hastings Hospital, but police have confirmed that the critically pair died shortly afterwards.

Detective Inspector Martin James said a scene examination was taking place at the property yesterday.

"Police appreciate this is a distressing incident that will no doubt be concerning to nearby residents.

"I would like to reassure the community that this was an isolated incident, contained to this specific group of people, and there is no risk to the wider public," James said.

'Horrible and horrific'

Hastings Mayor Wendy Schollum



said she was "deeply saddened" by the incident.

She expressed her condolences to the friends and family directly affected and said it was now about giving police space to do their job.

Schollum said Hastings is a tight-

knit community.

"That is one of the beautiful things about provincial Hawke's Bay and New Zealand as a whole, that we know and take care of each other.

"It really does ripple through our community."

In the coming days, she believed locals would be paying tribute to the deceased.

"When something horrible and horrific like this happens, our community comes out in force."

Schollum wanted to emphasise

A homicide investigation is under way in Hastings following the deaths of three people after an incident at an Avenue Road East address early yesterday.

Photo / Chris Hyde

that Hastings is a place where people come to thrive, love, and enjoy life.

"Events like this are horrific, and they definitely don't define communities like ours," she said.

"We're a community full of families, and so I think we need to wrap

It really does ripple through our community.

Hastings Mayor Wendy Schollum

our support around those who have been most affected at this time."

Fatal house fire

News of the Hastings deaths followed police confirmation that a person had been found dead following a house fire in Napier yesterday morning.

Emergency services were called to Main North Rd in Bay View at 5am. Police said one person was found dead at the scene.

"Inquiries into the circumstances of the fire are ongoing, and the formal identification process is under way," police said.



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Hidden hymn history: New film traces story of Whakaaria Mai

Project uncovers link to Billy Graham and its journey into Kiwi worship

Joseph Los'e

A newly released music video filmed in Texas tells the little-known story behind the Māori hymn *Whakaaria Mai*, revealing its historical connection to the late American evangelist Billy Graham.

The project was created by Dr Steve Elers, a Māori Anglican priest and academic from Palmerston North, who moved to America in July 2025 to become Associate Professor of Communication at LeTourneau University, an interdenominational Christian university in Longview, Texas.

The video features Texas student Glory Griffin, a student at LeTourneau University. She sings the hymn in te reo Māori and English, accompanied by Elers on guitar.

Elers said the project included guidance from leaders such as Waikato and Kingitanga historian Mamae Takerei, Sir Eddie Durie – the first Māori judge – Reverend Dr Wayne Te Kaawa, a former lecturer in theology at Otago University and Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi leader Bayden Barber. The project, Elers said, was a tribute to Billy Graham while also recognising the Māori clergy who



LeTourneau University student Glory Griffin sings *How Great Thou Art* in English and Te Reo Māori.
Photo / Supplied

shaped the hymn's history.

During Graham's 1959 visit to New Zealand, the crusade meetings featured the hymn *How Great Thou Art*.

Graham asked Māori Anglican priest Reverend Wi Te Tau Huata of Ngāti Kahungunu whether there was a Māori-language version of the hymn. Elers, who also has Ngāti Kahungunu whakapapa, said that connection made the story especially meaningful for him.

Together with Reverend Sam Rangihū, Huata identified an existing Māori hymn, *Te Ariki, hei a au koe noho ai*, a translation of the hymn *Abide With Me*, which shared the

same metre.

Te reo Māori words were then set to the tune of *How Great Thou Art*, creating the version now widely known as *Whakaaria Mai*.

The project also reflects Graham's later connection to LeTourneau University, where he served on the board of trustees from 1961 to 1975.

When the university's founder, R. G. "Pop" LeTourneau, died in 1969, Graham sent his longtime musical associate, George Beverly Shea, to sing *How Great Thou Art* at the funeral.

"Many New Zealanders know the hymn *Whakaaria Mai*, but very few

know the story of how Billy Graham's visit helped shape the version that is sung across the country today," Elers told the *Herald*.

"This is one of my favourite himene to play on guitar. Three chords, unless you want to sound flash and add an E minor in there too," said Elers.

The hymn was a No 1 hit in 1982 for Sir Howard Morrison.

Griffin said learning the hymn was a great and meaningful experience.

"It was an honour to learn and sing this hymn. The message of the Gospel crosses languages and cultures.

"Steve told me that the Māori

people are like Texans in that they love their faith, family and food. So I would love to visit your beautiful country and fellowship with y'all," Griffin said.

The official music video was filmed at the Belcher Centre on the LeTourneau University campus in Longview, Texas.

A companion behind-the-scenes video also explores the history of the hymn and the story behind the project.

"We have chapel here on campus a couple of times a week [Mondays and Wednesdays]. It is usually packed full of students each time," Elers said. "LeTourneau University is a Christian [interdenominational] university – not affiliated with any denomination.

"I am an Anglican priest back home in Te Hui Amorangi ki Te Upoko o Te Ika [part of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia] under Bishop Waitohiariki Quayle, and I am also licensed to the Episcopal Diocese of Texas [the Episcopal Church is the US member of the Anglican Communion].

"I take services every Sunday at churches across East Texas because there is a shortage of clergy. Sometimes I take services at two different churches on the same Sunday.

"One of my favourite churches is St John the Baptist in Tyler, Texas. It is a historical African American church.

"It's all older folks who attend that church, and they remind me of our kaumātua back home. The East Texas churches ask me all the time to embed our reo into the services."

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