

Mission to the Streets and Lanes

1886 – 1997

Other Names:

- The Church of England Mission to the Streets and Lanes
- Diocesan Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne
- The Anglican Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne

Details

The Mission to the Streets and Lanes commenced in 1886 providing food, shelter and pastoral care to women and children in inner-city Melbourne. Its deaconesses were to 'visit in the lanes and courts and bring the message of the Gospel to the poor and fallen and by the force of their sisterly sympathy, compel the outcast to come in'. In 1888, Sister Esther (Emma Silcock) assumed the management of the Mission. The Mission to the Streets and Lanes moved to Fitzroy in 1952, adjacent to the Brotherhood of St Laurence. In 1997 the Mission to the Streets and Lanes merged with St John's Home for Boys and Girls, and the Mission of St James and St John to form Anglicare Victoria.

The Mission to the Streets and Lanes was founded by Bishop Moorhouse. It was the first Anglican mission established in Victoria. The first chaplain of the Mission was Canon Hadfield, and Sister Esther was its leader. Sister Esther was also the founder of the Community of the Holy Name in Victoria. The Mission House, first located in Little Lonsdale Street, and later in Spring Street, was the headquarters for much of Sister Esther's work in the city of Melbourne.

The Mission described its object in 1887 as 'to bring the gospel to a class of persons who were not reached already by the ordinary parochial organisations'.

The Mission provided a wide range of services. It founded children's homes and babies' homes. From Mission House, it also ran classes, mothers' clubs and provided material and spiritual support to Melbourne 'slum-dwellers'.

In 1887, the Mission reported on the success of its weekly 'Excelsior Class', 'for the benefit of young girls exposed to evil influences, especially when loitering in the streets in the evening'.

At the annual meeting in 1887, the Mission spoke of its plans for a team of Deaconesses (women Christian workers, often involved in outreach) to lead its rescue work with 'fallen women' in Melbourne's slums. It reported that a committee had been formed to raise funds for a Deaconesses Home, which would be the focal point of the Mission's slum rescue work.

The Mission to the Streets and Lanes played a significant role in the provision of institutional care in Victoria. Its Homes included the Church of England Homes for Children in Brighton and the Darling Babies' Home in Malvern. Many of the women employed in its Homes were members of the Community of the Holy Name. (From the mid 1950s, Sisters from the Community of the Holy Name were becoming less involved in work with children, to the dismay of many in the Community.)

Visits to women in prisons and girls in reformatory institutions were an important part of the work of the Mission. The Mission organised regular services in penal institutions. The Mission had a 'court sister' who worked as a

‘voluntary probation officer’ in the Melbourne courts.

In the 1950s, the Mission became involved in providing care to unmarried mothers at Mission House in Spring Street. The annual report for 1952 stated:

Early this year it was decided to use several rooms at the Mission House for young expectant mothers who are unmarried and need shelter. A sitting room has been furnished for these girls and has proved to be a ‘homey’ little spot for the young things, sometimes only fifteen or sixteen, who are in such distress. If necessary, arrangements are made for the adoption for their babies into very carefully chosen homes.

The care of unmarried mothers and the adoption of children became a significant activity for the Mission in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1958, the Mission moved its headquarters to the inner city suburb of Fitzroy, when the Commonwealth Government compulsorily acquired the land on which Mission House in Spring Street was located. In 1954, the Mission imagined its new surroundings in Fitzroy: ‘We shall probably find ourselves surrounded by alleys decorated with dead cats and empty bottles and the prostrate figure of the deadbeat may be seen reclining on our doorstep, but a slum area is surely the right setting for the Mission to the Streets and Lanes.’

The new Mission House at 116 Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy, had more space which made it possible for the Mission to care for more unmarried mothers. Formerly, young women sometimes had to be placed with private families due to a lack of space at Mission House, Spring Street. The annual report for 1958 stated that ‘the constant letters received from girls who have passed through the Mission House are sufficient indication that the “uninstitutional” methods employed are fruitful indeed in the spiritual and emotional rehabilitation of our girls’. Despite the increased capacity at Mission House, the Mission was forced to close applications for adoption in 1958, as its waiting list was impossibly long.

The Mission acquired a car in 1959, which made the task of visiting homes before and after adoptions much easier. This first car, a Morris Major, was known as ‘Gabrielle’. The Mission upgraded in 1961 to a new Morris-Oxford station wagon, ‘Brother Morris to his familiars’.

The passage of the new adoption legislation in 1966 led to even more requests to place unmarried mothers at Mission House and to organise adoptions of babies, taxing the Mission ‘to the utmost’.

The Mission withdrew from providing adoption services in the late 1960s. As the Mission of St James and St John was also an approved adoption agency, the Mission to the Streets and Lanes judged that it could vacate the adoption field ‘without loss to the overall service of the [Anglican] Church’.

In the late 1960s, after a ‘process of self examination’ and reviews by social workers, the Mission to the Streets and Lanes was restructured. The Department of Research and Social Action of the Brotherhood of St Laurence conducted a research project from 1968-1969, which found that the structures and policies of the Mission were due for an overhaul.

Following the restructure, the Mission to the Streets and Lanes moved towards the employment of ‘seculars’. Mission House was to be sold, and the Mission’s activities were to be consolidated with the activities of St Mark’s in Fitzroy. The restructure also led to significant changes at the Mission’s children’s Homes, with a shift in focus towards services like family counselling (which the Mission described as its new ‘growing edge’ in 1970).

In the early 1970s, the suburb of Fitzroy was being transformed by the new high-rise housing commission flats. The Mission wrote: ‘With 3000 people moving into the housing commission flats we will soon have a whole new community on our doorstep at the Mission House.’

The Brotherhood of St Laurence bought Mission House (which had been badly damaged by a fire in August 1969) in the early 1970s, and the Mission built new headquarters at the corner of Webb and Napier Streets, Fitzroy. These new headquarters (in close proximity to the high-rise flats) were dedicated on 3 December 1972.

In the 1970s, the Mission to the Streets and Lanes continued to provide residential and other forms of 'care' to children and families, through initiatives at the former Children's Home at Brighton, and new services including the Broadmeadows Family Service and the Joint Anglican Foster Care service in Preston. The Mission continued to provide emergency accommodation at Mission House, and a 'halfway house' at St David's Hostel in Fitzroy.

In 1997 the Mission to the Streets and Lanes merged with St John's Home for Boys and Girls, and the Mission of St James and St John to form Anglicare Victoria.

Mission to the Streets and Lanes was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry* (2012) as an organisation that was involved in forced adoption.

Gallery



Little Lonsdale Street - north side, no. 30, Meyer Manufacturing Co.

Description: This building was once the first Mission House of the Sisters of the Community of the Holy Name.



Spring Street - west side, north of nos. 247-255

Description: This image shows the Church of England Mission House.



Church of England Mission House, Spring Street

Description: Spring Street - west side, near corner with Little Lonsdale Street, showing Church of England Mission House

More info

Chronology

- **Mission to the Streets and Lanes (1886 – 1997)**
 - Anglicare Victoria (1997 - current)

Related Entries

Ran

- [The Homes for Children and Family Counselling Service \(1968 - c. 1975\)](#)
- [Broadmeadows Family Centre \(1974 - 1997?\)](#)

- [North East Foster Care \(c. 1976 - 1997?\)](#)

St John's Home for Boys and Girls auspiced North East Foster Care jointly with the Mission to the Streets and Lanes from c.1976 to 1989. From 1989, St John's auspiced the Preston office, and the Mission to the Streets and Lanes auspiced the Greensborough office.

Date: 1976 - 1991

- [St Faith's \(1975 - c. 1984\)](#)
- [Mission House \(1886 - c. 1997\)](#)
- [Unit 64 \(1975 - c. 1984\)](#)

Date: 1975 - 1984

- [Church of England Homes for Children \(1894 - c. 1968\)](#)
- [Darling Babies' Home \(1927 - 1967\)](#)
- [House of Mercy \(c. 1892 - 1946\)](#)
- [Moir Private Hospital \(1924? - 1980?\)](#)
- [Southbridge Adolescent Services](#)
- [Napier House \(1990? - 1997?\)](#)
- [St David's Hostel \(c. 1973 - 1997?\)](#)

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)

Mission to the Streets and Lanes was mentioned in submission 285 to the Inquiry Committee as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

Related Organisations

- [Community of the Holy Name \(1888 - current\)](#)

Many of the women who worked in the Mission to the Streets and Lanes' Homes for children and women were members of the Community of the Holy Name.

Date: 1888 -

Resources

- Stewart, John W., [Sister Esther: an Anglican Saint](#), Kingston Historical Website, No date
- Jolliffe, Peter, [Silcock, Emma Caroline \(1858 - 1931\)](#), Australian Dictionary of Biography Online Edition, 2006
- Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne, *In our midst*, 1953 - 1961
- [Victoria Government Gazette Online Archive 1836-1997](#), 1836 - 1997. *Relevance*: Gazette 88, 3 October 1890, p.3908
- Swain, Shurlee, *The value of the vignette in the writing of welfare history*, Australian Historical Studies, 2008
- *Annual report: Church of England, Diocesan Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne*, 1886 - 1980
- *Annual report: the Anglican Diocesan Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne*, 1981 - 1996
- *Social service work has personal side*, The Argus, 27 August 1949
- [Mission to the Streets and Lanes \(1886-1997\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance*: See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Mission to the Streets and Lanes
- Henningham, Nikki, [Deaconess Orders](#), The Australian Women's Register, 2009

Other Resources

Title: Anglican Mission to the Streets and Lanes. Outline History

Type: Image

Date: 1885 - 1991

[Details](#)

Records

Records

- [Anglicare Victoria Records \(1886 - current\)](#)
 - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
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