

Holy Cross Retreat

13 October 1889 – 1978

Other Names:

- Magdalen Asylum, Woolloowin
- Holy Cross Magdalen Asylum, Woolloowin
- Holy Cross Retreat and Infants Home

Details

Holy Cross Retreat or Magdalen Asylum, in Woolloowin, was operated by the Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane Congregation. It opened in 1889 as a home for unmarried mothers, disabled girls and infants. It ceased operating as a home for very young children in 1959. From 1974 it no longer cared for children but provided continuing care for physically and intellectually disabled persons and single mothers. In 1978 its function changed to a centre for intellectually and physically disabled persons and was renamed Mercy Centre.

Mother Mary Vincent was instrumental in the establishment of Holy Cross Retreat. She came to Queensland from Ireland in 1861.

The Holy Cross Retreat foundation stone was laid on Sunday 22nd April 1888 by Archbishop Dr Dunne. The Holy Cross Retreat was then opened 13th October 1889 by the Governor Sir Henry Norman. This institution was also referred to as the Magdalen Asylum. The girls worked in the laundry which was co-located on the site. State Government funds contributed to the running of the institution.

Holy Cross Retreat was licensed in 1895 under the *Orphanages Act 1879*, then under the *State Children Act 1911*. It was licensed again under the *Children's Services Act 1965*.

Holy Cross Retreat was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Report (2012)* as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.

A publication from 1976 states that until 1973, women at the Holy Cross Retreat paid no board but worked in its laundry. It described the current situation where women did pay board as well as working "light duties" for a few hours per day. The same book reports that since 1970 there had been a decline in the number of single mothers at Holy Cross Retreat, with the institution having accommodated 155 women since 1970. However the number of women with disabilities in the Home had remained "fairly constant". Holy Cross Retreat accommodated 31 women with disabilities and 14 of them worked in the commercial laundry which was classified as a "sheltered workshop". Eight other women came to Holy Cross daily to work in the laundry. The book stated that in March 1976 a Day Care Centre for children and adults with disabilities was open once a month at Holy Cross (Ann Amen, 1976, pp.38-39).

Gallery



Magdalene Asylum at Woolloowin, Brisbane, 1937

Description: The library catalogue includes this description: Magdalene Asylum at Woolloowin, Brisbane was designed by former colonial architect Francis Drummond Greville Stanley, one of Queensland's most prolific late 19th century architects. It was built between 1888 and 1889.



Holy Cross entry/despatch section of laundry building

Description: This image is from page 144 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions and the image is an Inquiry photograph. The Holy Cross laundry was located on the same site as the Holy Cross Home and Holy Cross Retreat.



Holy Cross at Woolloowin, operated by the Brisbane Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy

Description: This image is from page 141 of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse in Queensland institutions and the image is an Inquiry photograph.

More info

Chronology

- **Holy Cross Retreat (13 October 1889 – 1978)**
 - Mercy Centre (1977 - current)

Related Entries

Run by

- [Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane Congregation \(1861 - current\)](#)
Date: 1888 - 1978

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)
Holy Cross Retreat was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* Report (2012) as an institution that was involved in forced adoption.
- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
Holy Cross Retreat was mentioned in Submissions 221 and 237 to the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care

Related Legislation

- [State Children Act 1911, Queensland \(1911 - 1966\)](#)
- [Orphanages Act 1879, Queensland \(1879 - 1911\)](#)
- [Children's Services Act 1965, Queensland \(1965 - 2000\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Holy Cross Home \(1965 - 1973\)](#)
The Holy Cross Home was located on the same site as the Holy Cross Retreat.
- [Industrial School for Girls, Woolloowin \(1904 - c. 1966\)](#)
The Holy Cross Retreat was located on the same site as the Industrial School for Girls, Woolloowin.

Resources

- Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#), 29 February 2012
- Amen, Ann, *Archdiocese of Brisbane: a survey of social welfare resources*, 1976
- [Holy Cross Retreat](#), Brisbane Courier, 25 December 1902
- [Christmas](#), Brisbane Courier, 25 December 1897
- [Magdalen Asylum Woolloowin](#), Brisbane Courier, 25 December 1901
- Social Work Staff, Faculty of Education, University of Queensland, [Directory of Social Services Queensland](#), 1958

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- [Records and Archives, Children's Institutions \(c. 1900 - c. 1995\)](#)
 - [Adoption Records](#)
 - [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/holy-cross-retreat/>