

# Garden Point Mission

1940 – 1969

**Other Names:**

- Melville Island Mission
- Our Lady of Victories Mission
- Pirlangimpi
- Catholic Mission Melville Island

## Details

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The Garden Point Mission was established on Melville Island in 1940 by the Catholic Church to take charge of all Catholic Aboriginal children from The Bungalow, Alice Springs, and Kahlin Compound in Darwin. A residential school operated at the mission for children aged 5 to 17 years. In 1942 many children were evacuated to Carrieton in South Australia, returning in 1946. The government took over responsibility for the Mission in 1967, and the last of the children returned to the mainland in 1969.

In 1939 the new Native Affairs Branch, on a recommendation from the then Chief Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines for the Northern Territory, Dr Cecil Cook, began negotiations to have religious Missions take charge of all the children, then considered to be 'half-caste' or 'part-coloured', from the government run facilities at Kahlin Compound in Darwin and The Bungalow in Alice Springs. Garden Point was chosen to be the site for a Catholic Mission for these Aboriginal children.

The area had previously been utilised from 1937 as a place to send so called 'incorrigible natives' from the Darwin area where they were placed under the supervision of a Control Officer. The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart began work on the Mission for Aboriginal children in 1939 and by 1941 dormitories and housing for both girls and boys were completed at the site. Boys arrived first and assisted with work in preparation of the Mission. Fifteen girls were brought from the mainland and a further fourteen girls of Aboriginal and Japanese background were transferred from the Bathurst Island Mission. The girls were between 18 months and 14 years old.

In 1941 the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart established a school at the mission for Aboriginal boys and girls aged 5 to 17 years. They provided accommodation, education, medical care and religious instruction. The girls were under the charge of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and the boys were supervised by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart.

In 1942, after the bombing of Darwin during World War II, 41 children from the Mission were evacuated to Carrieton, a small country town in South Australia. The group included 37 girls, which was the majority of the girls from the Mission, and 7 boys. The rest of the boys remained on Melville Island. The children were returned to Melville Island during 1945-46.

Healthy children of patients from the Channel Island and East Arm Leprosariums, who were not allowed to stay with their parents, were often brought to Garden Point between the 1930s and 1960s. Throughout the Mission's history the Welfare Branch and its successors sent a number of children under its charge to Garden Point.

By 1949, 150 Aboriginal people, who were then considered to be 'part coloured', were living at Garden Point Mission. In 1967 the Mission lease was not renewed and control of the Mission was taken over by the government. In 1968 the Mission School closed and the last of the children returned to the mainland in 1969.

Garden Point Mission was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families.

In 2019 a group of survivors of Garden Point Mission began the process of seeking redress for the abuse they suffered at the Mission. Maxine Kundera, Josie Calma, and Alfie Calma, siblings who survived their time at the mission, spoke of their experience at Garden Point Mission and how it has impacted their lives in an interview published by *ABC News* in 2019. Josie Calma recalls:

*"We'd stay in the bush all day, until late in the evening, then we'd come back to the mission. That was a way of keeping me and my brother safe from the nuns and priests...  
Yeah I was angry with the priest and nuns, and the life that I was in. I always wanted to go back, because it was a beautiful place, but the people who looked after us were nasty...  
I was lucky that I was educated, but because I hated what was done to me and my family, I rebelled. I didn't want to achieve nothing, you know, I could have done lots of things in my life, but I just didn't want to because of what happened to me."*

Zita Wallace, in an interview published by *The Guardian* in 2016, also recalls abuse at Garden Point Mission:

*"They flogged us from day one, to stop us speaking language. They told us we were pagans and that we were spawn of the devil and that the language was evil and we couldn't speak it. So we got belted every time."*

## Gallery



### Garden Point Mission - Building

**Description:** The description of this image suggests the building is most likely one of the dormitories housing girls at the Roman Catholic Mission at Garden Point. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.



### Building

**Description:** The description reads: Building housing men at the Roman Catholic Mission on Garden Point. Group of men at front of building, probably a dormitory. This photo is undated, the date included is an estimate.

## More info

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart \(1885 - current\)](#)

The Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart were in charge of the girls at the Garden Point Mission.

- [Missionaries of the Sacred Heart \(1885 - current\)](#)

The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart were in charge of the boys at the Garden Point Mission.

#### Related Organisations

- [The Bungalow \(1914 - 1942\)](#)  
Catholic children from The Bungalow in Alice Springs were transferred to the Garden Point Mission.
- [Kahlin Compound \(1913 - 1939\)](#)  
Catholic children from Kahlin Compound were transferred to the Garden Point Mission.
- [Channel Island Leprosarium \(1931 - 1955\)](#)  
Some healthy children of patients at the Channel Island Leprosarium were transferred to the Garden Point Mission
- [East Arm Leprosarium \(1955 - 1982\)](#)  
Some healthy children of patients at the East Arm Leprosarium were transferred to the Garden Point Mission
- [Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration, Australian Government \(1955 - 1970\)](#)  
The Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration often sent State children to the Garden Point Mission
- [Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Carrieton \(1942 - 1945\)](#)

## Resources

- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, [Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#), 1997. *Relevance:* Garden Point Mission was mentioned in the Bringing Them Home Report (1997) as an institution that housed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families
- Stolen Generations' Testimonies Foundation, [Stolen Generations' Testimonies](#), 2009. *Relevance:* See testimonies of Marita Ahchee, Mohammad Ali McKee and Daniel Forrester
- Duguid, Charles, [The Aborigines of Darwin and the Tropic North](#), 1951
- Zillman, Stephanie, [Stolen from Their Mother and Abused, Children of Garden Point Mission Lead Charge for Justice](#), ABC News, 26 August 2019
- Sherwood, Matthew & Weeks, Jonny, ['You're Not Given Any Love': The Stories of Australia's Stolen Generations - Photo Essay](#), The Guardian, 2016
- Commonwealth of Australia, [The Northern Territory Report for 1959-60](#), 1961
- Commonwealth of Australia, [The Northern Territory Report for 1960-61](#), 1962
- [Missions - Inside Australia](#), National Shrine of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, 2011

## Other Resources



**Title:** Roman Catholic Mission Garden Point - Part-Aboriginal (1944-1951)

**Type:** Image

**Date:** 1944 - 1951

[Details](#)

## Records

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

## Records

- [John Mulligan Photograph Collection, ca. 1960-1976 \(c. 1960 - c. 1976\)](#)
- [Records held by Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Darwin \(1882? - 1983\)](#)
- [Garden Point Collection \(1941 - current\)](#)
- [Roman Catholic Mission Garden Point - Part-Aboriginal \(1944 - 1951\)](#)
- [Roman Catholic half caste mission, Melville Isle and Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Carrieton, South Australia \(1942 - 1970\)](#)

- [Garden Point \(Melville Island\). Review, reports etc - Northern Territory \(1940 - 1952\)](#)
  - [Registration of births after lapse of nine months \[Croker Island, Garden Point, Retta Dixon Home and other areas\] \(1954 - 1955\)](#)
  - [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/garden-point-mission/>