

Mission House

1886 – c. 1997

Details

Mission House was the headquarters of the Mission to the Streets and Lanes. From the 1950s until the 1970s, some single mothers were accommodated at Mission House during their pregnancies. In 1952, the Mission relocated from Mission House in Spring Street, Melbourne, to new premises at 116 Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy. In the early 1970s, Mission House moved to another location in Fitzroy, on the corner of Webb and Napier Street.

The annual reports of the Mission to the Streets and Lanes demonstrate that a number of young pregnant women were accommodated at Mission House from the early 1950s (when it was situated in Spring Street) up to the late 1960s (when it was in Fitzroy).

From 1886 until 1913, Mission House was situated in Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. In 1913, the Sisters relocated to a new Mission House headquarters in Spring Street, Melbourne.

In 1948, the Mission to the Streets and Lanes learned of plans for the block where Mission House was located to be compulsorily acquired by the Commonwealth government. In 1953, the Mission was in negotiations to acquire a new property in Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy.

In the annual report for 1954, the Sisters reported on the ‘thrilling plans’ for a new Mission House 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.

As plans for the new Fitzroy headquarters developed, the Sisters continued to work out of Mission House in the Spring Street location until around 1957-1958.

The annual reports show that Mission House (still located in Spring Street) accommodated some single mothers from 1952:

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.

In 1953, it was reported that 20 expectant mothers had stayed at Mission House, ‘for periods ranging from 5 days to 5 months’. In 1954, 16 women lived at Mission House during their pregnancies.

The Mission's report for 1954 contained a passage that demonstrates the Sisters' approach to working with pregnant single women, which often resulted in their babies being adopted:

One of the Sisters was most interested to hear an expert American social worker stress the importance of helping the unmarried mother to make a decision for her baby's future which she herself can live for the rest of her life. It is much easier to help these girls make their decision if the Sisters can get to know them intimately before their babies are born, and it also makes it easier to plan the placements for adoption. Adoption is a tremendous responsibility. It is an arresting thought to realise that you have the future of a small life in your hands and that you are encouraging two people to take the risk of adopting an almost unknown quantity as their child for life. But you cannot help feeling a deep sense of joy when you find that a very nice house with everything 'just so' has become a real home with a beloved little person's belongings lying here and there.

In 1955, the Mission reported that its 'adoptions and care of unmarried mothers' work had doubled in the last 3 years: 'mainly because the clergy and social workers have discovered that we can take 4 or 5 of these girls at the Mission House for some months before they go to hospital'.

The 1955 annual report stated: 'It is a joy to see a precious bundle of babyhood setting off on its journey to a welcome home, but there is always the sadness of the young mother to be shared as she signs her consent to part with that precious bundle for its own dear sake'.

The numbers kept growing in 1956, and the Mission reported that its accommodation for young mothers was 'quite inadequate for the numbers who need our love and care'. That year, 17 women lived at Mission House, and another 18 were placed in private homes. Another 38 unmarried mothers were cared for by the mission in 1957.

In 1958, Mission House moved to the new premises in Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy. The annual report stated that the new building made it possible for the Mission to care for a greater number of young women. Despite this, in 1959, the Mission reported that they still were not able to meet all of the requests for help.

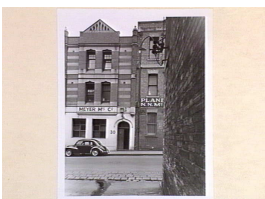
The report stated that the Mission's work with single mothers was 'necessarily hidden', but that it 'brings much reward as the response of the girls to love and understanding and to the peace of the house is undeniable'.

The numbers continued to increase throughout the 1960s. In 1963, the Mission reportedly had to refuse a number of unmarried mothers. They also referred to a constant number of applications for adoption.

Its 1969 annual report stated that the Mission to the Streets and Lanes were boarding some young pregnant girls for the Mission of St James and St John.

The Mission underwent a review in 1968-1969, when it was acknowledged that its structures and policies were 'due for overhaul'. Following this review, the Mission to the Streets and Lanes withdrew from adoption services in the late 1960s. It would seem that the Sisters' work with unmarried mothers, and the provision of accommodation at Mission House, also wound down during this period.

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.



Church of England Mission House, Spring Street

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



Sidney Myer House, 116 Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy, City of Yarra, South Fitzroy Precinct

Description: This is a photograph of the building at 116 Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy, which was formerly Mission House, the headquarters of the Mission to the Streets and Lanes from around 1957 to around 1972. A number of single mothers were accommodated at Mission House during this period.



Millott House

Description: This is an image of the building at 116 Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy. In the 1980s, it was a rooming house run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, known as Millott House. This building is the former site of Mission House, the headquarters of the Mission to the Streets and Lanes.



Mission House, Spring Street, Melbourne

Description: This is a copy of a photograph of the former site of Mission House

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Resources

- *Annual report: Church of England, Diocesan Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne, 1886 - 1980*
- [Spring Street Mission House done over first time in, well, maybe forever](#), Storey of Melbourne, 27 February 2020

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