

# Catholic Family Welfare Bureau (Archdiocese of Sydney)

1941 – 1967

**Other Names:**

- Catholic Family Service
- Catholic Welfare Bureau

## Details

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The Catholic Family Welfare Bureau was established in 1941 by the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney to provide social welfare services to needy children, families and individuals. It provided marriage counselling, worked with children in orphanages and children's homes, deserted mothers and provided adoption services. The social work methods used by the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau had a positive impact on the lives of children in Catholic institutions, and helped families in crisis to stay together. In 1967 the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau became Centacare Catholic Community Services.

The Catholic Family Welfare Bureau was established at the initiative of four skilled social workers, all women. They were Norma Parker, Elvira Lyons, Constance Moffitt and Eileen Davidson and they wrote to the Archbishop of Sydney, Norman Thomas Gilroy, recommending that a 'Catholic Welfare Bureau' be established. According to the CatholicCare website:

*They believed that the disadvantaged, distressed and devalued in society deserved the best possible professional care from the Church.*

*They believed that a Catholic welfare bureau was necessary to ensure that needy children, families and individuals were given dignity rather than pity, opportunities rather than 'handouts' and justice rather than benevolence.*

*In 1941 Archbishop Gilroy appointed Father A.E.R. Thomas as the first Director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau.*

In the 1940s, under Monsignor AER Thomas, the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau began examining Catholic orphanages in Sydney. Sister Kathleen Burford has written that the orphanages were overcrowded and understaffed, and Monsignor Thomas recommended that the bureau control all admissions. Funds for maintaining the children were to be collected from parents or extended family of the children in care. In the period 1948-1959, a subsequent director of the bureau, Monsignor J. McCosker, interviewed parents of children in Catholic homes and required them to contribute to the upkeep of their children. The New South Wales Government was also asked to provide support. Sister Burford has written:

*By the 1960s one outcome of this intervention by the Catholic Welfare Bureau was the reduction in numbers at Kincumber, Lane Cove and St Joseph's Croydon.*

The Catholic Family Welfare Bureau initiated major changes in Catholic-run children's institutions in New South Wales. These included introducing a central point of control for admissions to homes, requiring parents or family members to pay maintenance for children in Catholic institutions, and the introduction of social work methods. This led to the development of casework for individuals and families, including foster care, and changes in the organisation of institutions to provide more family-like environments. The institutions were asked to rethink their approach; Kincumber, for example, converted the ferrymen's cottages to accommodation for boys, and changed its dormitories to home units.

The introduction of maintenance payments and the centralisation of admissions led to a drop in the number of children coming into care in Catholic institutions, while the development of new forms of accommodation, including cottage and units, changed the nature of institutional care for Catholic children.

Catholic Family Welfare Bureau was mentioned in the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices Inquiry* (2012) as an organisation that was involved in forced adoption.

## More info

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### Chronology

- **Catholic Family Welfare Bureau (Archdiocese of Sydney) (1941 – 1967)**
  - Centacare Catholic Community Services Sydney (1967 - 2011)
  - CatholicCare Sydney (2011 - current)

### Related Entries

#### Related Events

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

Catholic Family Welfare Bureau is mentioned in submission 123 to the Inquiry Committee as an organisation that was involved in forced adoption.

#### Related Organisations

- [Catholic Adoption Agency \(1967 - 1993\)](#)

### Resources

- Burford, Sister Kath R.F.J., *St Anthony's Family Care*, 1989
- Burford, Sister Kathleen, [A history of St Anthony's Home Croydon](#), July 1989
- Gleeson, Damian John, [The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare, 1920-1985](#), 2006

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