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Confidential Briefing Paper

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**Sisters of Nazareth and Emigration****Introduction**

This is a revised and expanded version of a section of a paper *Sisters of Nazareth and Adoption & Emigration* which was produced for the Superior General and Council in April 2003.

The history of child migration, and the catholic involvement in it, are well set out in a number of published books and reports. These should be consulted, if a more complete and detailed account is required. Here a very brief summary of the historical context introduces the subject of the paper.

The history of child migration from Britain has been characterised by two salient perceptions: the positive benefits to deprived children in the general social conditions of the time, and the advantage to the colonies who received them. Governments and charitable bodies alike formulated and operated child migration policies with good intentions. This is evident from the organised migration of children to the American colony of Virginia in 1618 right through to the end of the Australian scheme in the late 1960's. Within the cultural mores of each epoch, migration was seen as a constructive way to help destitute, abandoned, and orphan or illegitimate children to a better life in the British colonies. It seemed as if the policy perfectly matched the needs of children to the social and economic needs of the receiving countries. It is appreciated that this briefing paper has been evoked by the on-going problems arising from the migration of children to Australia. However, the participation of the Sisters of Nazareth can only be properly understood by taking a longer historical perspective. That clearly demonstrates that migration was, for many years, perceived by the Sisters as a good outcome for children.

**The Congregation, Migration Policy, and Records**

I have made an extensive search in the records of the Congregation. There is little evidence *in the surviving archival papers* to suggest that the Sisters of Nazareth had any formal or clearly defined policy in relation to child migrants. There was no initiation of policy. The stance of the Sisters of Nazareth was reactive to public policy and the catholic initiatives taken by Cardinal Manning in child care policy. *It was a very co-operative operational response.* The initial driving force in that response was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Superior General, Mother Mary of the Nativity Owen. She had excellent relations with Cardinal Manning, who was a keen supporter of the migration of catholic children cared for in the many institutions of the time. She would have been very ready to co-operate in the scheme for sending children to Canada led by Father Seddon of the Crusade of Rescue, who was well known to the Sisters. She numbered among her friends and benefactors many men and women well connected in government and influential circles.

Nazareth House children migrated to Canada between 1881 and 1930. Migration of Nazareth House children to Australia started in 1926, and peaked in the post-war period. Only one child migrated to New Zealand, and that occurred in 1914. The British,



Canadian, and Australian governments (federal and states) had put financial help in place. The catholic authorities and charitable bodies readily responded. The Sisters of Nazareth simply acceded to the request of the bishops and the rescue societies. Given the active participation of the Sisters of Nazareth in the schemes for child emigration agreed between the British and the Australian central governments, and then with the Roman Catholic national authorities, it is very surprising that no formal documentation, nor official guidelines, either civil or ecclesiastical, have been preserved by the Sisters. Furthermore, there is very scant reference to the successive migrations of group of children in the minutes of the decision making bodies, or in the annals of the Congregation or the local communities. It is necessary, therefore, to rely on the register entries. Where the Canadian migrations are concerned, this has involved a very time-consuming manual scan of the records. Much of the research work for the Australian migrations had already been done as part of the response to the controversy that has continued since the early 1990's.

### **Canada**

There is no reference to the juvenile immigration policy agreed by the British and Canadian governments in the formal documents of the Congregation. The Nazareth House migrations under the scheme were occasionally mentioned in the locally written History of the Foundation of one of the communities involved. Otherwise there were two retrospective references of the Canadian migration as a good precedent when the Australian scheme came to be discussed at the General Chapters of 1925 and 1928. From the admission registers and annals it is possible to calculate that 145 Nazareth House children had migrated to Canada between 1881 and 1930. All but 5 of these children were girls, a few as young as nine, although most were about 14 years old. Unlike the Australian scheme the children were placed in individual situations, the girls in domestic service and the boys in farm work. Some went to join elder siblings already settled in Canada. The first to go were four children from Nazareth House, Hammersmith, in 1881. The five boys came from Hammersmith. In all, 15 children migrated from Hammersmith up to 1901.

Nazareth House, Southend, sent 7 girls to Canada between 1882 and 1900. Another 3 girls migrated from Nazareth House, Aberdeen, in 1899 and 1900. The Nazareth Houses most significantly involved in the Canadian scheme were Bexhill and Birmingham.

Nazareth House, Bexhill, sent 66 girls to Canada between 1890 and 1928, most in the years up to 1908. The locus of operations then shifted more to Nazareth House, Birmingham, with 64 girls migrating to Canada between 1913 and 1930. Ten girls went during the First World War, and the peak year was 1923. I cite here the references in The Birmingham History of the Foundation as they well illustrate the positive perceptions of the scheme that prevailed among the Sisters of Nazareth. Later, this experience of child migration would be a significant influence in their readiness to co-operate in the Australian scheme proposed in the 1920's, and fully developed after the Second World War.

On August 7<sup>th</sup> [1915] seven children sailed for Canada, they had a good passage and were placed in situations on their arrival at St. George's Home, Ottawa. The reports which come from the representatives of the Rescue Society out there are very satisfactory and consoling. After the





children got over the home sickness they settled down to their work and from their letters appeared to be well cared for and happy.

On October 15<sup>th</sup> [1920] 11 children left for Liverpool en route for Canada. They were conveyed in a biog bus to the station and had a good send-off. Most of them had brothers already settled in Canada so the opening for them was a good one. We have heard since that they are all doing well and are very happy in their new home.

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> [1925] nine girls emigrated to Canada. These children have written to say they are very happy. And it is hoped they will continue to do well.

Five of the children left for Canada the 30<sup>th</sup> May [1930]. Mgr. Hudson sailed with them on the "Duchess of York" They were lonely leaving, but we trust it is for their benefit to start life in entirely fresh surrounding.

The positive references to the Canadian migrations at the General Chapters of 1925 and 1928 were an affirmation of the principle of child migration in contemporary child welfare. They reflected the experience of the Sisters in that aspect of their work, and undoubtedly that was one persuasive influence on their willingness to engage in the Australian scheme.

### **Australia**

The earliest reference to any systematic programme of emigration to Australia for children in the care of the Sisters of Nazareth occurs in the General Council minutes of the meeting held on November 5<sup>th</sup> 1923. The Mother General [Mother M. Macnise Murphy] reported that a Major Macaulay, a London catholic:

is very anxious for us to send out children about 12 years of age to Australia and thinks the Government will pay their passage out, and also for the Sisters who may accompany them. If they could be sent to Brisbane after an arrangement has been made with Archbishop Duhig, who is also anxious for Catholic girls to go there. The members agreed it would be a good thing, but the scheme would need to be well thought out and none but Nazareth House children to be sent and to be entirely in the hands of the Sisters

Nothing further came of Major Macaulay's initiative until the Mother General raised it at the 1925 Intermediate Chapter of the Congregation. During a visitation of the Australian houses beforehand, Mother Macnise had taken the opportunity of exploring for herself and with Archbishop Duhig the practical feasibility of the proposed scheme, and whether it would be welcomed by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. She reported to the Chapter a positive outcome to her enquiries. The Agent-General for Queensland, Sir John Huxham, had agreed to take out children under 12 years free, and to pay £5-10 shillings of the passage for each of those over that age. Queensland was a very catholic state and had much to commend it. The girls would be expected to pay back to the State Government the balance of about £32 when they were in waged employment. In the light of that the General Council proposed that as a beginning about 20 girls from 14 to 16 years old should be sent out to the new house at Brisbane. They would stay there in the first instance for about two years and help with the work of the house while being trained in some way for work outside.

The majority of Chapter delegates approved of the scheme, on account of the children's future prospects and the spread of the catholic faith. In the course of the discussion



mention was made of the success of the Catholic Emigration Society's scheme to send out children to Canada. The first group comprising 3 Sisters and 25 girls left for Australia from Tilbury on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1926. There was much praise for the quality of the girls, and the previous day they were visited by Sir John Huxham, Major Macaulay, and another supporter of the scheme, a Miss Fitzsimmons.

There is a reference in 1928 to the very good reports which had been received about the children who had been sent to Canada under the auspices of the Catholic Rescue Society. It was clear that up to this time the majority of children who emigrated from the English Nazareth Houses went to Canada. These migrations were considered as perfectly normal and acceptable, and had largely been initiated in catholic circles some 50 years previously by the child care policies of Cardinal Manning. Group child migrations were a normal feature of residential child care practice among both protestants and catholics in this period.

The only other reference to emigration in the period between the two world wars occurs in 1928, when the General Council minutes refer quite bluntly to the "Emigration of the children in our Houses so as to spread Catholicity". About that time the Christian Brother in Australia had offered to take 50 boys to their farm school, and to be entirely responsible for their education. Mother General reported that advantage would be taken of the offer as soon as definite arrangements had been made by the Christian Brothers to receive boys. Good reports had been received of the group of girls who had emigrated to Australia in 1926, and a site had been acquired for a foundation in Melbourne which might be used for emigrant girls in future.

By the outbreak of war in the autumn of 1939 some 112 Nazareth House boys had migrated to Christian Brothers' residential establishments in Western Australia. Most went directly to the Tardun farm school, and St. Mary's Agricultural School. Many of the youngest boys went first to the Castledare Junior Orphanage, before being transferred to Tardun in 1942. Other boys went direct to St. Joseph's Farm and Trade School, or to Clontarf Boys' Town, Some these boys also went later to Tardun. Sadly the Australian destinations of some 8 Nazareth House boys are not known. In her circular letter, the Superior General described the emigration programme as the "Commonwealth scheme". It was so hard to find employment for Nazareth House boys in England in the 1930's economic depression, that the Sisters felt the farm school scheme to be a real godsend. Both the British and Australian governments were grant-aiding each boy to the amount of 13 shillings per week, and they were to be trained by the Christian Brothers for at least ten years.

Although no formal policy or procedure documentation of the Congregation or the two Governments has survived in the general archive of the Sisters of Nazareth, it is quite clear that the Sisters co-operated fully in the prescribed procedures. The Southampton History of the Foundation (a private annual diary of the house) records the preparatory process very clearly:

Brother Conlan (a senior Christian Brother) called on us at the end of May [1938] with a view to examine proposed candidates for Western Australia. We had twenty boys ready for him. Nineteen of these were passed by him and on the 28<sup>th</sup> May a doctor and emigration officer from Australia House, London, arrived to examine them The





examination was conducted along educational, medical, and psychological lines. They expressed themselves well satisfied with the physical and educational standards of the boys.

There is no reference anywhere to any prescribed or perceived need actively to obtain parental consent. The local superior or her delegate generally assumed a legal capacity to give consent under their status *in loco parentis*. Sometimes poor record keeping militated against any definite evidence whether parents were still living, or where they dwelt. Sometimes complete record keeping was impossible when parents did not keep in touch with their children or the Sisters. There was also likely to be unrecorded confidential information as to a child's origins, or the circumstances of his admission, known only to a single admitting Sister, who might now be in another house, or dead. This ethic of confidentiality was a deeply engrained aspect of the Sisters' child care practices, and seen as a protection both to the child and its parents. Often children were referred through individuals, both clergy and lay-people, and where these were known and trusted by the Sisters little information passed between them. It is anachronistic to evaluate these practices by present residential care standards. It should not be overlooked that the scheme was initiated by governments who actively sought the co-operation of the Sisters of Nazareth, amongst others, to put the scheme into effect. The "Tardun Scheme" came to a halt at the outbreak of the Second World War, and emigration was not resumed until 1947.

The local Bishop of Geraldton had invited the Superior General to found a home for girls near to St. Mary's Agricultural School at Tardun. When this new convent was established they would receive British girls as well as Australian girls. Slightly later, similar financial arrangements to that made for the Christian Brothers were being negotiated for 50 girls to emigrate to the proposed Nazareth House at Geraldton. Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Bishop Griffin announced that the scheme for the emigration of girls to Western Australia had been approved. Whereupon the Superior General asked for suitable girls between 8 and 12 years old to be proposed by the local Superiors, and for a few girls between 13 and 14 to go out and help the Sisters in looking after the house and the youngest children. It was anticipated that the first group would go out in December 1939, when the building of Nazareth House, Geraldton, would be completed. However, the declaration of war in September 1939 put the scheme into abeyance for the duration of the hostilities, the sea voyage to Australia becoming far too dangerous.

Negotiations between the two governments and the catholic bishops of each country opened up again in 1945 at the end of the war in the Pacific. But as they were protracted and complicated no emigrations were resumed until 1947. At a meeting of the Congregation's General Council in January 1946, it was noted that the Catholic Church in Western Australia was anxious to receive girl migrants from England. The discussion simply focussed on whether to move out the old people who had occupied the house at Geraldton during the war; the house having been built specifically for work with the migrant girls. This minute is the only reference to the child migration scheme in the central official records of the Sisters of Nazareth during the entire 16 years of the post-war migration. Yet during that period nearly a thousand children were sent out to Australia. There was no reference to any official directives, and no record of any discussion of the scheme as such. No official documentation or correspondence on the



migration scheme has survived in the archive, save some correspondence with the Christian Brothers about the establishment of the convent at Tardun.

The first reference to the actual resumption of the migration of Nazareth House children occurs in the Congregation's History for 1947, where it is recorded that a party of boys and girls left for Australia on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1947. There are no papers or correspondence in the archive from either Government or the Catholic Church authorities announcing the post-war resumption of the scheme or setting out procedural guidelines. The reference in the history for 1947 is simple and brief, suggesting that the scheme, despite its eight-year war-time suspension, was almost a routine part of the Congregation's child care policy and practice. Indeed, between 1947 and 1963, the period of the post-war emigrations, there are only three other similar references in the Congregation's History, the last being in 1956. During this time the Congregation was very much pre-occupied with implementing the recommendations of the Curtis Report in its U.K. child care establishments, and there is no shortage of comment and analysis on that in the archive. Child migration was seen as a good outcome for the children, to the benefit of the Church and the Commonwealth, and not in the least controversial.

By the early 1950's problems were arising, as the quality of the children sent out was considered far inferior to those who emigrated just before the war. The Superior General devoted the whole of her March 1952 circular letter for Superiors to the scheme. Apart from mentioning a current request from the Catholic Emigration Scheme for more children to be sent, the Superior General expatiates on complaints from the Australian Government about the type of child being sent. It was alleged that they were often enuretic, mentally handicapped, or problem children, and were causing problems in the receiving institutions. This circular goes on to place the responsibility for the careful selection of normal children on the Superiors and Sisters in charge of the children. The circular concludes by cautioning the Sisters not to send children belonging to those who may object to the emigration, which is basically a warning about consent. The complaint of the Australian Government that the Sisters were sending children who were the most difficult to manage seems extraordinary when their own Immigration Department selection procedures were applied in London.

Although the term "select" is used, the Sisters are selecting children for proposal to the Australian and Church authorities, for the final decision rests with them. This was very clear in the procedure already cited for the pre-war cohorts of children, and is reflected in the 1953 and 1954 records of Nazareth House, Southampton. In the community's Council Minutes it is noted that the Reverend C. Stimson visited on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1953 to examine the boys for Australia. Later in May the Selection Officer from Australia House came and interviewed the boys for Australia, and those selected sailed on 10<sup>th</sup> July. It was always the case that a local doctor examined the children as well, and recorded and signed the results on an official Australian Department of Immigration form.

There are no records in the archive of any official guidance or advice on the criteria to be applied in choosing children as candidates for emigration. The evidence supports the view that the Sisters did select children, but those children were then subject to routine immigration processes, before they were accepted by the Australian authorities. Parental consent was obtained for very few children, and this was more often than not due to the



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difficulties in finding parents to give the consent. No doubt there were instances when insufficient effort to obtain consent occurred, but in general the Sisters took a reasonable commonsense approach that their status as adults *in loco parentis* gave them capacity to grant consent. The involvement of the Sisters of Nazareth has to be seen in proper historical context. They had been invited to participate in a scheme initiated and negotiated between the British and Australian Governments and the Catholic Church. The policy and principles of the matter were never of much concern to them, as the involvement of Catholic bishops would have been seen as sufficient guarantee the scheme was an appropriate involvement for the Sisters of Nazareth.

All together some 750 Nazareth House children were sent to Australia between 1926 and 1956, indicating that the Sisters of Nazareth played a major part in the Australian scheme. By contrast their role in the Canadian scheme was much less significant.

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10<sup>th</sup> December 2009