

St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Home

1957 – 1970?

Other Names:

- St Michael's Girls Home
- St Michael's Girls Anglican Home
- St Michael's P.O.W. Memorial Children's Home

Details

St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Home was officially opened at Kelso, a suburb of Bathurst, on 4 May 1957, by the Anglican Youth Council and Children's Home Council of the Bathurst Anglican Diocesan Synod. There were three homes in the complex: one was for children of kindergarten age, one for older boys and one for older girls (St Michael's Girls Anglican Home). St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Homes closed around 1970.

The full name for this institution is St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Homes, but that appears to have included St Michael's Girls Anglican Home. The St Michael's P.O.W. Memorial Children's Home, which the *Australian Women's Weekly* said was for '40 little girls', opened on 4 May 1957, after ten years of fundraising by the Youth Commissioner of the Bathurst Diocese of the Church of England, Canon Harry Thorpe MBE, who was also known as Padre Happy Harry and was a veteran of the Thai-Burma Railway.

According to research done by the staff of the Northern Territory Department of Health, it was a place where children from the Northern Territory were sent.

Rhonda Wardman, writing on the *Inside: Life In Children's Homes* blog in 2011, remembered her experiences in the late 1950s at St Michael's Girls Anglican Home in Bathurst:

I went to St Michael's Girls Anglican Home in Bathurst when it was very new. I went from a loving Nanna in a homely old terrace full of love, food, photos, furniture and family to nothing but bare emptiness, starvation, bullying from a Nun.

There was a large playroom with a red laminex table and six chairs and an empty bookcase – nothing, nothing but emptiness (and my tears).

In my time there I saw no toys – no books – heard no radio, emptiness everywhere, quiet – pain and crying.

In the dining room there were six red laminex tables and chairs, that's all. Empty – no sound. In the dormitories there were chrome beds with pink chenille bedspreads and some bedside tables that were empty – emptiness everywhere.

53 years later I can remember each stick of furniture and the pain of emptiness.

Sister B told me constantly, 'You are the spawn of the devil, Rhonda Wardman, put here by God to be punished, born bad, never wanted. You are the spawn of the devil!'

Leanne Hawkins, a singer who spoke to the *Lithgow Mercury* in 2009, on the day of the National Apology to the Forgotten Australians and Child Migrants, was placed in St Michael's in the 1960s. She said:

My older brother [who went to Orange], my younger sister and I were uprooted at a young age when one day we were told that we were going on a holiday.

From the moment we arrived [at St Michael's] we were constantly told we were bad and wrong and made to feel like we could not do anything right.

I could not cope. I remember crying all the time and that saw me get the cane a lot.

St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Homes were intended as a memorial to prisoners of war who died in Asia under the Japanese and Korean campaigns.

Gallery

Momma [St Joseph's Girls' Orphanage, Bathurst and St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Home]

Description: This is a video of a song called 'Momma' by Leanne Hawkins. The video features Leanne revisiting the site of St Joseph's Orphanage, Bathurst, where her mother was placed in 1942, and St Michael's Church of England War Memorial Children's Home in Kelso, where Leanne and her sister were placed in 1966.

More info

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Resources

- [Anglican Homes for Children Near Bathurst](#), The Sydney Morning Herald, 4 May 1954
 - Arrow, Brendan, *Rudd's apology helps heal Leanne's wounds*, Lithgow Mercury, 17 November 2009
 - Hawkins, Leanne, [The Forgotten Australians](#), Leanne Hawkins, 2013
 - Name withheld, [Submission No. 126 to the Review of Government Compensation Payments](#), 2010
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