

## Chapter 22: Bethany Home

### Origins

- 22.1 Bethany Home opened on 4 May 1922 and continued in operation until 1971.<sup>1</sup> It was an amalgamation of two previous charities: the Dublin Midnight Mission and Female Refuge, founded in 1862, based at 31 Marlborough St Dublin, and the Dublin Prison Gate Mission, established in 1876, with an address at 40 Blackhall Place. Both charities aimed to provide a safe shelter for women, predominately from the poorest classes, who had nowhere else to turn and who had entered, or may have been tempted to enter, a life of prostitution. In addition, the Prison Gate Mission sought to rehabilitate former female prisoners and, by training them in domestic service, to integrate the women back into mainstream society.<sup>2</sup> Their mission of rescue and rehabilitation was broadly similar to the Magdalen Asylums that were established in Ireland and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Both charities were associated with the Church of Ireland, but their services were open to any women without distinction of religion.
- 22.2 A lack of funds forced the closure of both charities in 1921 with the trustees deciding to transfer their rights and properties to a new board that consolidated the charities into the Bethany Home, an institution that would focus on providing shelter and support for unmarried mothers and their children. The property in Marlborough St was sold to clear off debts. The new home was located in the premises of the former Dublin Prison Gate Mission.<sup>4</sup> The address was 23 Blackhall Place, while the address of the Dublin Prison Gate Mission was 40 Blackhall Place. This suggests that the street numbers were revised. By the early twentieth century many rescue homes in Britain had become homes for unmarried mothers, as had some rescue homes in Belfast (both Catholic and Protestant), and the Magdalen Asylum in Leeson Street.<sup>5</sup> The decision by these two Protestant charities to re-focus their philanthropic efforts on unmarried mothers and their children suggests

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<sup>1</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 May 1922.

<sup>2</sup> John Falconer, *Dublin Charities, Being a Handbook of Dublin Philanthropic Organisations and Charities; Including Benevolent and Educational Organisations; Shelters, Refuges, Orphanages, Hospitals, Reformatories, Industrial Schools, etc., etc., in or Applicable to Ireland* (Dublin, John Falconer, 1902), pp. 153-4/158.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society 1800-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp 76-123.

<sup>4</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 May 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Leanne McCormick, *Regulating sexuality. Women in twentieth-century Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp 37-78.

that the concern about 'illegitimacy' in post-World War I Ireland was not confined to the Catholic community.

## Sources

### Institutional records

22.3 The institutional records of the Bethany Home are held by PACT, which was formerly known as the Protestant Adoption Society. These were digitally copied by the Commission. There are four registers:

- The Admission/Discharge Register from 29 March 1922 to 3 May 1946: This register is the continuation of the admissions register of the Dublin Midnight Mission (which is not relevant to this inquiry). It lists the woman's name; age, religion, birth-place; her most recent address; how long she had been in Dublin - though this is generally blank; her occupation; dates of admission and discharge, and her destination when discharged. A column headed 'description' gives some details about her appearance or some judgements about character or personality - as for example '[maternity] case fair complexion, blue eyes curly hair', or 'drink'; 'fair complexion wearing glasses'. The early entries reflect an institution in transition; only five of the first twelve entries in the register were identified as maternity cases. One woman was sent from the courts where she had been charged with concealment of birth - she left eight weeks later to a 'situation'. A farm worker whose file states 'railway station' under the heading 'where from' was brought to Bethany by 'patrol' and sent home to Cavan. She was described as 'dark, good colour vacant looking'. The patrol was almost certainly carried out by the Midnight Mission. A twenty-four year old woman from Dublin, who was admitted in March 1927, was described as 'untidy, fair, fat, quick temper'. This column was rarely filled in after the early 1930s. An 'observations' column was usually used to record details of the woman in relation to her child, i.e. whether she was pregnant, or accompanied by a child; the child's date and place of birth, and whether it was her first or second child.
- The Bethany Baby Records covering the period 7 May 1922 to 25 August 1970; This lists babies' names; date of birth; whether they were born in the home or admitted after the birth; date of christening, vaccination details; date of leaving the home; where they went and if they were readmitted to Bethany. After the move to Rathgar all children, born in Bethany or

admitted to Bethany, whose mothers were members of the Church of Ireland, were baptised in the nearby Zion Parish Church. These ceremonies usually involved multiple infants; 13 children born in Bethany between June and November 1935 were baptised in a ceremony held in the church on 13 December 1935.<sup>6</sup> The children of mothers who belonged to the Presbyterian Church were baptised in Rathgar Presbyterian Church.

- Records and Particulars Book of Maternity Home (or Hospital) known as Bethany Home 1936-1956 and Records and Particulars Book of Maternity Home (or Hospital) known as Bethany Home 1956-1971: This was the standard official register that all maternity homes and hospitals were required to keep under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*. It gives the woman's name, age, date of admission, condition (not always completed), date of discharge, state of health, removal of child, particulars of the person removing a child and particulars of person to whose care a child was removed, plus a general column for observations. It appears that Bethany completed this official record and also continued to maintain its individual admission book until 1946, when it began to rely solely on the official register and the Bethany Baby Book.

### **Representative Church Body Library**

- 22.4 The minutes of monthly meetings of the management committee of the Bethany Home from 8 January 1924 to 8 January 1937, and from 12 May 1944 to 14 January 1966, are held in the Representative Church Body (RCB) Library in Braemor Park. The library also holds copies of some annual reports of the Bethany Home; these give some details about the mothers and babies, records of donations, subscriptions and an annual financial statement. The RCB Library also holds a register from Zion Church of Ireland Parish, which includes separate pages with entries for the baptisms of babies born in Bethany Home, c.1935-1949. These give the dates of baptism, the child's Christian name, parent's (mother's) name; they give no entry under 'abode', or 'quality, trade or profession'.

### **Irish Church Missions**

- 22.5 The Commission has also consulted the records of the Irish Church Missions (ICM) to the Roman Catholics held by the ICM in Bachelor's Walk.

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<sup>6</sup> Zion Church of Ireland Parish Baptismal Register, Bethany Home, December 1935.

**Department of Health files**

22.6 This report also draws on Department of Health files. Some are available in the National Archives; others were supplied under a discovery order to the Department of Health. The main files used in this chapter are:

NATARCH/ARC/0/402710

NATARCH/ARC/0/413869

NATARCH/ARC/0/493747

CCP/INA/0/483137

INACT/INA/0/474129

NAI M34/58 Volumes 1 and 2

22.7 These contain, among other things, the various inspection reports and the correspondence in relation to finances which are outlined below.

**Published material**

22.8 Miss Lily Pilgrim, a matron of Bethany Home, published a short booklet, *Far Above Rubies - A memoir of Miss Hettie Walker of Bethany Home*. This is undated but was obviously written after Miss Walker's death in 1955. Other material is referenced in the footnotes.

**Governance and Management**

22.9 The Bethany Home was a charity with a board of trustees that was formed in 1922 following the merger of the Dublin Midnight Mission and Female Refuge and the Dublin Prison Gate Mission charities. In practice, the governance of the institution was overseen by a voluntary management committee that generally met monthly. The minute books of those meetings, covering the period from January 1924 to January 1937 and from May 1944 to January 1966, have survived. The minutes of the first meeting recorded in the surviving Bethany Home minute book, on 8 January 1924, show that the management committee consisted of three men and seven women; one appears to have been the wife of a trustee. The most important member of the management committee was Miss Hester Ann 'Hettie' Walker, who served as Bethany's Residential Secretary from November 1924 until her death in May 1955. She was succeeded by George Godden who continued in that role until his unexpected death in May 1961. He was succeeded by William M. Taylor.

- 22.10 The management committee included members from several Protestant churches: Church of Ireland, Presbyterians, Methodists and Plymouth Brethren, (a conservative, nonconformist, evangelical Christian movement, originating in Dublin, which split from the Church of Ireland in the late 1820s).<sup>7</sup> The committee generally included a number of Protestant clergymen, their wives and lay evangelists. Miss Pilgrim, Bethany's long serving Matron, described Miss Walker as 'born again'. She had been an itinerant evangelical preacher before taking up her role in Bethany and in this capacity she had been acquainted with evangelical clergy,<sup>8</sup> and it would appear that she continued the rescue work of the Dublin Midnight Mission. In 1932, the minutes contain a report by Miss Walker on preventative work among girls frequenting public houses late at night; she was given approval to accept one or two urgent Midnight Mission cases.
- 22.11 Bethany operated as a predominantly Protestant mother and baby home. At the official opening, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, John Gregg, expressed the hope that the people of Dublin 'would support this vitally good work, which was a very real door of hope to those who had fallen, and for whom that home was specially intended'. Like its predecessors, Bethany was open 'for all classes and creeds' and 'down-trodden woman' from 'all parts of Ireland'.<sup>9</sup> During its first 17 years of operation, it regularly admitted Catholic unmarried mothers and illegitimate children. The board and staff of Bethany saw their mission as helping the young women admitted to Bethany 'to lead good Christian lives' on their departure. It noted that 'the appreciation shown by the girls...testified to the spirit in which the work was carried out that girls went out determined to live better lives'.<sup>10</sup> In 1933, Bethany stated that, in the past year, five girls who were former inmates had married and 'many heartbroken parents had found relief through the open door in Bethany for their daughters'.<sup>11</sup> Meetings of the management committee opened with a 'season of prayer', and closed with a prayer. A dominant influence on the management committee and, consequently, on the ethos of Bethany (particularly in its first decades of existence), were those members who were associated with the Church of Ireland's Society of Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics (ICM). Founded in 1846, the ICM's aim was to convert the

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.plymouthbrethrenchristianchurch.org/about/who-we-are/>

<sup>8</sup> Niall Meehan, 'Church and State and the Bethany Home', *History Ireland*, xviii. 5 (Sept-Oct 2010), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 May 1922/2 February 1928.

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 February 1925; 13 February 1930.

<sup>11</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 February 1933.

Roman Catholics of Ireland to the Protestant Faith.<sup>12</sup> From 1922 until his departure to Australia in 1935, Rev Thomas Chatterton Hammond, the ICM's Superintendent, was a prominent member of the Bethany management committee. In a pamphlet produced in 1936 on the dangers of Protestant inter-faith marriages to Catholics, Rev Hammond described those who chose to marry Catholics as 'betraye[r]s of an age-old heritage [who] must forever feel ashamed'.<sup>13</sup> A significant number of Bethany babies were placed by the ICM, either in a children's home or with 'adoptive' parents.

- 22.12 The influence of Plymouth Brethren doctrine was evident in the management of Bethany. One of their main beliefs was *sola scriptura*, the view that the Bible was the supreme authority for church doctrine and central to their way of life, morality and code of conduct. In February 1935 the Bethany Committee unanimously resolved that 'the following doctrinal basis should be subscribed by each and every new member of the Managing Committee, namely belief in:

The supreme and sole authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures of the old and new Testaments as the rule of faith and practice: the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead, the utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall: the forgiveness of sins only through faith in Christ's obedience unto death even the death of the cross; the necessity of the direct influence of the Holy Spirit to impart and sustain spiritual life; the immorality of the soul; the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked.

- 22.13 The report of the annual meeting published in the *Irish Times* in February 1933 quoted a statement by the chairman that 'the work of the home was very much misunderstood in many circles. There were many who looked upon it as proselytising work – that their aim was to entice people from one church to another - whereas the fact was that its great aim, and the only aim, of the home was to bring sinners back to Jesus'.<sup>14</sup>

- 22.14 It seems clear that despite frequent protests to the contrary, those in charge of Bethany sought to indoctrinate residents in their own religious beliefs. In August

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<sup>12</sup> A.E. Hughes, *Lift up a Standard: The Centenary Story of the Society for Irish Church Missions* (London, The Society for Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics, 1948), pp 18-20.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. T.C. Hammond, *Marriage: My Choice: What Shall it Be?* (Dublin, Church of Ireland Printing Company, 1936), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 February 1933.

1924 a decision was taken to form a special sub-committee of ladies connected with Bethany to discuss with the Matron how best its 'spiritual work' could be continued. Vacancies for staff were generally advertised in British religious periodicals. In 1928 Miss Pilgrim, then a nurse in Bethany, resigned to take up a position with the Dublin Medical Mission; she returned to Bethany as Matron four years later. In 1928 a nurse gave notice that she intended returning to China (presumably to undertake missionary work). In 1926 the management committee minutes record that a nurse employed in the home was 'firm' in her engagement to a Roman Catholic. It was subsequently recorded that she had acknowledged the wishes of the committee that she should seek another position and would give them ample time to find a successor. In 1957, an advertisement seeking the services of a qualified nurse to work in Bethany asked that applicants be 'evangelical missionary-minded'.

#### **The Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934**

- 22.15 In the early years the only contact between Bethany and the State or local authorities was in relation to women who were sent to Bethany by the courts. Bethany was a charity, funded by private sources, and as such it was not subject to oversight by either the local authority or the Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH). The only aspect of Bethany's work that involved local or national government related to the children that Bethany placed at nurse. The children and nurse mothers should have been registered and subject to inspection by the local authority; however the obligation rested with the foster mothers, not with Bethany - see Chapter 1. The *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934* transformed this picture because all maternity homes were required to register and became subject to inspection. Bethany registered as a maternity home under the 1934 Act in November 1935.

#### **The Premises**

- 22.16 From 1922 until 1934 the Bethany home was located at 40 Blackhall Place in the north inner city. Census returns from 1911 state that the property at 40 Blackhall Place was officially designated as a 'laundry'; this suggests that the Prison Gate Mission was similar to a Magdalen laundry. There were eight outbuildings, consisting of two stables, two coach houses, a harness room, a boiling room, a shed and a laundry. The premises had stone/brick/concrete walls, a slate/iron/tiled roof and consisted of twenty rooms. The front of the building had fifteen windows

and was classed as a 'first class of house'. On census night there were 32 resident women: 20 Catholics, nine Church of Ireland, one Methodist and two described as 'others'.<sup>15</sup> The report by the *Irish Times* on the opening of the new Bethany home in May 1922, stated that the main building, facing Blackhall Place, would accommodate 25 girls. The centre building had been set apart for such cases as were formerly dealt with by the Dublin Midnight Mission and would hold from 20-25 girls, while the building known as the Crawford Memorial would be specially used for maternity cases.<sup>16</sup>

22.17 Within three years of the Bethany home opening, it appears that the management committee wanted to move. Minutes of the meeting on 18 March noted the 'desirability of selling and buying a place in some healthy neighbourhood'. The meeting in May that year referred to the possible sale of the home. In 1928 the management committee discussed an approach from the Female Orphan House in Harold's Cross Road, a Protestant charity, who asked whether Bethany would accept the premises and assets if offered to them. A barrister, who was asked for advice on this proposal, determined that the orphanage could not be legally transferred to Bethany. In 1929 the management committee decided to write to the Trustees of King's Hospital, which at the time was located nearby in Blackhall Place, inquiring whether they would buy the Bethany premises for £3,000 or a reasonable offer. The next meeting reported that the Bethany Trustees had agreed to sell the property and buy more suitable premises. By January 1930 the prospect of selling the property to King's Hospital had disappeared. Bethany then tried to sell it to the Institution for the Blind. The May 1930 meeting reported that the premises could not be disposed of by public auction and it was suggested that it be converted into rented flats. The next attempt was to sell off vacant parts of the premises. There were several further abortive attempts to dispose of the premises to various organisations until it was finally sold to Dublin Corporation under a compulsory purchase order in March 1934.<sup>17</sup>

22.18 Bethany had not yet identified an alternative premises but Miss Walker informed the management committee that Rathgar House 'could be obtained on terms'. This was a former private boarding school located on Orwell Road, Rathgar, which

<sup>15</sup> See 1911 Census Returns for 40 Blackhall Place, West Side (Arran Quay, Dublin)

[http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Arran\\_Quay/Blackhall\\_Place\\_West\\_Side/55032/](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Dublin/Arran_Quay/Blackhall_Place_West_Side/55032/)

<sup>16</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 May 1922.

<sup>17</sup> *Irish Times*, 28 February 1934.

was owned by a member of the Bethany Board of Management. The three-storey detached building with a floor area of circa 6,000 square feet stood on grounds of about one acre. At the time of the Bethany home's closure in early 1972, the premise was described as having twenty rooms. The hall floor and return consisted of eight rooms and a toilet annexe; the first floor had seven rooms, two bathrooms and water-closets while the lower floor had a large kitchen, a gas-fired water-heating boiler suitable for central heating, a laundry, drying-room and two additional rooms.<sup>18</sup> After Bethany acquired the property, £284 was spent adapting it; in later years various improvements were carried out but it underwent no major extension.

- 22.19 An independent valuation commissioned by the management committee valued the property at £2,000; however the owner sought £3,000. The committee discussed the price in his absence; they asked him to reduce the price, but the minutes state that he was 'perfectly satisfied' that it was worth £3,000. They also noted that no other premises were available – however it was also probable that he had no alternative purchaser. They eventually compromised on a price of £2,750 - which was 37.5% higher than the independent valuation. They assigned £180 for alterations.
- 22.20 The wish to leave Blackhall Place appears to have been prompted by several considerations - the unhealthy air in the inner city may have been one factor (there is a reference to getting sick children away to the countryside). There may also have been concerns about the women living in premises that appear to have been on the side of the street. Miss Pilgrim recounts how 'one inmate in Blackhall Place was found receiving a match-box full of cigarette butts, tied with a piece of string and drawn up through a window from the street'. However the determining factors were probably problems with the premises and financial pressures. In 1929 the minutes noted that accommodation in the Crawford would be inadequate for the number of children who would be in the home over the winter months and it was agreed that the adjoining Gospel Hall would be used to house the children if one or two anthracite stoves were purchased and some renovations were carried out. However Dr Mackay, who was for many years Bethany's unpaid medical officer, reported that the Gospel Hall would not be suitable as a nursery unless fireplaces

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<sup>18</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 March 1972.

were provided so that plan was dropped. Finances were probably the major motivation.

22.21 The former stables at Orwell Road were converted and used temporarily by Emmanuel Home, a children's home (see below). When the Emmanuel Home moved out in 1938 this space became an annexe to the main house and a dormitory for mothers. The move to Rathgar eased Bethany's financial difficulties. The overdraft was reduced; it would have been obliterated if the new property had been bought for £2,000, the price set by a professional valuation. By December 1939, however, the overdraft had risen to almost £1,000 and securities were sold to clear it.<sup>19</sup>

22.22 Orwell Road was more suitable as a mother and baby home than Blackhall Place. When it was inspected in November 1937 under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act*, it had two baths and three toilets; this was significantly better than any other mother and baby home at that time. There were 4 wards and a total of 25 beds. It is evident that these statistics include all the accommodation for mothers in Bethany, because the next inspection report in November 1938 stated that there was accommodation for 4 patients, in one four-bed ward; this was obviously where mothers gave birth and women requiring ante-or post-natal care were accommodated. This report stated that there were 5 baths and 6 toilets. However an inspection in December 1945 records that there was '1 bath in main house'. In 1950 the Department of Health noted that the mothers' dormitory was 'in a building apart from the Home proper'; the infants slept in a nursery in the main home. In 1951 it was proposed to install washing facilities in this annexe which would appear to have been devoid of any, however it was then decided to supply a basin, jug and stand instead of washbasins. Following an inspection by a Dublin Corporation official in May 1949, Bethany was advised to erect a proper fire-escape; construction commenced in May 1950.

22.23 Economy prevailed throughout Bethany. There is evidence of insufficient household items, and a shortage of heat and hot water. In 1924 the matron reported that there was a shortage of sheets for inmates; she was instructed to buy some. In 1928 the ladies committee expressed concern that several babies were

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<sup>19</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 April 1940.

being bathed in the same water - an economy that risked transmitting infections. In 1934 however the same committee remarked on 'huge fires' in the kitchen and the management committee decided that the coal should be locked up.

22.24 Lack of facilities for drying clothes for mothers, babies and staff remained a constant complaint, both in Blackhall Place and Orwell Road. Consideration was given to installing 'laundry dryers' in 1936 on the recommendation of the DLGPH inspectors, but that does not appear to have happened. In 1948 it was noted that staff had nowhere to air their personal clothing - it was suggested that a fire might be kept burning in the living room at night for that purpose. In 1946 a meeting of the management committee noted the 'great inconvenience of inadequate water heating owing to the insufficiency of supply of suitable fuel'. This problem was common to all mother and baby homes during the war and the immediate post-war years. In May 1946 they reported that a water heater had been installed - paid for by a 'friend'. But the new heater supplied only half the quantity of hot water required. The committee dismissed the proposal that they should buy a second heater, and decided to fully use the existing heater. A legacy of £1,500 in 1946 was used to rewire the house, install a children's toilet and replace linoleum. This money also funded the purchase of new blankets. When blankets or other household goods were purchased the committee used their connections with the major Dublin stores to secure 'seconds' at special prices. In a letter to the *Irish Times* in February 1938, the rector of the Zion Church, Rathgar appealed to the public for 'beds, bedding, furniture, delph, clothing or anything that may prove of use in the works of Bethany Home'.<sup>20</sup> In 1954 it was estimated that 24 mattresses needed repair, but the Matron, Miss Walker, and the secretary reduced this number to 12 and decided that this could be done using cheaper materials than originally specified.

22.25 Bethany frequently relied on voluntary labour. An inspection report under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*, carried out in 1938, listed the staff, in addition to the Matron as '4 & voluntary worker'. There was an active ladies' committee. A shelter for infants was erected on the lawn at Orwell Road in 1935 by a 'Christian' friend of the home. However, it does not appear to have been long-lasting because another shelter was erected in 1946 - this was funded by

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<sup>20</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 February 1938.

charitable donations. In 1960 three men decorated the bedrooms and toilets without charge and some months later they were asked to tackle the 'squalid condition' of the kitchen and girls' sitting room. In 1965, two '3 K.W.' storage heaters were installed in the nursery.

- 22.26 The fall in the number of women admitted during the 1950s meant that everybody could be accommodated in the main house. With this in mind it was decided to rearrange the rooms. The front nursery was turned into a prayer room. A room next to the kitchen was converted into a sitting room for the women - apparently the first provision made for any form of leisure or relaxation. The Matron was asked to seek public donations of chairs, cushions and other suitable articles. It was decided to sell the annexe in 1956; however later that year there were proposals that it should be used to house Protestant refugees fleeing the Hungarian uprising. The Irish Red Cross assumed responsibility for the heating and furniture. In 1957 Bethany agreed to a request to house a Catholic Hungarian family in the annexe. When the refugees had moved to alternative accommodation the Red Cross agreed to buy the annexe at a price of £1,200. The sale was completed in September 1958. Bethany continued to function as a mother and baby home until 1972 when a decision was taken to close the home because of falling admissions.

### **Staffing and Inspections**

- 22.27 When Bethany opened it was staffed by one qualified nurse and the Matron. However, given the high level of sickness among children, in March 1926 the management committee determined that 'the children needed more care than they could get with the present staff'. They recommended appointing an assistant to the matron. This assistant (qualifications unstated) was dismissed within months because her work was deemed 'unsatisfactory'. The number of children had increased from 14 in the previous year to 23 and staff found it difficult to provide adequate care. In 1928 the visiting committee noted that the 'girls' in the nursery - presumably these were either expectant mothers or mothers of children who were in Bethany - were 'not doing what they could for the comfort of the babies'. It was decided to hire a fourth member of staff to work in the kitchen to enable the new matron's assistant to help in the nursery as required. In 1929 a nurse who was

due to take up appointment failed her CMB<sup>21</sup> examination. Having failed to secure a qualified nurse (Bethany tended to advertise in British religious periodicals), the committee agreed to appoint a woman who was known to the Matron, but was presumably unqualified, as a 'suitable assistant to the staff'. An 'inmate...who had proved to be of great assistance in the Nursery' was taken on as a servant.

22.28 Despite a significant increase in the numbers of infants, particularly following the move to Orwell Road, there was no corresponding increase in staff numbers. In June 1936 the management committee determined that additional staff would be required and approval was given to hire an 'honorary helper'. When Bethany was inspected by Mrs Crofts, apparently in September 1936 under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act*, she determined that the bedrooms were overcrowded: there appear to have been three bedrooms in addition to a room that was used as the delivery unit. At this time there were 25 women in the home. Mrs Crofts also described the medical staff as inadequate. One member of the board of management suggested that they apply for exemption from the Act and the committee decided to consult their solicitor. At the next meeting of the management committee in October, Miss Walker reported on visits by Dr Sterling Berry, a medical inspector in the DLGPH, and Mrs Crofts and their recommendations 're Staff, number of girls, worker for night duty and laundry'. The management committee decided to recruit a nurse who had the CMB, and to give one month's notice to another staff member, who presumably lacked this qualification. They also unanimously agreed that the number of 'girls' in the home should not exceed 20 except in urgent cases. Another member of staff was hired as a night worker. The Commission has not seen any reports on these inspections in the records of the Department of Health.

22.29 An inspection carried out in November 1937 by Dr Dillon under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act* listed the staff as a Matron, who was SRN and CMB; one qualified nurse who was not a qualified midwife; a housekeeper; and a night worker. This was deemed sufficient. When Dr Berry visited Bethany on 25 January 1939, a little over a month after the home had been inspected by his colleague, Dr Dillon (the Commission has not seen any record of this inspection), he reported that conditions were much improved since the last inspection. He described it as

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<sup>21</sup> The Central Midwives Board was responsible for registering and regulating midwives.

'kept very well...clean & comfortable. The mothers and infants are well looked after & appear happy & contented'. There were 22 expectant or nursing mothers in the home - two more than the permitted number - and 42 children. The Matron was SRN and CMB. Under the heading 'staff employed', in the standard inspection returns, there was one midwife and one qualified nurse, plus four other staff and voluntary workers. The staffing was deemed adequate for the home. When Miss Pilgrim retired as Matron in 1944 and was succeeded by Mrs Glover, she served on the management committee. By September 1944, Bethany was employing three additional staff to support the matron, a nurse on a £75 per year salary, the housekeeper, on a salary of £52 and a third worker whose duties and salary were not stated. (All would have lived in the home.) Another maternity home inspection in December 1945 recorded the staff as the Matron, Mrs Glover, who was SRN and CMB and a nurse with similar qualifications plus a housekeeper and 'girl in charge of older children'. The staff was deemed adequate and the inspector wrote that they 'appeared' to be efficient and capable.

- 22.30 Bethany often found it difficult to recruit nurses when a nurse resigned. In 1945 the Matron and the two other staff had to care for 19 women and 31 babies. Bethany was again without a qualified nurse from December 1947 to April 1949, and the nurse who was appointed left within three months. It was also without a housekeeper for much of this time. In December 1949 the staff consisted of the Matron, a housekeeper and an 'honorary worker'. Staff shortages persisted throughout the 1950s. Between December 1947 and September 1953 Bethany had a qualified nurse on the staff for only a total of three/four months. In January 1957 when the home was yet again without a qualified nurse, the Matron told the committee that it was 'not yet absolutely necessary' to find a replacement. Some months later she reported that a qualified Scottish nurse had agreed to fill the vacancy and 'was anxious to engage in their Christian service', the 'smallness of the salary (£150 p.a.) being no deterrent'. This nurse left within a year. Bethany's difficulties in attracting and retaining staff suggest that the salaries were too low, and the fact that recruitment was limited to Protestant women, preferably with strong missionary impulses, was a further handicap. Staff shortages probably meant that mothers had to carry out more work and the quality of care for mothers and infants may have suffered at times.

22.31 Medical care was provided free of charge by a visiting doctor, who was voted an annual honorarium of £10; it is unclear how often he visited Bethany. The maternity homes inspection carried out in 1945 stated that ‘most of the girls appear to be sent to city hospitals for confinement’. In 1957, the committee expressed its thanks to him for carrying out inoculations of the children and mothers, along with other services, free of charge. In 1950 it was reported that free dental treatment had been provided to several women in the home.

## Finances

22.32 The Bethany home was a charity and in 1922 its funding came from a variety of sources: legacies and donations, the proceedings of sales of work and church collections and payments made by the mothers or on their behalf. When the Bethany home opened, a debt of £1,000 had been incurred in modifying and preparing the premises in Blackhall Place for its new purpose.<sup>22</sup> In March 1924, the Management Committee held a lengthy discussion about the serious financial situation. Since 1922 the debts had risen from £1,500 to over £2,078. Subscriptions had fallen from £129 in 1921, to £35 in 1923. The chairman decided to write a letter appealing for funds to all would-be subscribers. At the annual meeting the following February the financial difficulties were attributed to the growing number of women, mostly from the country, who were seeking admission.<sup>23</sup>

22.33 The 1920s was a difficult period for charities. In 1930, the Irish Hospitals Sweepstake was established to provide an alternative source of income for the Dublin voluntary hospitals that could no longer rely on charitable donations or legacies. Irish Protestant charities lost donors because of Protestant emigration after independence. War-time inflation, punitive income tax and death-duties had eroded traditional sources of income for charities such as legacies, and dividends from stocks and shares in railways and other safe investments. In 1928, the chairman of the management committee agreed to write to all clergymen who referred women to Bethany, asking them to make a contribution towards its costs. There were annual sales of work and pound days when the home was open to the public, the premises were decorated with ‘flowers and foliage’ and stalls were

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<sup>22</sup> *Irish Times*, 8 May 1922.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 February 1925.

erected selling 'a great variety of needlework and fancy goods, cakes and home-made bread, jam and vegetables'. Church of Ireland clergy connected to the home oversaw the proceedings, explained its purpose and promoted its work.<sup>24</sup> From the late 1930s, these events were replaced by an annual Gift Day, where 'friends and sympathisers' and members of the public could visit, attend an opening prayer meeting and bring donations or money or gifts such as 'articles of food, household utensils, soap, mats, ink, medicines, etc.'<sup>25</sup> Bethany also benefited from numerous public collections organised by religiously affiliated groups such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA),<sup>26</sup> but the revenue from these activities was modest and uncertain.

22.34 In 1927 Miss Walker (who was described as assistant to the matron) noted that 'some Friends of the Home had much sympathy for the children, which was not extended to the mothers'. The management committee determined to create a special fund for the children - which they presumably hoped would attract more donations. A special public appeal was made to support this new fund 'to enable suitable homes to be got for the children when they leave the Home - surroundings in which they could be visited by the workers and where Christian influences prevailed'. The notice for the Bethany Home Gift Day in 1950 - which would have been widely circulated - stated that 'Babies may be seen from 3 to 5 pm. Tea will be provided in the afternoon'.

22.35 The minutes of the Bethany board of management convey a picture of chronic financial insecurity, which might be temporarily relieved by a windfall donation or a legacy, followed by another financial crisis within months. In December 1925 the board received a letter from their bank drawing attention to the large overdraft. It appears that the permitted figure was £2,000. The committee minuted that 'care should be taken in relation to admitting girls so as not to add to expenses unnecessarily'. Yet by the following August the overdraft had climbed to £2,210 and the home appears to have made efforts to discharge mothers and babies. It sold an unspecified quantity of War Loans to reduce the overdraft. The organ was out of order but repairs were deferred. The minutes for February 1927 noted that income in the previous month was £18 and expenditure was £110. The committee

<sup>24</sup> *Irish Times*, 24 October 1928.

<sup>25</sup> *Irish Times*, 18 September 1937/11 November 1938.

<sup>26</sup> *Irish Times*, 17 March 1934/27 September 1941.

determined that only emergency cases would be admitted and efforts made to reduce the numbers in the home. The ladies committee was asked to review the diet and articles in the nursery and beds 'with a view to curtailing expenditure as far as possible'. Five 'girls' were admitted in April; when asked to explain this, Miss Walker produced a letter from an anonymous donor who had given £200 to prevent admissions being refused. Despite these efforts to reduce expenditure, the overdraft remained close to the maximum permitted, so the committee determined to hold a special meeting in September to discuss 'how best to make the work done by the Mission known to the churches'. They ordered 150 copies of a circular letter and 1,000 copies of a pamphlet outlining Bethany's work, for distribution among the 'ministerial brethren' of the members of the management committee. Friends of Bethany organised 'drawing room meetings'. These efforts made a minimal dent in the overdraft.

22.36 In September 1930, with the overdraft within £20 of the limit, the meeting discussed stopping admissions, selling stock, discharging 'inmates' and deferring the payment of most bills. They placed the premises on the books of an estate agent for sale if they could identify alternative premises costing £500 less than the sale price. This was a time of international recession. In September 1931 Bethany was informed that owing to the depreciation of the securities lodged in the bank as security for the overdraft, the overdraft was not covered; the bank demanded that further securities should be lodged immediately. The committee contacted Lord Iveagh and Lord Plunkett (bishop of Meath 1919-25), who was also a member of the Guinness family, seeking assistance, but there is no indication of a response. A special meeting of the management committee about the finances was preceded by a one-hour prayer meeting. The committee determined that no women should be admitted until the overdraft was below £2000, other than exceptional cases. They decided to cap admissions at 20 and redoubled efforts to sell the Blackhall Place premises. The financial statement presented at the 1933 annual meeting reported that over the previous twelve months, Bethany had received £408 10s from legacies and wills, £306 in public subscriptions, £152 from the Sale of Work and Pound Day, £75 in donations and £63 from public collections.<sup>27</sup> However running costs consistently outstripped income. In 1938 it was reported that Bethany operated at a loss of £625; £711 was spent on 'dietary costs', £259 on

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<sup>27</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 February 1933.

salaries and wages of staff, £140 on coal and gas and £58 on drapery and household expenses.<sup>28</sup>

**Financial support from the state:**

- 22.37 There is no evidence in the minutes of the management committee for the years 1924-37 that Bethany sought public funding. In 1922 when Bethany was founded the only funding for mother and baby homes provided by central government was the Maternity and Child Welfare grants that were introduced in 1916. The Magdalen Asylum in Leeson St (later Denny House - see Chapter 23) and St Patrick's Guild (which had a small home in Mountjoy Square - see Chapter 27) benefited from these grants, as did organisations that placed children in foster homes, such as the Society for the Protection of Destitute Catholic Children and the Nursery Rescue and Protestant Children Aid Society. Bessborough, which opened in 1922, was funded through capitation payments for mothers and children who were sent to the institution by South Cork Board of Assistance and over time by a growing number of other local authorities, see Chapter 18. Each local authority had to secure ministerial approval permitting them to pay for unmarried mothers and their children in the designated mother and baby home: see Chapter 1.
- 22.38 It is not clear when Bethany first tried to secure state funding. In 1925 an official from the DLGPH gave evidence to the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor about the funding provided to the Magdalen Asylum (later Denny House) under the Maternity and Child Welfare scheme. When he was asked whether the Bethany Home had claimed funding under this scheme, he replied 'We don't touch it'.<sup>29</sup>
- 22.39 The minutes of the board of management from 27 January 1937 to 12 May 1944 do not survive. On 28 January 1944 the DLGPH approved an application by Monaghan County Council to send a pregnant woman to Bethany. Monaghan appears to have been the only local authority to seek approval to admit women to Bethany at this time, and rather than concentrate on securing funding under the *Public Assistance Act 1939* for the women and children in the home, it would appear that Bethany preferred to emulate the Magdalen Asylum by securing funding under the Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme. The first letter on file from

<sup>28</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 April 1939.

<sup>29</sup> Oireachtas Library, Minutes, Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, 10 June 1925.

Bethany to the DLGPH requesting a grant from the National Maternity and Child Welfare scheme is dated December 1942. The department replied seeking information about the women and children who were in the home during 1942. It is unclear what happened next - the file does not contain a response by Bethany. However, in March 1943, the department noted that 'the financial position of the Home as disclosed in the accounts does not appear to warrant State Subvention'. In subsequent correspondence Bethany pointed out that, in 1940, it had cashed in investments amounting to almost £1,000 to clear its overdraft.

- 22.40 When the Bethany representatives met an official in the DLGPH in 1944 to pursue their claim for assistance under the Maternity and Child Welfare scheme, they were informed that it was 'now a matter for the Dublin Corporation'. Bethany replied that they had been trying for two years without success to secure financial assistance from the Corporation; (the Commission has seen no information about this). Bethany appears to have pinned its hopes for public funding on Dr Sterling Berry, a medical inspector of the DLGPH, who was undoubtedly sympathetic towards its campaign, probably for religious reasons. In 1945 he promised to contact the Dublin city manager on their behalf. However, the Dublin city manager refused Bethany's application for a grant, noting that Bethany had not been approved under the Maternity and Child Welfare scheme. Dr Berry suggested that they apply for approval. Later that year however, Dr Berry, having consulted the Dublin city manager and Dr Russell, the Dublin medical officer of health, advised that Bethany should apply 'for a grant' under the public assistance scheme. The board decided to do this 'while expressing fears that few of the girls referred to it would be willing to make applications through the City Manager'. When the Bethany representatives met members of the commission that was running Dublin City,<sup>30</sup> they told the Bethany delegation that they had no authority to award a grant to the home. Bethany again wrote to the Secretary of the DLGPH seeking financial support in the summer of 1946. The letter mentioned that Bethany was running an overdraft of £800; they did not understand 'why financial assistance cannot also be given to an institution which performs such useful public service'. The department reiterated that the 'appropriate procedure' was to approach the public assistance authorities asking that Bethany be recognised under the 1939 Act. They suggested that Bethany should contact 'those from whose districts inmates are admitted to the Home in circumstances which would appear to suggest that they could be

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<sup>30</sup> Dublin Corporation was dissolved 1942 and replaced by three appointed commissioners – see Chapter 1.

deemed eligible for public assistance'. Dr Berry, who had now retired from the department, advised Bethany 'that this would involve considerable correspondence'; they tried to short-circuit this by writing to the department for approval. Dr Berry promised to intervene on Bethany's behalf but the department informed Bethany that 'The Minister does not give his consent in this connection without application for consent having first been received from local authorities'. Dr Berry then confirmed that the procedures outlined by the department were correct.

- 22.41 The minutes of the Bethany management committee for 1944 and 1945 do not mention that Monaghan county council had secured departmental approval in 1943 to maintain mothers and babies in Bethany. However, in June 1946, Bethany notified Monaghan county council that it had increased the weekly charge 'for each girl' to 15s 'in view of the increased cost of living in Dublin'. It was claimed that this would cover approximately half of the maintenance cost of each mother. Some months later Cavan county council applied to the department for approval to maintain mothers and children, who were members of the Church of Ireland, in Bethany. The county council pointed out that 'the girl in question', who was a member of the Church of Ireland, could not be sent to Sean Ross or Castlepollard, the two homes approved for Cavan public assistance cases. It then emerged that this 'girl' had left the Bethany Home, but Cavan asked the department to advise as to 'what arrangements should be made for such cases in future'. The department replied that 'the home, if necessary' could be approved under Section 35 of the *Public Assistance Act 1939*. The department approved the maintenance of unmarried mothers who were members of the Church of Ireland in Bethany under the Act. In 1948 Longford public assistance authority agreed to pay for the maintenance of a mother and her child in Bethany with effect from August 1947. In 1950 the Department of Health noted that Bethany had been approved for admissions from Cavan, Monaghan and Longford; Donegal sought approval to maintain a woman in Bethany in 1956; Kilkenny did likewise the following year; Tipperary North Riding and Wicklow were approved in 1959, but the number of public assistance authority admissions from the various counties appear to have been so infrequent that the counties tended to seek approval on a case by case basis.

- 22.42 The Commission does not have any details about the number of women and infants maintained by the public assistance authorities. In the mid-late 1950,

Bethany was receiving £2 a week for each mother in the home from the public assistance authorities. This was the same as the amount paid for women in the Sacred Heart homes. On several occasions the minutes of the management committee note that payments by local authorities were in arrears. Nevertheless, at the 1965 annual meeting the Matron expressed thanks for the 'great help' Bethany had received from 'County Councils of the areas from which the girls came'.

22.43 In October 1948 Bethany wrote to the Department of Health, on the advice of Miss Litster, requesting reimbursement under the Maternity and Child Welfare scheme. At this time the Department of Health was expanding services for mothers and children. Total payments from the National Maternity and Child Welfare Grant increased from £34,149 in 1945/6 to £58,752 in 1947/8. In the years 1945-1948, just over £50,000 of the £134,000 expended under this scheme went to voluntary agencies; the balance went to local health authorities. In March 1948 this grant was merged into the Health Services Grant. These changes and the Department's evident willingness to increase spending under this heading would have made it easier to include Bethany. In January 1949 the Department of Health informed Bethany that it would be eligible for maternity and child welfare grants from the beginning of the year. This meant that Bethany would be reimbursed for 50% of approved expenditure on mothers and infants - excluding mothers and babies maintained by the public assistance authorities. The financial benefits were significant. In April 1949 the treasurer reported that income since the previous meeting had amounted to £801, of which £697 came in a grant from the Department of Health. Bethany recorded a credit balance in its accounts, apparently for the first time.

22.44 This comfortable position was short-lived; by 1953 Bethany was again running an overdraft. By the 1950s, it was heavily dependent on support from local authorities and the Department of Health. There were few references to bequests, although in January 1955 with the overdraft standing at £599, an American gentleman who had adopted two children some years previously arranged to transfer shares worth \$3,000 to Bethany which could be sold for the benefit of the home. Bethany suffered the same experience as other mother and baby homes. Falling numbers and shorter stays reduced revenue; the twice-yearly payments under the maternity and child welfare grants reported in the management committee minutes become

smaller. By early 1958 the overdraft had risen to £1,192; it was £250 at the end of 1956. The management committee decided to have a 'form of request' included in the Home's Annual Report Booklet, and members of the committee were asked to identify potential donors. Bethany determined to apply to the national radio station, Radio Éireann for inclusion in the station's weekly charity appeal.<sup>31</sup>

22.45 Economies were necessary. The high cost of heating and fuel was highlighted; there was a view that the cooker and water heater were too large and inefficient for their needs. It was decided to repair and use the stove instead of the cooker. A second hand gas cooker, financed by a private subscription, was installed some time later. The completion of the sale of the former Emmanuel Home 'annexe' on the site of the Bethany Home reduced the debt to £205. The management committee continued to seek charitable donations, distributing 1,000 handbills advertising its annual Gift Day along with copies of the annual report to subscribers. Bethany asked clergymen to make an announcement to their congregations about the annual Bethany Gift Day and the need for increased financial support. Such efforts were evidently successful. The accounts for 1962 showed a surplus of income over expenditure of £194; total income was £2,111, expenses amounted to £1,917 10s 3d. When the 1964 accounts showed a surplus of income over expenditure of £175, the management committee 'voiced thanks to God'. In 1964 Bethany received a gift of £1,000 that they invested in shares. The favourable financial circumstances meant that in 1968 the committee reported that many improvements had been made in the past year and 'much more' were envisaged. When Bethany closed in 1972 the property was sold for £38,000. In 1974 a High Court judgement determined that the net proceeds of the sale - £37,232 and an additional £4,000-£4,500 in other securities should be allocated to the Magdalen Home, Eglinton Road (later Denny House) and Miss Carr's Children's Home on Northbrook Road, with the Magdalen Home receiving 85% and the balance going to Miss Carr's Home.<sup>32</sup>

## The women

22.46 The institutional records which have been entered into a database and analysed by the Commission show that a total of 1,584 women entered the Bethany Home between 1922 and 1971. This number includes 113 who were neither pregnant,

<sup>31</sup> An appeal for a charity was broadcast on Sundays before the main evening news.

<sup>32</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 November 1972.

nor recent mothers. (These women are discussed in a separate section). The records give very little detail about admission pathways. Some women and children were referred by local clergymen. In 1928 the management committee determined that the secretary should be advised as soon as possible of every case admitted temporarily by the Matron. They also determined that women should be inspected by the Bethany nurse before the secretary formally approved their admission and at the time of their admission every adult had to sign a formal document agreeing to the rules governing the Bethany Home.

Numbers Admitted by Decade:

1920s	352
1930s	509
1940s	359
1950s	157
1960s	188
1970s	17
Total	1582
Date unknown	2

22.47 There is some evidence that the number of women admitted was determined by the financial state of the home. For example, in November 1931 when the overdraft had reached its limit of £2,000, the management committee passed a resolution that the number of women in the home should not exceed 20. When finances improved in 1932, because of a legacy and an anonymous donation, the number of mothers increased from 26 to 50. Admissions peaked in the late 1930s. Between 1935 and 1939 the numbers admitted were 60, 62, 64, 51 and 57 respectively. In 1940 admissions fell to 32, and although they increased during the 1940s, the peak figure of 43 in 1946 was substantially below the numbers admitted in the late 1930s. The sharp fall in admissions in 1940 was undoubtedly due to the exclusion of Catholic women (see below). This meant that Bethany did not experience the same capacity pressures during the war as Catholic mother and baby homes.

22.48 When Bethany was first inspected in 1936 under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*, the departmental inspector, Mrs Crofts, reported that the home was overcrowded and the management committee determined that the number of

mothers should be capped at 20 except in an emergency. This average figure had been breached in every year from 1933 to 1939, with the exception of 1937, but it was never again exceeded; in 1942 there was an average of 20 women in the home. From the early 1950s, the number of women and babies fell steadily. Average monthly occupancy was only in double figures twice after 1950, in 1953 and 1956. In May 1962, there were seven women and four resident babies; only 15 women were admitted in 1970 and two in 1971. The last child was admitted to Bethany on 25 August 1970 and the last child was discharged on 18 December that year. The last recorded admission for a woman was on 23 January 1971; the last woman was discharged on 27 March that year.

### **Age of mothers**

- 22.49 The mean age of mothers fell from 25 in the 1920s to 23 in the 1950s and 1960s. Sixty-four women were under the age of 17, 41 of these were aged 16. In total 89% of mothers were 18 years and older. Information about the women's occupations is not available in 76.5% of cases; the best data is for the 1920s, when it is no surprise that the overwhelming majority were either domestic servants or engaged in home duties. In her memoir, Miss Pilgrim stated that the women who entered Bethany were not simply 'rough or low class...We have had some of the most refined and cultured girls - typists, teachers, nurses, and even a Minister's wife and a missionary'.
- 22.50 The largest number of Bethany women gave a Dublin address (though many would have been born elsewhere). The next most common addresses were counties Cavan, Wicklow, Donegal and Monaghan, all with substantial Protestant populations; 139 women gave addresses in Northern Ireland.

### **Length of stay**

- 22.51 Women stayed in Bethany for a shorter period than in the Sacred Hearts Homes. The longest average stay was in the 1950s. The increased duration of stay was the result of women entering Bethany earlier in their pregnancy; the duration of post-natal stay was falling - as happened in other homes. By 1961, the amount of time allowed for a mother to remain in Bethany after the birth of her child was four months. This was subsequently reduced to three months by a decision of the

management committee in December of that year. By this stage the average stay in all mother and baby homes was falling because children were being adopted.

Decade of Admission	Average length of stay (days)
1920	137
1930	155
1940	164
1950	212
1960	120
1970	82
Average all decades	154

22.52 Three-quarters of the women were admitted when pregnant and remained until after they had given birth; 17% arrived with their child having given birth. A small number (8%) left the home before the birth and others gave birth in hospital and did not return. Just over half, 54%, of the births took place in the Bethany home. Between November 1937 and December 1938 a total of 47 babies were born in the home. An inspection in December 1945 stated that 'most of the girls appear to be sent to city hospitals for confinement'. Under the heading 'Number of confinements in Home since date of last inspection' it recorded 35 (22 in Rotunda). A report by the Department of Health in 1950 noted that Bethany mothers attended ante-natal clinics in the Rotunda hospital 'the Home had a visiting physician and a qualified maternity trained nurse. The Home was described as clean and well kept; comfortable beds and the mothers appeared to be well-fed'. A Department of Health survey of accommodation for unmarried mothers provided under the *Health Act 1953* stated that 'Confinements do not as a rule take place in the Home except in an emergency or at the request of a patient'. The department regarded the move to hospital births as very desirable given the few staff in the home.

22.53 The three homes run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and the Magdalen Asylum would admit only first-time mothers. Bethany's rule was somewhat different. Miss Pilgrim explained that 'no girl was admitted the second time, having been in the Home and having had a chance to hear the Gospel previously but we often had girls admitted to have a second or third, or even fourth babies: but having been once in the Home they were not allowed back'. In 1956 the Department of Health noted that women who were 'not eligible' to be admitted

to the Magdalen Asylum or Bethany were sent to a home in Cork - Braemar House. Records of Braemar House, which was not included in the Commission's remit, record women being transferred between Braemar and Bethany.

- 22.54 The institutional records show that almost 28% of Bethany mothers had one or more previous pregnancies, over 5% had multiple previous pregnancies; this information is not available for 28% of the women, so the actual percentage may have been higher. The highest proportion of women with previous pregnancies were admitted in the 1930s. During that decade many of the Catholic women admitted had already given birth to one or more children. In 1953 the Magdalen Asylum in Lesson Street contacted Bethany Home regarding its admission policy. Under the terms of its trust, the Asylum could only admit 'first fail' cases. Very few such women were now seeking admission; the number of 'illegitimate' births had fallen sharply and given that Bethany admitted women on their second or subsequent pregnancy, the Magdalen Asylum suggested that those 'first fall' cases coming to Bethany should be 'diverted' to the Asylum. Bethany's management committee declined this request, noting that the 'vast majority' of women they admitted were 'first falls'. If they excluded 'first fall' mothers the numbers admitted to Bethany 'would be negligible'. In 1961 in a break with policy, the Matron was given permission to admit a woman who had been resident two years previously after she 'had again got into trouble'. In 1956 a Westmeath clergyman asked that a woman be admitted to Bethany 'to get a fresh start in life'. She had been resident there 18 years previously and was currently working in a mental hospital. But given that she was now in her fifties the committee decided that that she was ineligible for admission.
- 22.55 There is evidence that Bethany sought financial support from the parents of Bethany mothers, and from the clergy that referred them. The women were expected to perform domestic work and chores in exchange for their care, and the Bethany authorities regarded such work as training for jobs in domestic service. However, it was frequently acknowledged that women admitted into the Home 'could not usually pay anything towards their maintenance' and securing financial assistance from parents and clergy proved difficult. By the 1950s a growing number of unmarried mothers were in insured employment and they qualified for maternity benefit (from 1953). The Matron reported that women were handing over their social insurance payments to support their residency. On occasion, women

who were viewed as being particularly useful while resident in the home were paid for their work. For example, in 1957, the Matron received approval from the management committee to pay one 'girl who had been in the Home for the past year 10s a week due to her 'helpfulness'. In 1964, the decision was made to increase the charge on women paying for their maintenance privately to £3 a week.

### **Mothers' exit pathways**

- 22.56 There is limited information available about the immediate destination of women who left Bethany. No details are recorded for 38% of the women. Where information is available, 56% were recorded as going home (i.e. their family home) or to a private address; 29% were recorded as going to a situation/employment, which may have been arranged by Bethany. The remainder scattered among a range of institutions. Bethany's 1938 annual report stated that of the 87 women who had been resident over the previous year, 37 were sent to situations, seven went to friends, 13 returned home, six went on to other institutions, one left on her own accord, while 23 were still in the home at the end of that period. In 1956, the Matron reported that two girls were leaving the home to take up nursing overseas. Some former residents kept in touch with Bethany following their departure. In 1956, the matron reported that she had received a letter from a former 'inmate', who was now resident in California and happily married; this woman and her husband were 'actively engaged in Christian service'.
- 22.57 A number of women were asked to leave Bethany. In 1945 Miss Walker reported to the management committee about the behaviour of a recently admitted woman. They issued an order requiring her to leave within six days. If she failed to comply they would be willing to 'take such steps as they deem necessary in the circumstances'. In 1958 the Matron reported that one woman was causing considerable trouble and the management committee again ordered that she be told to leave within a week. This mother complied with the order; however she left her child, who was mixed-race, in the home. In 1963 a resident stole two coats from the Matron's flat before leaving. The management committee awarded Matron £10 in compensation.

22.58 In 1944 the management committee discussed the problem of ‘feeble-minded girls’ in the home ‘some of whom were at present causing anxiety’. They acknowledged that they did not have the staff or facilities to cater for such cases and decided to approach the Salvation Army to explore the possibility of opening an institution to cater for such cases. A representative from the Salvation Army informed the committee that there was no prospect of anything being done just then, because of war-time pressures. Records indicate that a number of women with intellectual disabilities were admitted in later years. In 1959 a woman who had been in an institution in Co Meath (Drewstown House) was sent to Bethany ‘for a trial there’. She was described as having ‘limited mental facilities’; if Bethany did not prove suitable, it was proposed to transfer her to the Stewarts Institution. At almost the same time a twenty-year old woman, who was described as of ‘very low mental capacity’ was found wandering in Dublin. She was detained in St Joseph’s Convent, Drumcondra<sup>33</sup> but was then transferred to Bethany with a view to her rehabilitation and finding her suitable employment. The Department of Health queried the decision to send this woman to Bethany; they did not believe that it had the facilities to rehabilitate her. Sligo County Council was planning to transfer a ‘girl’ from Stewarts to Bethany to determine whether she could be placed in employment. In 1963, the Matron told the committee that a recently admitted 17 year old ‘girl’ appeared to be ‘only 12 years old in intelligence’.

### **Roman Catholic Mothers**

22.59 In the early years Bethany admitted women, irrespective of their religion; 419 of the 1,584 Bethany mothers were Catholics. In the 1920s and 1930s Catholics constituted over 45% of mothers admitted; in 1927, 1929, 1933, 1934 and 1937 over 50% of mothers admitted to Bethany were Catholic.

22.60 The ethos of Bethany was strongly evangelical. The staff and the management committee were determined to ‘save’ all the women who entered the home. In December 1957, the committee ‘heard with satisfaction’ how eight mothers ‘had professed conversion’ having attended a recent ‘crusade’ meeting held by the British evangelist preacher Eric Hutchings. One ‘backslider had been restored’ (presumably to religious practice); in 1959, the Matron noted that two women had ‘come to Christ’ at the tent meeting held on Dublin’s South Circular Road.

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<sup>33</sup> Most likely in the Magdalen laundry on this site (High Park).

Mourning the death of their long serving Secretary, Miss Walker, in May 1955, the members of the management committee put on record, her

selfless devotion to the spiritual and material welfare of the women and girls who in their time of need came under the influence and loving care of the Bethany Home. She continued to take a prayerful and practical interest in them after their discharge and this interest was greatly blessed by the Lord and rewarded by her seeing his transforming grace manifested in many lives. In caring for them she served her Saviour and has now entered into the fuller joy of his presence.

22.61 Bethany offered some attractions for Catholic women. Given the sectarian divisions in Irish society, it was unlikely that their presence in Bethany (and their pregnancy) would become known to family or neighbours. Women remained in Bethany for a shorter time than in the Sacred Heart homes, or a county home, and Bethany facilitated the placement/'adoption' of children, provided that the mothers consented to their being raised as Protestants. It may be significant that in the 1930s, the decade of peak Catholic admissions, 35% of the Catholic mothers admitted had given birth to one or more children. These women would not have been admitted to the Sacred Heart homes, though they would have been accepted in Regina Coeli or Pelletstown. Chapter 21 which deals with Regina Coeli, contains some details about Catholic mothers in Bethany and the efforts of the Legion of Mary to remove them.

22.62 In 1926 Miss Walker received a letter from Miss Cruice of St Patrick's Guild requesting that all Roman Catholics applying for admission to Bethany should be referred to her. In return, she promised that Protestants applying to her organisation would be referred to the Bethany Home. The management committee informed Miss Cruice that they 'could not comply with her request'. In 1934, during a sermon given to raise funds for the Catholic Sacred Heart Home in Drumcondra (an orphanage which was not connected to the Sacred Heart mother and baby homes), the preacher attacked the Irish Church Mission's stated objective 'to bring the gospel message of religious liberty to our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen'. He referred to its 'ally' the Bethany home, and declared that the ICM's aim was 'to rob' the Irish people of their Catholic faith.<sup>34</sup> In April 1939, the annual report of the CPRSI described Bethany as 'another active source of proselytising' among

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<sup>34</sup> *Irish Independent*, 24 January 1934.

unmarried Catholic mothers in Dublin. It accused the Bethany authorities of trying to entice these women and their children to the Protestant faith. While Protestant women in Bethany had to pay a fee, the CPRSI alleged that Catholic women were accommodated free of charge on condition that they actively participated in Protestant religious services and their infants were reared in the home free of charge 'on condition that they handed them over to be brought up as Protestants'.<sup>35</sup> Bethany was unapologetic about its missionary zeal. A.H. Gibson, who presided at Bethany's 1933 annual meeting, stated that the work of the home 'was very much misunderstood' with many claiming 'that their aim was to entice people from one Church to another – whereas...the only aim...was to bring sinners back to Jesus'.<sup>36</sup> Miss Pilgrim noted that some Roman Catholics admitted to Bethany 'became new creatures in Christ Jesus'.

22.63 In January 1940 a barrister, representing the Bethany Home in a legal case, quoted a solicitor representing the Attorney General, who had opposed a draft scheme to give the funds of the Dublin Women's Shelter (which had closed because the premises were subject to compulsory purchase) to Bethany

because the manner that the trust deeds of the Bethany Home required it to adopt towards those who applied to it for shelter, would, if applied under the draft scheme to Catholic applicants, constitute an infringement of religious liberty under the Constitution; be a constant source of irritation to the Catholic community and thereby impair the good relations that ought to exist among all the citizens of the State.

22.64 In an affidavit Miss Walker denied that the religious liberty of any Roman Catholic applicant or inmate had been infringed. She alleged that the work of the home 'had been seriously interfered with for a considerable time past by persistent, unfriendly, innumerable and unnecessary requirements of public officials' and consequently with 'great reluctance' it was deemed advisable by the management committee to pass a resolution prohibiting the admission of Roman Catholics 'notwithstanding that the home would be seriously prejudiced in this matter by adopting such a resolution'. She intimated that the passing of this resolution 'was accelerated as the result of information which reached her Committee that, if it was not adopted, the recognition of this home as an approved institution was intended to be

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<sup>35</sup> *Irish Independent*, 17 April 1939.

<sup>36</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 February 1933.

cancelled'.<sup>37</sup> The absence of management committee minutes for these years is a major handicap in trying to interpret this statement. At this time Bethany was not in receipt of any public funding; the only official recognition was as a place of detention for women and its registration under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934*, which makes no mention of religion.

- 22.65 In October 1940 the secretary of the Bethany management committee wrote to Dr Berry, a medical inspector in the DLGPH stating that the committee had unanimously adopted a resolution 'That as suitable accommodation is available elsewhere in Dublin for Roman Catholic girls, such girls shall not in future be admitted to the Home'. The institutional records suggest that Bethany broadly complied with this resolution; only 23 of the 419 Catholic women were admitted after 1939; the last in 1964. In 1955 the Bethany management committee expressed concern that Catholic organisations in Dublin were 'getting hold of babies born to Protestant mothers in hospitals'. They decided to ask the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin to raise the matter when contacting the clergy members in the archdiocese. The Commission has not seen any evidence relating to this.

#### **Non mother and baby home admissions**

- 22.66 A total of 113 women who were admitted to Bethany were not pregnant and had not recently given birth. While mainly functioning as a mother and baby home, Bethany was also a place of detention for women accused of infanticide, 'concealment of birth' and petty crimes.<sup>38</sup> Catholic women in such circumstances would have commonly been sent to a Magdalen Laundry. If they were under the age of 16 (this was raised to 17 in 1941), they would have been sent to a reformatory school, under the provisions of the 1908 and 1941 *Children Acts* (see Chapter 1). In 1945 the minutes of the management committee reported that Bethany had been registered as a place of detention for the purpose of part 5 of the *Children Act 1908* on the recommendation of Dr Barton, the Archbishop of Dublin.

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<sup>37</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 January 1940.

<sup>38</sup> James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 195.

22.67 The *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries*<sup>39</sup> showed that 8% of admissions to Magdalen Laundries were categorised under ‘criminal justice system’, which included cases ‘on remand, on probation, by the Courts from prison or by An Garda Síochana’. In 1940 the barrister who was appearing on behalf of the trustees of the Bethany Home told the High Court that the Gardaí ‘were in the habit of sending any homeless Protestant girl to Bethany’.<sup>40</sup> For example in September 1924, two sisters from England, aged 17 and 18 respectively, were charged with stealing a woman’s overcoat from a shop in Dublin and obtaining goods by ‘false pretence’ from two other establishments. They pleaded guilty and stated that they had been ‘left in Bray by their parents with £1, and had to do something to live’. The court ordered that they be sent to Bethany until such time as the probation officer ‘decided that they might leave, the period not to exceed 12 months’.<sup>41</sup> In 1931, a young domestic servant from Wexford was ordered ‘to enter Bethany for six months’ having been arrested for leaving a hotel in Bray without paying a bill for a week’s worth of food and lodgings.<sup>42</sup>

22.68 In 1926 a woman from Donegal pleaded guilty in the Central Criminal Court to the ‘concealment of birth’ of her child. In the majority of such cases, the initial charge of murder was reduced to one of ‘concealment of birth’ of an infant, in accordance with Section 60 of the *Offences Against the Person Act 1861*.<sup>43</sup> Her solicitor urged the court to consider the extenuating circumstances, namely that she was underage and her parents ‘took no interest in her’. The court ordered her to be bound to the peace for a period of two years provided she remain in a suitable institution; she was ‘given to the care’ of the Bethany Home.<sup>44</sup> Rattigan reports on an infanticide trial in the Central Criminal Court in 1930 where Miss Walker told the judge that if he took ‘a lenient course’ the defendant would be admitted to the Bethany Home and kept for at least twelve months.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Generally known as the McAleese report: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013>

<sup>40</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Jan 1940.

<sup>41</sup> *Irish Independent*, 20 September 1924.

<sup>42</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 February 1931.

<sup>43</sup> James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> *Irish Independent*, 6 November 1926.

<sup>45</sup> Rattigan, *What else could I do?* p. 213.

CHAPTER 22 BETHANY

Month /Year	County	Name	Charge	Guilty	Sentence
6/29	Monaghan	EM	Murder/concealment of a birth	Concealment of a birth	1 year Bethany
11/30	Sligo	ES	Murder	Concealment of a birth	1 year Bethany
10/37	Donegal	EA	Murder	Concealment of a birth	3 years Bethany
11/45	Sligo	JM	Murder	Murder	2 years Bethany

22.69 From his examination of the Criminal Court Trial Record Books, covering the period 1926-64, Smith has uncovered four further cases of women being sent to Bethany on charges of concealment of birth or murder of an infant.<sup>46</sup> One was a grandmother, who was sentenced to death for killing her daughter's baby in 1938. The sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life; she was released on licence to Bethany two years after the date scheduled for her execution; she spent less than two months in Bethany, moving to live with a son in Northern Ireland.<sup>47</sup> There is no evidence that Bethany received government funding for admitting these women. In 1947 Bethany asked Sligo county council to contribute to the cost of maintaining a woman, who was a native of the county and had been sent by the court, but they declined to do so. Bethany then contacted the Department of Justice. They replied that they had no funds available for this purpose. A request for funding to the Discharged Protestant Prisoners' Aid Society was also rejected. The Magdalen Laundries received no financial support for similar cases. Bethany continued to accept women committed by the courts or released from prison. In October 1962 a woman was admitted from Mountjoy Prison, as was a woman who had suffered a mental breakdown. In 1965 one woman was admitted on 'prison remand'. This was the last such case before the home closed.

<sup>46</sup> Table reproduced from James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 195. These records are held in the NAI.

<sup>47</sup> Ian O'Donnell, *Justice, mercy, and caprice, Clemency and the death penalty in Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 187.

22.70 Many of the women admitted to Bethany who were not pregnant or recent mothers were 'Midnight Mission cases'. They were brought to Bethany by Miss Walker or her friends who patrolled public houses and the streets at night. Others were sent by charity workers and Gardaí. While Bethany refused to admit an unmarried mother for a second time 'having had a chance to hear the Gospel previously', this restriction did not apply to Midnight Mission cases. Miss Pilgrim claimed that many made repeat visits 'and sometimes they stayed with us for months on end; and then the craving for drink and company would get so acute that they succumbed again'. In 1925 the management committee discussed the difficulties that arose in keeping the women as long-term residents in the Bethany Home. They decided to get in contact with a similar institution in either England or Belgium to which such cases could be referred, though there is no evidence that this happened. However, statistics suggest that some policy of reducing the number of these women was implemented, because 75 of the 113 women who were not maternity cases were admitted between 1922 and 1929.

#### **Health and mortality in the home**

22.71 Five mothers died while in the care of the Bethany Home; three in the 1920s and two in the 1930s. Three mothers died in Bethany itself and one each in the Rotunda and the Adelaide Hospital.

22.72 In November 1933 the Matron reported on the death of one woman, stating that the visiting doctor 'was fully satisfied that everything possible was done for the girl who died'. In September 1957 a mother died in the Adelaide Hospital following an operation. The Matron subsequently outlined the particulars of her death and funeral to the management committee along with her attempts to get financial aid, from either her father or through church contributions, to help cover the £17 cost of the funeral arrangements.

### **The Children**

#### **Infant mortality**

22.73 A very high rate of infant mortality was a common feature of all mother and baby homes until the late 1940s and Bethany was no exception. A total of 262 children who were born in Bethany, who were admitted to Bethany, or whose mother was in Bethany and left to give birth, and the child was not admitted to the home, died

between September 1922 and October 1964. In the case of 142 children, their mothers were in Bethany when they died.

Total Deaths by Decade

1920	65
1930	105
1940	81
1950	6
1960	5

- 22.74 The highest number of deaths was in the 1930s, when the numbers in the home were at their peak, but the highest mortality rate was in the early 1940s.
- 22.75 The death of any infant born in, or admitted into, Bethany was recorded in the Bethany Baby Book Register, which was kept and updated between the years 1922 and 1970. Two columns in the register, headed 'where gone' and 'later news', were used to record the death of a child, plus the date and place of death. Almost three-quarters of the total, 195 children, died in the Bethany home; 17.4% died in various hospitals, including 10 children who died in maternity hospitals; only three children are recorded as dying in a maternity hospital (the figures for deaths exclude stillbirths); seven children died in Emmanuel House. Nearly three-quarters, 73%, of the children who died were aged between one month and one year. This proportion was greatest in the 1920s, when 80% of deaths were in that category; it fell to 73% in the 1930s, 69% in the 1940s and 17% in the 1950 - by which time the overall death rate had fallen significantly.
- 22.76 There was a high incidence of infectious disease among children in Bethany until the 1950s. In February 1924 the secretary reported on a severe outbreak of influenza, resulting in the death of one of the 11 resident children. In December, the Matron reported that nine of the 27 children were suffering from bronchial pneumonia; she requested that they be transferred to hospital as soon as possible and that their mothers be notified - which would appear to suggest that these mothers had left Bethany. Following an outbreak of German measles in May 1925, the medical officer told a special meeting of the management committee that several babies were 'suffering from septic infections'; he 'strongly recommend that some building be set temporarily in the country and if possible near the sea so that the children and others can go there for a stay'. As it was not financially possible

to arrange this, the committee agreed that the mothers should be allowed 'take babies out in prams with some dependable person in charge.' It was decided at the next meeting to close the institution with a view to disinfecting the entire premises before reopening.

- 22.77 The Matron at this time subscribed to the not-uncommon belief that the children of unmarried mothers tended to be weak and prone to illness; in 1929 she attributed the deaths of six infants during the previous month as 'mainly to the inherent illness of the infants in question'. However, she also reported that the visiting doctor had highlighted the risk of infection in the home. In May 1929 an amendment was made to Bethany's standing orders requiring that 'any child admitted must be put and kept in the isolation room until medically examined, and must be dealt with thereafter in strict accordance with doctor's orders'. Following the death of a four-and-a-half month old baby in 1930, who had been admitted from the Waterford county home when six weeks old, the management committee decided that in future 'no child shall be received unless accompanied by a medical certificate of health. If this is not forthcoming no child admitted shall be allowed out of the isolation ward, or to remain there longer than seven days without such a certificate'. The following month the medical advisor reported that there was inadequate space for infants in the nursery; more space was required. It is unclear whether the home had an isolation unit; the Commission has not seen any independent evidence that there was one.
- 22.78 The Matron reported to the monthly meetings of the management committee on the numbers of women and children in the home; the number that were admitted, or left since the last meeting, and, in the case of children, she gave the numbers who were born or had died. The minutes also contain brief comments on the health of the 'inmates', which was generally described as 'good' or 'very good'. In the years when infant mortality was high it is doubtful that such observations were justified. In December 1935 the Matron reported that the 'health of the girls' was 'good'; the deaths of six infants in the past month was due to 'gastro-enteritis'. In April 1936 the visiting medical officer recommended that Bethany should purchase a sunlight lamp 'owing to the larger number of babies now passing through the Home who needed ultra-violet ray treatment' - presumably to prevent rickets. The medical officer contributed £5 towards the cost of £25.

- 22.79 In October 1936 the Matron reported that five infants had died in the previous month; four from heart failure. She went on to observe that the health 'of all was good, except for one delicate baby'. Despite the recurring high infant mortality, the minutes of the management committee do not record any discussion of the causes of infant deaths, or what might be done (other than isolation) to reduce the number of deaths.
- 22.80 Because of the absence of minutes from 1937 to 1944 there are no contemporaneous comments on illness and deaths during this critical period. In January 1946, the Matron reported on an outbreak of measles; another measles epidemic was reported in October 1947, when 14 infants contracted the disease. When the Department of Health inspected the home in March 1948 (the Commission has not seen a copy of the inspection report), they highlighted the need to provide 'a very comprehensive diet for the babies'. The committee claimed that it would be difficult to do this, because of the ever increasing cost of food. In September 1949, the Matron reported that 15 of the 33 children were suffering from whooping cough. By the date of the next monthly meeting all the children had been infected. Two children died. An outbreak of polio in September 1958 forced Bethany to cancel a planned 'Bring and Buy' sale. One mother was hospitalised. By the 1950s the number of infant deaths in Bethany and the other mother and baby homes had declined significantly due to immunisation programmes, the use of antibiotics and the reduction in infectious diseases in the community.
- 22.81 Overcrowding, which was particularly acute during the 1930s, inadequate facilities for the treatment of illnesses, the employment of under-qualified staff and the, frequently dire, financial pressures under which the Bethany Home operated were all contributory factors in the high incidence of infant mortality from the 1920s until the late 1940s. A further factor may have been the number of children who were in Bethany without their mother. It is also evident that heating and sanitary conditions were inadequate when the home was in Blackhall Place. They were much improved when Bethany moved to Rathgar, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest a lack of heating and facilities for drying clothes, and although the home was well-provided with bathrooms and washbasins, none of these was in the annexe where the mothers slept until the 1950s. There is no information available about the proportion of Bethany infants who were breastfed, but the fact that the mothers' dormitory appears to have been in the annexe, whereas the nursery was

in the main house would have made it difficult for mothers to breast-feed their babies.

### **Children's exit pathways**

- 22.82 The institutional records have information about exit pathways for 1,072 children; this excludes 195 children who died in Bethany and 109 children where there is no information. The records show substantial changes in the children's destinations over the decades. In the 1920s and the 1930s, for example, 31% of the children were recorded as nursed out; this fell to 24% in the 1940s and to less than 1% in the 1950s. In the 1930s, over 38% of children went to other institutions, compared to under 22% in the 1920s, 1940s and 1950s. This appears to suggest that families were more willing to take children in the early years: 42% of children who left in the 1920s were recorded as going with a parent or to family members, compared with 25% in the 1930s, 18% in the 1940s, 12% in the 1950s and 10% in the 1960s. The annual report for 1943 noted with satisfaction that, of the 84 children who passed through Bethany in the previous year, 'an exceptionally large number of children had been taken home by their mothers, grandmothers or other relatives'.<sup>48</sup> However it is possible that a mother or her family subsequently placed the child with a foster family or in an institution. However, it is possible that a mother or her family subsequently placed the child with a foster family or in an institution. A total of 216 Bethany children were placed for adoption (from 1953) and an additional 112 are recorded as 'informal adoptions'.
- 22.83 Children left Bethany at an earlier age than the majority of children who were in the Sacred Heart mother and baby homes; the average stay was under a year and it fell following the introduction of legal adoption. The length of stay was greatest in the 1940s when it proved difficult to secure foster homes, because of the rising cost of food and clothing - a difficulty that was common to all charities and local authorities that placed children in foster care.
- 22.84 A significant number of children (49%) remained in Bethany after their mother had left. The Bethany authorities made arrangements to place these children either in foster homes, or Protestant charitable institutions; from the 1950s children might remain in the home pending the completion of adoption arrangements. Some

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<sup>48</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 April 1943.

children of Catholic mothers were transferred to the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society - a charity whose mission was to prevent Catholic children being lost to Protestantism. Most Bethany children who were adopted were adopted within the State and the adoptions were arranged through the Protestant Adoption Society. Unaccompanied children were also admitted to Bethany. Children who had been placed at nurse by Bethany were occasionally returned to the home, if the foster parent was either unwilling or incapable of keeping them, or the child became ill.

- 22.85 If a mother did not take her child when she left the home she was expected to contribute to the child's maintenance in the home, or the cost of placing the child at nurse. Some mothers were able to provide this financial support through employment - usually as a domestic servant - which was arranged by Bethany. At the annual meeting in 1925, it was reported that £271 had been subscribed by the 'girls' or their relatives as 'thank-offerings'.<sup>49</sup> Yet a year later, it was noted that 'most of the girls who are received into the Home cannot pay anything towards [their children's] support ... the mothers contribute as much as they can afford and visit them regularly'. Despite this the secretary, Miss Walker, stated that out of the 85 maternity cases dealt with in the past year, there had only been one case of a mother leaving the home and 'disappearing'. The others 'do not shirk their responsibility and contribute faithfully what they can to the upkeep of their children'.
- 22.86 The issue of mothers, who were unable to provide a pre-payment to cover the cost of the first monthly fee to the nurse-mother who was taking care of their children, was discussed by the management committee in 1927. The committee agreed in principle to provide financial help 'in suitable cases'. In 1930, a concentrated effort appears to have been made to place as many children as possible with nurse mothers. By May, it was reported that 21 children were now so placed under the auspices of the home. In August, it was noted that all the children whose mothers had left were due to be nursed out over the coming days. As a result, the committee determined that they could dispense with an additional member of staff who had been hired in 1929. The 1933 annual report stated that 20 children from the home were at nurse; their mothers were contributing £137 18s towards the cost. Dr Barnardo's charity made a donation to Bethany - amounting to £93 that

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<sup>49</sup> *Irish Times*, 6 February 1925.

year, towards the cost of foster care.<sup>50</sup> In April 1939, it was reported that 29 children from Bethany had been nursed-out in the past year, with the mothers contributing over £229. The 1943 annual report highlighted with gratitude the grants from Barnardo's towards the cost of boarding-out children.

- 22.87 Mothers were also expected to contribute to the cost of their children if they were placed in a children's home. On occasion children were transferred from Bethany to homes run by Dr Barnardo's, as happened with three children in June 1928. Barnardo's also contributed to the cost of maintaining at least one Bethany child in a home run by the Irish Church Missions.

### **Children at Nurse**

- 22.88 Local health authorities did not commonly place children in foster homes until they were at least two years old. None of the children who left Bethany were placed in foster homes by the local authorities when they left, although a number may have been placed in later years. The institutional records show that 207 children were placed 'at nurse', and this was the destination of 31% of Bethany children in the 1920s and 1930s. The proportion fell in the 1940s, when the number of 'informal adoptions' increased, and the practice of placing children 'at nurse' effectively ended following the introduction of legal adoption. In December 1955 only one child was being boarded-out from the home; his mother paid the entire cost.
- 22.89 Bethany was directly involved in identifying foster homes and placing children, and Bethany was responsible for ensuring that mothers contributed towards the cost of foster care, and for paying the foster mothers. Miss Pilgrim's memoir of Miss Walker recalled the 'great day' when she acquired 'her little Baby Austin. It was much used to hunt up Nurse mothers and visit adopted babies in many parts of the country'. Bethany used a network of Protestant nurse-mothers, some of whom were based as far away as Co Monaghan. In May 1930, it was reported that 21 children had been placed in foster homes. However, the quality of care in some foster homes gave cause for concern. The secretary attended a court case that month to give evidence on the condition of a Bethany child who was in the care of a nurse mother. Following this case Miss Walker stated that she was not 'fully qualified' to visit and inspect children at nurse in future. Following a discussion, it

<sup>50</sup> A charity established by the Dublin-born Dr Thomas Barnardo in London in 1870 to care for destitute and homeless children. In addition to a network of children's homes they supported some children in foster homes.

was decided that the lady members of the management committee should arrange for a suitable person to visit all nurse children from Bethany on a regular basis. The first of these visits occurred a month later, and the lady members remarked on the absence of proper clothes on children who were under the care of two nurse mothers. In October 1930, it was reported that children who had been at nurse with one identified nurse mother were to be removed from her 'owing to unsatisfactory attention'. In 1933, Miss Walker noted that a number of 'Christian girls' had arranged to form a society to look after the interests of babies as they left Bethany Home; the Commission has no further details of this initiative. It is also unclear whether a ladies committee carried out regular inspections of foster homes; if they did, it is not reported in minutes of the management committee or the annual reports.

- 22.90 A report on boarded out children in Co Monaghan in December 1938 by the DLGPH inspector Miss Kennedy O'Byrne described details of a number of children placed at nurse by Bethany; she noted that one child was being returned to Bethany and would be 'adopted'. The inspector reported that a nine-month old boy, who had been placed at nurse from Bethany two weeks previously, 'appeared to me to be in a dying condition...It was dirty and neglected and sore and inflamed from a filthy napkin which cannot have been changed for a very long time'. The Gardaí had informed her that they had already 'received unfavourable reports' about this particular foster mother, who had fostered another infant from Bethany 'some time ago [who]...wasted away and died within a month of being sent to her'. Miss Kennedy O'Byrne contacted the dispensary doctor and asked him to see the neglected child and order his removal to the county home. This foster mother had failed to register the child as required under the Children Acts. The inspector recommended that the local authority should 'deal drastically with this woman and to prosecute'. She described the Bethany authorities as 'very culpable to send a child in the condition of health of [...] out to nurse. He should have been sent to a hospital'.
- 22.91 Her report prompted Dr Sterling Berry, a medical inspector in the DLGPH, to visit Bethany to investigate this case. Bethany informed him that the homes of all nurse mothers were either inspected by the Bethany authorities or a reference was sought from a reliable source. Nurse mothers were paid £1 10s a month and given an 'outfit consisting of six napkins (nappies) & three of all other clothes'. At this

time Bethany had 19 children boarded out. Dr Berry claimed that the Monaghan woman had acted as a nurse mother for Bethany for some years and was 'always regarded as satisfactory' until this case. (Miss Kennedy O'Byrne suggests otherwise). Having checked the records of six children who had been placed with this nurse mother, he claimed that four 'show very good results'. He described the child seen by Miss Kennedy O'Byrne as 'delicate from birth and was put out to nurse on the recommendation of the Bethany Medical Officer who thought that country air might improve the child's condition'. This child had been returned to Bethany. Dr Sterling Berry described him as 'a delicate child but shows no signs of neglect or ill-usage'. He indicated that this foster mother would not be used by Bethany in future. Dr Berry ended his report by stating that 'the Institution is kept very well is very clean and comfortable, no evidence of over-crowding. The mothers and infants are well looked after and appear happy and contented'. The Commission's records show that this child died in Bethany two months later. The file suggests that the Monaghan county solicitor was examining whether to prosecute the foster mother.

- 22.92 Allegations that Bethany children were neglected became embroiled in a campaign, by the CPRSI, against Bethany's proselytising activities. In July 1939 the assistant secretary of the CPRSI informed the clerk of Rathdown Board of Assistance that the CPRSI had removed seven Bethany infants to hospital since January; they were found to be sick or suffering from a range of medical conditions. In August, the *Irish Independent* carried a report of a meeting of the Rathdown Board of Assistance which discussed the case of one of these children, a four-month-old boy, who was suffering from whooping cough and purulent conjunctivitis of both eyes. He was admitted to Loughlinstown hospital. It is unclear where the CPRSI found this child; the file stated that 'the child was in such bad condition that no foster mother would take him'. The infant 'was rescued from the Bethany Home' and admitted to Loughlinstown hospital. One of the children, an eighteen-month old girl, was taken by the CPRSI at the request of her mother who was in London; she was placed with a foster mother. The Bethany Matron informed the CPRSI that this child was 'backward in walking' - she was getting cod liver oil and exercises. This child was subsequently removed from the foster mother and placed in a Sunshine Home; the matron claimed that she had received sun-ray treatment at Bethany until she was a year old. The Rathdown Board's chairman described these incidents as 'becoming an epidemic' and recommend that the

whole matter be reported to the department so as to 'have an inquiry into the matter'.<sup>51</sup>

- 22.93 Dr Berry again visited Bethany in October 1939, on foot of these reports. He stated that the children taken by the CPRSI 'were delicate from birth...they were under constant medical care and received appropriate treatment. I am satisfied from my investigations that the children were not neglected while in Bethany'. He then went on to give his medical opinion that 'it is well recognised that a large number of illegitimate children are delicate and marasmic from their birth, and if removed from constant medical supervision and nursing attention often quickly deteriorate'. He ended his report by again emphasising that the home was 'clean and comfortable and not over-crowded. The children were well cared for and appeared to be happy and well fed. Several of the children were suffering from a mild form of impetigo; they were isolated and receiving adequate treatment'.
- 22.94 The final paragraph of this handwritten report is headed 'Confidential: For Department use only'. Dr Berry outlined his belief that the complaints being made against Bethany 'are largely due to the fact that they take in Roman Catholic girls for their confinements and keep them and their children subsequently. This practice is most undesirable as the Home and its environment are definitely Protestant. This being so the effects must be detrimental to these girls deprived as they are of the ministrations of their Church'. Dr Berry placed pressure on Bethany's management committee to change its policy of admitting Catholic women and children into the institution. In an addendum to the above report, Berry stated that he again visited Bethany on 27 October to conduct an interview with the management committee on the matter and 'to get them to consent to put an end to this most objectionable feature of their work' and, as already noted, he was successful.
- 22.95 The CPRSI continued their policy of removing Catholic infants from Bethany. Their annual report from April 1940 stated that they had removed a total of 14 children from the institution in the previous year.<sup>52</sup> A meeting of the Rathdown Board of Assistance in March reported on another case of an infant being taken out of

<sup>51</sup> *Irish Independent*, 24 August 1939.

<sup>52</sup> *Irish Independent*, 4 April 1940.

Bethany and sent to a foster home, who was suffering from 'rickets and debility.' They forwarded this information to the DLGPH medical inspector with a request the matter be investigated 'as several children have been sent to nurse in the District, from time to time, from this Home, suffering from rickets'. In June 1940 the Rathdown Board of Assistance informed the department that four children from the Bethany Home had been sent to the Sunshine Home, suffering from rickets, (including the child taken by the CPRSI and mentioned above). The incidence of rickets rose sharply in Dublin during the war years,<sup>53</sup> but the rise was concentrated in years after 1940. There appear to have been more references to rickets in relation to Bethany children, which may indicate a problem either with their diet (perhaps the milk formula used), or a lack of sunshine.

- 22.96 The proportion of Bethany children placed at nurse fell during the 1940s; the rise in 'informal adoptions' appears to parallel this decline, and as noted earlier few children were placed in foster care following the introduction of legal adoption.

### **Children's Homes**

- 22.97 A total of 303 Bethany children (the largest single cohort) were sent to various children's homes and orphanages. Five institutions, Emmanuel Home, the Children's Fold, which was originally located in the Coombe; the Cottage Home for Little Children in Dun Laoghaire, the Westbank Orphanage Greystones (previously the Protestant Home for Orphan and Destitute Girls/Harold's Cross Orphanage) and Miss Carr's Home<sup>54</sup> in Ranelagh accounted for 190 children, just under two-thirds of the total. Bethany's 1943 annual report specifically acknowledged 'with gratitude' the help of Miss Carr's Home, and the Children's Fold Home in taking children from Bethany over the past year. At least five children were recorded as being transferred to institutions outside the State, two were sent to the Ever Open Door (Barnardo Home) in Co Down, two went to the Manor House in Lisburn and one child was sent to a children's home in Newcastle, England. Other Bethany children may have subsequently been transferred to institutions in Britain or Northern Ireland from children's homes within the State.

<sup>53</sup> For details of this, see Chapter 5.

<sup>54</sup> Miss Carr's Children's Home; Miss Carr's Flatlets was a different institution - see Chapter 25

22.98 Emmanuel Home admitted the largest number of Bethany Children, 68 in total. When the Bethany Home moved to Orwell Road in October 1934, the decision appears to have been taken to open an orphanage/children's home, in an adjacent premises on the site. This became the Emmanuel Home. When a £1,000 anonymous donation was received with instructions that it should be used to offset the running costs of Bethany and the Emmanuel Home, the management committee agreed to apportion £250 to Bethany and the remaining £750 towards the Emmanuel Home. It noted that Bethany 'would be dependent upon Emmanuel Home for the acceptance of babies whose mothers had left Bethany' and thus the Emmanuel Home 'would have heavy financial responsibilities'.

22.99 On 12 January 1935, the Emmanuel Home was brought into use; a formal opening ceremony took place at the end of that month. For ease of access, the Bethany committee decided to grant a right of way alongside the boundary wall of their property to Emmanuel Home. At the first management committee meeting following its opening, it was reported that 21 babies had been transferred from Bethany to the Emmanuel Home. Between June and August 1935, 5 further infants were transferred to Emmanuel. In 1938 it was reported that 20 of the 87 children who passed through Bethany in the past year had been transferred to the Emmanuel Home; 29 other children had been taken by 'the boarding-out auxiliary'.

In 1938 a decision was taken to move the Emmanuel Home to Portland Park House, Lorrha, Birr, Co. Offaly. It was reported that 37 children were taken back to Bethany when this happened.<sup>55</sup> The move to Offaly was facilitated by Major Butler Stoney who had offered the use of the house as a home for Protestant children. However, at the Bethany AGM in May 1938 a member of management committee, who had been staying in Portland Park House described how a group of armed raiders broke through the front door. He and his wife were instructed to take their personal belongings and leave the house, as the raiders were about to set it on fire. The house was gutted by fire.<sup>56</sup> Emmanuel House subsequently moved to Avoca, Co Wicklow. In 1939 the annual Bethany Home meeting reported that 13 children had since been transferred from Bethany to this premises.<sup>57</sup> Emmanuel's move to Avoca was possibly facilitated by a member of the Bethany management committee, who owned the Avoca Manor. In 1940 the Wicklow Board of Health noted that

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<sup>55</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 April 1939.

<sup>56</sup> *Irish Times*, 19 May 1938.

<sup>57</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 April 1939.

there appeared to be 25 children in Emmanuel Home; all were maintained by private subscriptions. Emmanuel Home claimed exemption under the Children's Acts, because it was not run for private gain. When the local authority rejected this claim, Emmanuel Home took a successful court case. The judge accepted that the home was not operating for the purpose of private gain; he noted that all the children were illegitimate.<sup>58</sup>

22.100 At least 45 children were sent to homes that were run by the Irish Church Missions (ICM) - the Children's Fold/Boley Nursery Home. The Children's Fold, originally known as The Irish Door of Hope, opened in the Coombe in 1918. In 1922 it was described as 'a new branch of the ICM work, in which a patient and loving effort is made to care for the homeless babies and to reclaim the erring girls who have taken a false step for whom the Church of Rome does little or nothing'. At this time it accommodated over fifty small children, 37 had been 'rescued' from Roman Catholicism.<sup>59</sup> The Children's Fold moved to Marfield House, Co Wexford following the outbreak of World War II - allegedly following government orders to evacuate to the country. In 1943 the Gardaí in Gorey investigated a complaint of ill-treatment made against the matron by two girls who had recently left the Fold. She was convicted; her appeal was unsuccessful, but as a first offender she was given the Probation Act. A member of the ICM's general committee in London visited Ireland as a result of this case. He reported that the home was too far from Dublin to make it possible to exercise 'proper supervision'; 'no official form [was] used' when children were being admitted and 'the law relating to adoptions needed careful decision'. The children were moved back to the Coombe. In 1945 the Fold proposed to relocate to Killiney Castle, however it was reported in the press that 'Catholic members of the [Dun Laoghaire] Corporation would resent in the strongest possible manner the handing over of the premises to such a body'. Rev Coates of the ICM acknowledged 'that it was obvious the real ground for refusing us the premises was that we were proselytisers'. The home then moved to Boley in Monkstown, where it remained for several decades, later moving to Shankill.

22.101 The ICM records show that some mothers contributed towards their child's maintenance; others appear not to have done so. Mothers whose child was accepted into the Children's Fold signed a declaration requesting the Children's

<sup>58</sup> Wicklow Board of Health Minutes 1 January 1940; 1 February 1940; 24 June 1940; 6 July 1940

<sup>59</sup> The Banner of Truth and Irish Missionary News, published by ICM, No 117 July 1922 and no 122 October 1923

Fold to 'consent to her/him being brought up in the principles of the Church of Ireland'. Some children went directly from Bethany to the Children's Fold - Miss Walker generally features as an intermediary and in a number of cases this was arranged before the birth of the child. A number of the declarations placing a child with the Children's Fold were signed by Miss Walker, who described herself as the 'lawful guardian of the child'.<sup>60</sup> A number of Bethany children were admitted to the Fold, having previously been with a nurse mother. The medical report on one five-year old child, who had previously been with a nurse mother, noted that he had 'sores on head, back of neck and feet Impetigo?' He was placed in isolation, and given a medical examination two days later; this recorded that he had 'signs of rickets, apparently healthy now'.

### Adoptions

22.102 There were small numbers of informal 'adoptions' in the 1920s and 1930s directly from Bethany, they accounted for 4.5% of the children. This rose significantly in the 1940s when 'informal adoption' was the destination given for 29.5% of the children, and for 12% of children in the 1950s. In October 1925, a letter was received from a man offering to adopt one of the girls in the home. The management committee asked him to supply a character reference from a clergyman. This was duly provided, and the 'adoption' was arranged. In 1933, the Bethany annual report stated that though the home had not been able to arrange as many adoptions in the previous twelve months as they had in 1931, they still recorded their success in placing 'some children in good names'.<sup>61</sup> In 1940 Miss Litster, of the DLGPH, alerted the secretary of the department to cases where children were 'taken out of this country in a haphazard manner without due regard for their safety and moral and physical welfare'. She had been contacted by the NSPCC. They reported that Miss Walker 'constantly advertises in English Protestant religious papers, such as the Christian Herald and Church Times, for people to adopt children from Bethany Home'. A woman in St Alban's had replied, forwarding a recommendation from a clergyman 'which alone was required by Bethany Home'. An eight-month-old baby 'was sent to her without further enquiry'. The police in St Alban's alerted the local branch of the NSPCC to conditions in that home, and Miss Walker had to remove the baby, who was being adopted through an adoption society into 'a suitable home'. Miss Litster claimed that in her letter to

<sup>60</sup> This child was the son of a Catholic mother; he was born in an unnamed 'Private Mother & Baby Home', was placed at nurse before somehow coming to Miss Walker and Bethany.

<sup>61</sup> *Irish Times*, 16 February 1933.

the woman who originally took this child, Miss Walker said 'If you know of anyone else wanting to adopt a child, we would be so glad to get in touch with them. We have a good many needing homes'. Miss Litster also mentioned three other women who were also sending children in England (and one in America); these women had no connection with Bethany.

22.103 A number of Bethany children who were placed in the Children's Fold were later adopted in Britain or in Northern Ireland, where legal adoption was possible from 1926. The 'adopting' parent(s) signed an undertaking to 'accept responsibility for the control of [...] under the direction of the Children's Fold to provide for his Board and lodging and general maintenance and see that he is brought up in the Protestant faith and attends a protestant school and sent regularly to church on Sundays. In the event of it being proved that I have not observed this undertaking I agree to return him to the Fold'. In 1937 A Church of Ireland clergyman in Co Armagh contacted the ICM concerning a childless widow in his parish, who had already adopted two boys; she was keen to adopt another boy. Miss Walker signed the papers permitting this adoption as the 'legal guardian' of a seven-year old boy who was in the Children's Fold. There is some evidence that the ICM retained an interest in these children long after their adoption. One girl, born in Bethany, who was the daughter of a Catholic mother, went first to Emmanuel Home and then to the Children's Fold. She was adopted by a couple in Northern Ireland at the age of seven. When she was seventeen years old a local clergyman wrote to the ICM informing them that 'it is terrible the tramp she is turning out to be'. This file contains an anonymous letter from a 'friend' reporting that she was 'running around with navy men and other bad men and girls that had children before' and she had 'never, done any work yet for her mother'.

22.104 Informal 'adoptions' from Bethany became much more common in the 1940s. The 1941 Bethany annual meeting reported that the past year 'had been a record one from the adoption standpoint', with 12 children being 'adopted' from the Home.<sup>62</sup> Two years later, the annual report stressed that 'the placing of children in good homes was the greatest problem with which the Bethany Home had to cope'. Nine children had been 'adopted' 'into good homes'; Bethany made an appeal for

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<sup>62</sup> *Irish Times*, 13 March 1941.

'further adoptions and continued support.'<sup>63</sup> Eight 'adoptions' were recorded in the twelve months prior to March 1944.<sup>64</sup> In May 1946, when there were 39 infants in the home, the management committee decided to send circulars to Dublin clergy in Dublin asking them 'to be on the lookout for homes into which the children might be adopted'. This initiative met with little success and by the following January the Committee was told that the home was having a lot of difficulty finding adopters for male infants in particular. Miss Walker declared that 'nobody seems to want the little boys'.<sup>65</sup> From the late 1940s, the Bethany management committee became involved in campaigns to legalise adoption in Ireland. They also assisted the adoption of Bethany children in the USA. Meanwhile Bethany continued to facilitate informal 'adoptions'. In September 1950, the Matron informed the management committee that she expected six more children to be adopted in the next month. In the 1950s, 54.4% of Bethany children were placed for adoption, as were 56.6% of children in the 1960s. When legal adoption was introduced, representatives of Bethany attended meetings of the Protestant Adoption Society; however they indicated that the management committee was in favour of Bethany being registered as a separate adoption society. This did not happen; the Bethany Matron was elected as a member of the Protestant Adoption Society's case committee and, while initially many of the babies were adopted from Bethany, in time a majority of Bethany babies who were legally adopted were placed by the Protestant Adoption Society.

- 22.105 The institutional records indicate that 50 children were adopted outside the State from the Bethany Home; the largest number, 29, went to Britain or Northern Ireland; 12 to the United States, four to Saudi Arabia; two to Italy, two to Canada and one to Norway (see Chapter 32). Other Bethany children may have been adopted overseas from children's homes.
- 22.106 As adoptions became more common, Bethany's main concern was to find suitable long-term care for children with intellectual or serious physical disabilities. In 1948 a child who was described as 'mentally deficient' was sent to Bethany from Miss Carr's Home. The Bethany committee noted that the only institution which cared

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<sup>63</sup> *Irish Times*, 15 April 1943.

<sup>64</sup> *Irish Times*, 30 March 1944.

<sup>65</sup> *Irish Times*, 20 May 1948.

for such children was Cabra<sup>66</sup> which was run by the Dublin Union under Roman Catholic management. It was decided to make enquiries 'as to the possibility of making available provision for imbecilic children'. The Bethany authorities returned to this matter in early 1949. The child was by that stage boarded out to a foster mother. It was decided to consult the Rector of the Church of Ireland parish in which the Cabra institution was situated to arrange for her to be given the proper 'instruction in Christian doctrine' if she had to be transferred to Cabra. However, the Department of Health inspector of boarded out children reported 'an improvement' in the child, and indicated that the foster mother would be willing to care for her if she was given an increased maintenance grant. The Bethany authorities contacted Dr Barnardo's who agreed to pay an additional sum to maintain this girl. In 1953 one of the children in Bethany was a 10-month-old baby who was described as 'apparently a hopeless Mongol'. Bethany had advertised for a foster mother but there had been no response. The child's mother, who was in service earning £5-6 a week, was said to be contributing 'liberally towards its keep'. The committee determined that it would not be appropriate to send this child to the Catholic institution in Cabra, and it was reported that the mother did not approve of such an action. A 'satisfactory nurse mother' was eventually found. In 1956, the Matron was invited to join a committee being set up to establish a suitable home for Protestant children with mental deficiencies. She was said to be especially interested in this matter given that a couple of children with such issues were currently resident in Bethany. One a boy was being cared for by his mother in the home, however his condition was deteriorating. The management committee agreed to contact the clergyman who had sent the mother to Bethany, asking that the child be admitted instead to the Donegal County Home. In 1958 the committee discussed the case of another 'mental defective', a four-year-old boy. It was decided to transfer him to Stewarts Institution, and his local authority agreed to meet the cost of maintaining him.

### **Witness statements**

22.107 The Commission heard witness statements from six women and men who were in Bethany when they were infants. All the witnesses left Bethany before their second birthday and the majority when they were less than a year old, though one man was readmitted from a foster home at the age of two years and three months. The institutional records do not give the date of his discharge on this occasion; he is not

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<sup>66</sup> St Vincent's, Cabra – see Chapter 13

the only Bethany infant with no discharge date. Two witnesses, both born in the early 1940s, stated that they had rickets, and there is independent evidence presented earlier in this chapter, that other Bethany infants suffered from rickets at around this time. It is not possible to determine whether these two witnesses suffered from rickets as a consequence of conditions in Bethany or conditions in the foster home that they both shared. Most of the evidence given by former Bethany babies related to their experiences in foster homes, in children's homes, or their adoption in Northern Ireland, which is beyond the Commission's remit. The largest concentration of such evidence related to Mayil/Westbank, an orphanage in Greystones, which was a successor to the Protestant Home for Orphan and Destitute Girls; this home admitted boys following the move to Greystones in the late 1940s. There is no evidence of a direct link between Mayil/Westbank and Bethany though witnesses believed that there was a link; a total of 33 Bethany children were admitted to this institution - both in Harold's Cross and Greystones. Witnesses gave evidence of children being moved from Westbank to Northern Ireland, for short periods or for adoption. One witness who gave evidence about this children's home was born in Braemar, which is not among the scheduled institutions. Another witness, who was in Bethany with her mother in the early 1950s, immediately after her birth, gave evidence that she had two adoption documents; one drawn up by a firm of solicitors, the other from the Adoption Board. She claimed that there are serious questions about the legality of both. The Commission has determined that she was adopted informally at a time when legal adoption had not yet been introduced, and this adoption was later approved by the Adoption Board. Many of the early approvals by the Adoption Board related to similar cases. Several witnesses also complained about a lack of documentation, relating to their birth, date of discharge from Bethany - which is missing in some cases and adoption.

- 22.108 The Commission also heard evidence from a nephew of Miss Pilgrim, who was the Matron at Bethany from 1932-44 and was a member of the Bethany committee until 1955. This witness recalled visits to Bethany from the early 1940s. He said that the babies were reasonably well dressed; he never witnesses any unusual or unkind behaviour. He recalls playing with some of the children; the mothers 'were less present in his memories'.