

Barnardo's Christian Heritage

Thomas Barnardo, inspired by his Christian faith, launched a programme of pioneering childcare work in the 1860s. Since then and throughout its history, Barnardo's has derived its inspiration and values from the Christian faith. Today we work in a multi-cultural society, but we are proud of the Christian values and beliefs upon which we were founded. These values, enriched and shared by many people of other faiths and of no religious faith, provide the basis of our work with children and young people, their families and communities. These are Barnardo's **basis and values**.

Since its foundation, the organisation has evolved to meet new demands and in response to social, political, economic and legal changes. Throughout, however, its work has been underpinned by its original inspiration. This paper describes some of the key elements to that heritage.

Below are some words of Thomas Barnardo which very clearly set out the religious basis upon which he started his work and ran his homes, and then a description of how that Christian basis has been honoured over time as society has changed.

Thomas Barnardo's words

"Before proceeding to detail, it may be well to set in the forefront the Religious Principles upon which the Homes are conducted.

'The Homes have from the beginning been conducted on definitely religious lines. They are Christian institutions, carried on in the spirit of the Gospel. They are, of course Protestant, but no creed or party can claim their work exclusively for its own. Every candidate, or his or her responsible guardian, is plainly informed, at the time of application, that these are Protestant Homes, and that no other religious instruction is afforded than such as is in accordance with the teaching of the Word of God. As of yore, I could not allow any question of sect or creed to close my doors in the face of a really destitute and homeless child, and admission is in no single instance with a view to proselytism.

'The Homes are conducted on the broadest Christian basis consistent with loyalty to the truths of the Gospel. They are inter-denominational Homes in the following very important senses:

- 1. They receive children of all creeds or of none, without any regard to denomination.*
- 2. They are supported by sympathizers in all sections of the Church of Christ, irrespective of sect.*
- 3. They are carried on and practically managed by workers who, like the subscribers, belong to almost every section of that Church Universal, which is made up of all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*
- 4. An earnest endeavour is, therefore, made to bring up each child in the Church to which its parents nominally belonged. I am bound to add that the chief aim of all associated with me (irrespective of Churches or denominations) is to bring these children up, experimentally, in the fear of the Lord, and to draw them in faith and love to the feet of our Saviour Christ."*

Basis and Values

In the 1990s, considerable work was done to find a way in which Barnardo's could honour its Christian foundation while embracing the ever changing circumstances of the society in which it operated. The result was the introduction of the 'Basis and Values', moving Barnardo's on into a world of equal opportunities for all, whilst clearly acknowledging its Christian foundations.

When introduced, a commentary on the Basis read as follows:

“Derive: This makes a statement about our history and also about the major and continuing source of our strength and direction. The word means “back to the source from whence it flows”. It looks both back and forward and the connection between source and values is immediate.

Enriched: Barnardo's values derive from the Christian faith and our understanding of these values is deepened and enriched by working with people of different faiths and philosophies (since changed to ‘and of no religious faith’).

Our work: This refers not only to the direct work with children, young people and families, but recognises every aspect of Barnardo's activities, including the essential enabling tasks of finance, fundraising, administration and all support services.”

A further commentary followed relating the values to the Christian basis of Barnardo's. It specifically noted that *“The concept of deriving from the Christian faith is very important. We understand the word ‘derive’ to refer both to the historical origins of Barnardo's work and to its continuing, current and future source of inspiration.”*

Changing lives, changing times

As Barnardo's has evolved to meet new demands and in response to social, political, economic and legal changes, so its governing document, the [Articles of Association](#), have been reviewed and amended over the years to reflect such demands and changes. The most recent review of the constitution was undertaken in 2010/11 to take account of changes in charity and company law and to reflect the current Barnardo's.

Thomas Barnardo's original words, quoted above, no longer sit in the Articles, but the core of his message – the refusal to *“close my doors in the face of a really destitute and homeless child”* – is reflected in every aspect of Barnardo's work today. The Basis and Values remain firmly embedded in the Articles as a clear recognition of Barnardo's heritage and the faith from which it derives its inspiration and values. The Basis and Values are affirmed by all new trustees and Members of Association, they form a part of the employment process, and trustee and senior staff meetings open with a reflection on them.