



Our Mother of Mercy in Rayne, Louisiana was a Mission of St. Theresa Catholic Church, Crowley, Louisiana. It became a separate parish in September 1924. It was originally known as St. Louis' Catholic Church.

Our Mother of Mercy Parish, located in Rayne, Louisiana, in the civil parish of Acadia, owes its origin to an anonymous northern benefactor, whose substantial donation made possible the building of the church in 1924. This mission was conducted by the Josephite Fathers. Prior to the arrival of the first pastor, Father Alexis St. Onge, the black people attended St. Joseph's diocesan church where, in 1922, Father Lerschen opened St. Joseph's Hall, an Elementary School, for their exclusive use. In 1924 this building was torn down and the lumber was used to erect a school at Our Mother of Mercy Mission.

The opening enrollment of 40 children were taught English, arithmetic, spelling, reading and religion. The first teachers were lay teachers who had received teacher training under the direction of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters at Xavier University in New Orleans. The salary of the teachers, who themselves were from rural areas of Southwest Louisiana, was paid by Mother Katharine Drexel, foundress of the religious community.

Providing for the spiritual and educational well-being of the members of the little congregation presented a unique challenge to the Josephite Fathers and the teachers in the school. The work of reclamation was a major part of the task confronting them at this time. The people of Rayne were traditionally Catholic. They were very poor and made their precarious livelihood in the rice fields and in the business of catching frogs. Rayne holds the distinction of being the Frog Capital of the World.

Little or no education among the parishioners presented a challenge to succeeding pastors as they worked to penetrate a seemingly insurmountable wall of indifference to things spiritual and educational that had become a part of their lives as a result of years of economic insecurity.

Once more the anonymous northern benefactor provided funds for the erection of an out-mission, dedicated again to Our Mother of Mercy, at Church Point, fifteen miles distant. Our Mother of Mercy Church was a mission to Rayne from 1927-1941. It became a separate parish in 1941. Our Mother of Mercy School was in existence sometime before a separate church existed for blacks. The school was staffed by two of Mother Katharine's lay teachers.

The school enrollment increased as the pastor and teachers visited the one and two-room garage-like shacks of the parishioners.

In 1933, Miss Theresa LeBlanc, who had taught in the rural schools of Southwest Louisiana since 1923, came to teach in Our Mother of Mercy Parish in Rayne. Through her efforts the Children of Mary Sodality, the Altar Boys Society, and the Choir were organized. The good influence of the school upon the older boys aroused the interest of a local merchant who then provided shoes, sweaters, and clothing for needy children.

When 1948 came around, the school was directly under the guidance of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. The Josephite records in 1928 show 120 pupils enrolled with two lay teachers; in 1938 there were 256 pupils and four lay teachers; in 1948 the enrollment showed 190 students and three Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and no lay teachers; in 1956 there were 176 pupils and four sisters with no lay teachers.

The 1960 Annual School Report of the Diocese of Lafayette showed an enrollment of 180 pupils under the direction of four teachers.

The statistics of a survey done approximately two years ago indicate cumulative totals of 838 baptisms, of which 749 were infants and 50 adults. The 266 marriages included 71 mixed and 195 Catholic. There were 472 deaths that included 334 adults and 146 infants. Our Mother of Mercy has a record of 930 confirmations.

