

# Parish History

## *History of St. Theresa's Church, Crowley, Louisiana A Faith Journey*

In 1920, a new parish for Black Catholics was started in Crowley, Louisiana. Father Thomas was assigned as the first pastor to 500 worshipping attendants. The patron saint chosen for the new parish was St. Theresa of Avila.

Hard work and many sacrifices on the part of all were necessary to achieve the construction of the parish buildings. Those were very hard times, with men earning only ten cents an hour or a dollar a day for their work at the mill. In order to raise money; bazaar, home cooked dinners, dances and plays were held (usually with a capacity crowd in attendance). By June 1922, it was possible to begin the construction of the church, and due to much volunteer help, it was completed and dedicated on October 22nd in that same year.

The following January, 1923, the first three Holy Ghost Sisters arrived. By the next September, there were over 200 children enrolled in the school. Later, in the early 1930's, St. Theresa's even had a high school for three years.

An important part of the parish development was the founding of several societies as the year went by. There was a Junior Sodality, a Choir, the Ladies Sodality and the St. Joseph Society which was organized for the purpose of mutual help in time of need, and which still exists today. In 1925 the Knights of Columbus and Ladies of Peter Claver were organized, and it too, continues its excellent work until the present time.

Meanwhile, life was still difficult in the Crowley area. The Flood of 1927 brought in many new parishioners, especially from Breaux Bridge and St. Martinville; however, sharecropping and plantation work brought in very little money, especially during the depression years. Then, in the terrible Flood of 1940, thousands had to be evacuated from Crowley as the rains kept falling and the waters kept rising. When the evacuees were able to return, they were faced with an enormous clean-up job before life could slowly return to normal.

During the years of World War II, there was more prosperity and, in 1945, the parish of St. Theresa celebrated its Silver Jubilee, an event that brought joy and thanksgiving to all. It was a sad occasion in 1991 when St. Theresa's School was closed due to the consolidation of all schools in the Diocese of Lafayette. Fortunately, for the many Black children who could not afford the tuition at another school, the Sisters developed an extensive Religious Education Program for them. This program has become one of the finest in the Diocese, with over 500 children

enrolled each year in grades 1 through 12. The annual census done by the Sisters also did much to bring children into the program. The census also affords the Sisters the opportunity to visit parishioners, particularly the sick, and to remain in touch with the people who love them dearly for their untiring dedication.

Through the years since its beginning as a small branch of a muster seed, St. Theresa's Parish has been blessed with many good, holy pastors. From the first Pastor, Father Thomas Duffy, down to the present, Father Kenneth Howard, the Josephite Fathers have given their lives and service willingly and their dedication is appreciated deeply by every parishioner.

St. Theresa's now has several excellent choirs, over 50 trained lay readers, Eucharistic Ministers, an active youth group and other organizations. The Parish Council actively participates in parish projects and planning, working through various important committees and other groups.

As rich in culture and as beautiful as the church is, we must remember it is You, the parishioners, who are the true church of Theresa's. From a tiny branch of the mustard seed, you have grown to be more than 2,500 parishioners, now a strong tree where "The Birds of the Sky Can Build Their Nests."

You have good reason too be proud of your ancestors, who founded this faith community. You have good reason to be proud of the families who supported St. Theresa's through difficult times, the sacrifices they went through, their hard work, and their unending trust in God.