

A Very Brief History of the Shrine of the True Cross

“I was taken with your purpose, mentioned some time ago to create a place of special reverence for the Cross, the instrument of our redemption.

“Then when you showed me how you could transform the little church at Dickinson into a beautiful and worthy place to promote the devotion brought by St. Helen to Rome, and still continued there I was delighted. In this year when we are celebrating the Centennial of Texas’ freedom and hope, you may be able to inaugurate your plan of honoring the True Cross, symbol of that freedom wherewith God has made us free.”

Letter by Bishop Christopher Byrne to Father Thomas Carney, pastor of St. Joseph’s Church in Dickinson, March 7, 1936

“The Cross is the symbol of our faith and around it are centered all the most consoling truths of our religion...

“If we could, through the various agencies of publicity, popularize a shrine to the Wood of the ‘True Cross’ on which Christ died as the only shrine in the entire south and make it, in the minds of the people of the south, what St. Anne’s Shrine and other shrines are to the people of the north, I believe that we could catch the imaginations of our Texas people especially, and capture the hearts of many of them and stimulate such piety as might bring untold fruit in the revival of religious mindedness among Catholics and non-Catholics alike.”

Letter by Father Thomas Carney, March 28, 1936

“The saying ‘In Hoc Signo Vinces’, is true now as it was in former times. It therefore seems most opportune that His Excellency Bishop Byrne has decided to raise the Standard of the Cross aloft in the center of the diocese by erecting a Shrine of the Most Holy Cross there.

“It is noteworthy that the formal opening of the Shrine will take place in the great Centennial year of Texas and on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, 1936.”

Letter by His Eminence Pietro Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, and the Cardinal-Priest of the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme at Rome, to Father Thomas Carney, August 12, 1936

- Bishop Byrne dedicated the Shrine of the True Cross on September 13, 1936.
- Bishop Byrne designated the Shrine of the True Cross as the diocesan chapel of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre in 1937. The Order was brought to Texas that year by Bishop Byrne and Father Carney. The Knights of the Holy Sepulchre were made honorary guardians of the Precious Relic of the True Cross enshrined in the church.
- With the permission of Bishop Byrne, the Servite Fathers from Chicago installed the Novena to Our Sorrowful Mother and canonically erected the Seven Stations of the Way of the Sorrowful Mother. The Novena was conducted every Friday at the Shrine from 1938 until the mid-1960s.
- After 73 years, the Novena is returning to the Shrine. It will be said from Sept 8-16, 2011, closing with Mass celebrated by Archbishop Fiorenza.

"It has long been my desire to have this devotion take root at the Shrine of the True Cross. Since its erection as a shrine, it has emphasized in every way possible devotion of the Cross as the symbol of mankind's redemption. But wherever true piety exists, one finds devotion to Christ's Mother going hand in hand with the devotion to Christ Himself, just as she was by His side during His earthly labors. And what devotion could be more fitting for a Shrine of the True Cross than that in honor of the Mother who stood beneath it and watched Him die?"

Letter by Father Thomas A. Carney, October 1938

Vision Statement of the Shrine of the True Cross, written by Fr Thomas Carney in 1936 and reaffirmed by Fr Paul Felix in 2010:

The purpose of the Shrine of the Wood of the True Cross and its activities is to bring people close to the Cross of Christ that they may find comfort for their souls in these troublous times and protection against the powerful forces, political and other, that are tearing down the ideals of Christian living and substituting communistic, anti-social, and Godless ideals in their place.

To further the range of our influence (which we do not intend to be political) we are conducting devotions to the Cross. We are persuaded that in this modern day when the forces of evil are using social and technological inventions to such great advantage to further their ends it is not only fitting but even a matter of obligation for us to use the same means to bring the blessings of the Cross of Christ and its teachings into the homes and hearts of thousands who must first hear the truth and the dangers of evil propaganda before they can believe the one and guard against the other.