

Historical Timeline of Our Parish (St. Joseph's / Shrine of the True Cross)

September 1892 Catholic services are conducted in Dickinson by Rev. Father John S. Murphy, a missionary from [St. Mary's Cathedral](#) in Galveston, Texas.

1899 Dickinson appears for the first time in the [Official Catholic Directory](#) as a mission of Immaculate Conception Church in Hitchcock, Texas. Rev. Father Odilo Schorer is the missionary.

1905 Plans are initiated for the construction of a church building to serve the rapidly growing Italian-American Catholic community in Dickinson. Nicholas J. Clayton, the noted Victorian architect in Galveston, is commissioned to design a wood-frame church edifice for the Dickinson mission. Clayton is best known for his design of the Bishop's Palace in Galveston.

July 21, 1908 2.5 acres of land at what is now the corner of Highway 3 and FM 517 in the town of Dickinson are donated by Joseph Lobit, a prominent Galveston banker, to the Right Reverend Nicholas A. Gallagher, Bishop of the [Diocese of Galveston](#). A small, wood-frame Catholic church is built on this parcel of land.

July/August 1908 The Catholic mission in Dickinson is named St. Joseph's in the Baptismal Register.

March 19, 1909 The Feast of [St. Joseph](#) is celebrated by the Italian-American Catholic community in Dickinson at the new but unfinished St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Rev. Father Jerome A. Rapp, missionary to Dickinson since 1907, administers First Holy Communion to a large class of children.

April 1911 A gift of \$500 is received from the [Catholic Church Extension Society](#) to assist in the completion of the new church building.

October 1911 Four [Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate](#) from San Antonio are assigned to the Diocese of Galveston to serve the missionary needs of the Diocese in and around Houston, including the Galveston County Mainland missions. Rev. Father John Massaro, O.M.I., is placed in charge of St. Joseph's Church in Dickinson.

June 6, 1912 Bishop Gallagher, assisted by five priests, celebrates the Feast of [Corpus Christi](#) at St. Joseph's and administers First Holy Communion and Confirmation to a class of 117 children.

August 16-17, 1915 St. Joseph's Church is destroyed by a powerful tropical cyclone known as the 1915 Galveston Hurricane. The church is rebuilt from material salvaged from the ruins, based on plans by William P. Stoddard, a contractor from nearby League City.

December 3, 1916 Bishop Gallagher returns to St. Joseph's to dedicate the rebuilt church at 10 a.m. Mass and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to 94 children.

1919 Rev. Father Anthony DeSimone assumes the missionary duties to the Mainland Catholic missions from the Oblate Fathers. Father DeSimone moves to Dickinson, becoming the first resident priest at St. Joseph's Church. He remains in Dickinson until 1921.

July 17, 1926 The first Mainland Catholic picnic is held at the Dickinson picnic grounds under the pastorage of Rev. Father Henry Rops, the newly appointed missionary to the Mainland Catholic parish. The picnic would become an annual tradition for decades, except for an interruption during World War II, and a mainstay during the Great Depression.

October 1929 The construction of two brown brick buildings, one a convent and the other a rectory, is completed on the grounds of St. Joseph's Church at a cost of \$20,000. Four [Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement](#) move into the convent and begin their mission of social work, teaching, and charity to the Mainland Catholic community. Soon after, Father Rops takes up residence in the rectory. St. Joseph's becomes the central church of the Mainland Catholic parish, which includes the mission churches of [Our Lady of Lourdes in Hitchcock](#), [St. Mary's in League City](#), St. Elizabeth's in Alta Loma, [St. Mary's in Texas City](#), and later [Queen of Peace in La Marque](#).

November 26, 1934 Father Rops passes away suddenly at the rectory in Dickinson at the age of 42. He is succeeded as pastor of the Mainland parish by Rev. Father Thomas Carney, rector of St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston and former president of the University of Dallas.

March 7, 1936 The Most Reverend Christopher E. Byrne, Bishop of the Diocese of Galveston, gives approval to Father Carney to rename St. Joseph's Church at Dickinson as the Shrine of the True Cross. Bishop Byrne also authorizes Father Carney to establish the Society of the Holy Cross at the new shrine, with the intention that the Society become affiliated with the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy Cross of the [Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem \(Basilica di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme\)](#), an ancient church in Rome in which Relics of the Passion of Our Lord are enshrined. Bishop Byrne enlists the assistance of a young diocesan priest studying in Rome, Rev. Father Andrew Deslatte, to obtain a Relic of the True Cross in the Holy See for the new shrine.

August 12, 1936 By letter and diploma of aggregation, His Eminence Pietro Cardinal Fumasoni-Biondi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith and Cardinal Priest of the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, affiliates the Society of the Holy Cross in Dickinson to the Archconfraternity of the Most Holy Cross in Rome. Plans are made to replace the small, wood-frame church building in Dickinson with a larger brick structure befitting the Shrine of the True Cross.

September 13, 1936 In an elaborate ceremony, St. Joseph's Catholic Church is renamed and dedicated as the Shrine of the True Cross by Bishop Byrne on the eve of the Feast of the [Exaltation of the Holy Cross](#). A Relic of the True Cross from St. Mary's Cathedral in Galveston is carried in procession by Bishop Byrne and temporarily enshrined until a Relic of the True Cross designated for the new shrine is received from Rome. The Shrine of the True Cross in Dickinson is established as a place of public exposition and veneration of the relic of the Most Holy Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

November 11, 1936 A [Precious Relic of the True Cross](#) is granted by the office of the Vicar General of the [Diocese of Rome](#) to the Shrine of the True Cross in Dickinson.

February 2, 1937 The Relic of the True Cross from Rome is received by Father Carney in Dickinson and enshrined in the church, and the Relic temporarily placed in the church since the previous September is returned to St. Mary's Cathedral.

1937 Bishop Byrne designates the Shrine of the True Cross as the church of the [Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre](#) in the Diocese of Galveston. The Knights of the Holy Sepulchre are made honorary guardians of the Precious Relic of the True Cross.

November 4, 1938 With the approval of both the [Order of the Friar Servants of Mary](#), known as the [Servites](#), and Bishop Byrne, Rev. Father Hugh Calkins, O.S.M., a Servite Father from the [Church of Our Lady of Sorrows](#) in Chicago, canonically erects the Seven Stations of the Via Matris in the Shrine, and installs the Novena in honor of Our Sorrowful Mother. Novena services are held every Friday until 1967.

1945 Construction begins on a new Spanish mission-style church building. A parochial school is also planned. The church and school complex is designed by the Houston-based Catholic architect Maurice J. Sullivan. The old wood-frame mission church building is moved to another location on the church grounds and is used as a parish activities hall for almost 30 years.

May 31, 1945 Bishop Byrne purchases three town lots in Dickinson behind the church grounds at what is now the corner of Church Street and Liggio Street. The lots are used for the new parochial school being planned.

March 31, 1946 The new Shrine of the True Cross Catholic Church is dedicated by Bishop Byrne at 10 a.m. Solemn High Mass. In the afternoon 158 children and 40 adults are confirmed by the Bishop. Construction begins on the school soon after.

September 16, 1946 The new [True Cross Catholic School](#) opens for classes, the first parochial school on the Galveston County Mainland. Teaching duties are assumed by the [Sisters of St. Mary of Namur](#). 135 children are registered on the first day. Classes are conducted in the old wood-frame church building and parish hall until the new school is completed later in the year.

December 29, 1946 True Cross School is blessed by Bishop Byrne. Later that day, the Bishop dedicates the Chapel of Precious Relics in the church.

November 1, 1950 Rev. Msgr. Thomas Carney passes after a long illness. He is succeeded as pastor by Rev. Father Andrew Deslatte the following year. Father Deslatte had helped obtain the Relic of the True Cross for the Diocese of Galveston in 1936 while studying in Rome.

February 21, 1964 Through the efforts of Father Deslatte, approximately 20 acres of land in Dickinson are purchased by the Most Reverend John L. Morkovsky, Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston. The site is located near Interstate 45 (Gulf Freeway) and stretches from FM 517 (Pine Drive) to Dickinson Bayou. The site is intended as the future home of the Shrine of the True Cross Church and School complex.

May 1967 The Novena to Our Sorrowful Mother is discontinued at the Shrine.

September 1972 Construction begins on a new church, rectory, and activities building at the Pine Drive site. The complex is designed by architect Christopher DiStefano of Houston, Texas.

August 23, 1973 The new True Cross School at 400 Pine Drive (FM 517 E) opens for a full day of classes in the parish activities building.

November 1973 The new rectory at the Pine Drive site is completed.

December 24, 1973 The new church building at 300 Pine Drive (FM 517 E) is opened for services. Christmas Midnight Mass is celebrated.

October 6, 1974 The new Shrine of the True Cross Catholic Church on Pine Drive is formally dedicated by Bishop Morkovsky at 3 p.m. Solemn Mass. The new True Cross Catholic School is also blessed by the Bishop. The Sacrament of Confirmation is administered at 8:30 a.m. Mass that same day.

November 18, 1976 The former church and school complex at the corner of Highway 3 and FM 517 is sold by the Diocese.

April 5, 1989 A nearby house is purchased for use as the rectory. The former rectory on Pine Drive serves as the parish office.

2004 In response to the increasing growth rate and new development in the Dickinson area, a Master Planning Committee is organized under the pastorage of Rev. Father Paul Felix to outline an expansion of the Shrine of the True Cross parish complex on Pine Drive. A [Master Architectural Plan](#) is designed by Hall Barnum Lucchesi Architects of Houston. The Master Plan includes a new Parish Life Center, improvements to and an expansion of the existing church building, and improvements to the existing school buildings.

February 27, 2007 The parish finance council and pastoral council implement a capital campaign to raise funds for the construction of the Master Plan complex. The campaign is later named "Lift High the Cross" in reference to the proposed bell-tower cross that would be lifted higher with visibility like a beacon from the Gulf Freeway.

April 6, 2008 The site of the Parish Life Center is blessed by Father Felix after the 10 a.m. Mass.

September 12-13, 2008 Hurricane Ike passes over Dickinson after making landfall near Galveston. The buildings and grounds of the Shrine of the True Cross sustain only minimal damage.

March 15, 2009 [His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston](#), celebrates a Centennial Mass of the church and parish at 10 a.m. in honor of the Feast of St. Joseph, 1909. Father Felix and Rev. Msgr. Rolando Diokno, a former assistant at the Shrine of the True Cross, concelebrate. At the conclusion of the Mass, Cardinal DiNardo blesses the congregation with the Relic of the True Cross. Following the Mass, Cardinal DiNardo blesses the traditional St. Joseph's Altar.

March 19, 2009 Father Felix celebrates the Solemnity of St. Joseph with a Latin-English Mass in honor of the Feast of St. Joseph observed 100 years ago.

March 21, 2010 Cardinal DiNardo returns to celebrate a Mass closing the Centennial year of the church and parish at 10 a.m. in honor of the Feast of St. Joseph. Again, at the conclusion of the Mass, Cardinal DiNardo blesses the congregation with the Relic of the True Cross and afterwards blesses the traditional St. Joseph's Altar.