

Founding Pastor of St. Michael at the Shrine of the Holy Cross

The Shrine of the Holy Cross began as a missionary effort of Rev. Vincent D. Warren, S.S.J. (1889-1975), who came to the Diocese of Mobile in 1936 as pastor of Most Pure Heart of Mary Parish in Mobile. Tireless and dedicated to his work, he not only served the largest Black parish in the Diocese, which included a school, he found ways to engage the Catholics in Mobile to assist him in his missionary service wherever he saw a need. For instance, in 1942, with the help of a Mobile physician, he opened and directed a small (5 bed) maternity clinic for Black women which developed by 1950 into the 35-bed St. Martin de Porres Hospital, a hospital serving the Black community during the years when the major hospitals served whites only.

In 1947, Fr. Warren was instrumental in the purchase of land in Daphne by the diocese for his mission work. His church was a Quonset hut; his school was a former dance hall; and most of his parishioners were converts. In 1953 he also founded St. John in Bromley. To help with his mission work, Fr. Warren organized a club of 100 girls from Bishop Toolen High School in Mobile, whose members traveled three times a week to Daphne and Bromley in order to provide religious instruction to the children.



There were many conversions among those served by Fr. Warren, and he guided many young men and women both black and white into religious life over the years. One young man in Daphne, Joseph Lawson Howze, a convert, became a priest and later a bishop, first auxiliary of the Diocese of Natchez-Jackson and then the first Bishop of the Diocese of Biloxi.

Fr. Warren served in Daphne until 1960, when he was elected to the post of Vicar General of the Josephites and moved back to the Baltimore headquarters.

Fr. Warren's "ride" with clan members in Virginia, an early experience that proved his courage and determination to serve God

In 1926, while pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Norfolk VA, Fr. Warren "was taken for a ride" by members of the Klu Klux Klan. Ignoring warnings, he persisted in taking his 50-piece band of Black boys and girls to rural districts in Virginia, giving concerts for Blacks and speaking about the Catholic Church. On Sept. 1, in a town called Princess Anne Courthouse, a cavalcade of cars arrived after dark, and some 60 hooded and masked men, all armed, quietly surrounded the priest. In silence, they pushed him into a car and sped off. They stopped in a secluded area and questioned his purpose in the area, warning him that Catholics were not welcome. Apparently satisfied with his replies, they drive him another few miles to a small cemetery where they left him at midnight. A former Klansman later told him that some had wanted to paint him with lamp black and burn him, but one had told the others: "Don't touch this man; he's a praying man!"

Taken from Obituary for Rev. Vincent D. Warren, by Rev. Edward J. Gartner, SSJ, Office of Communicatoins, Josephite Generalate, February 20, 1975