

AIDED MEXICO ORPHANS

Mass for 'Magic Priest,' Killed in Crash, Slated

BY JACK JONES
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A funeral Mass will be said today in Sierra Madre for the Rev. Henry Vetter, 65, so-called "El Padre Magico" (magic priest) who for more than 20 years aided the orphans and poor families of Baja California.

The Passionist priest was killed Tuesday when a tire blew out and his van went out of control near La Paz after he and four orphan boys had helped deliver lumber to victims of last fall's Baja California hurricane.

Two of the boys from Vetter's Rancho Nazareth orphanage near Tecate were slightly injured in the crash but the other two were not hurt, according to the Rev. Gabriel Chiodi, pastor of the Cathedral of La Paz, who accompanied the body here Wednesday.

Vetter was the founder of the Pasadena-based Aid for Baja California (ABC), a nonprofit organization that

operated the several orphanages he started, along with training schools, a medical center at Colonia and a hospital-clinic at Tijuana.

Vetter was associated with the Mater Dolorosa Monastery in Sierra Madre here, where the rosary was recited Thursday evening. But he lived at the Rancho Nazareth orphanage he founded in 1968 on 170 acres. About 100 boys stay there.

The priest, who acquired his nickname by doing magic tricks to win the hearts of children in remote villages, spent virtually all his time in Mexico, but came to ABC headquarters in Pasadena once a week to handle administrative problems.

With volunteer help, thrift shop profits and donations, Vetter and his ABC funneled truckloads of food, clothing, medicine and other supplies

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CRASH VICTIM—The Rev. Henry Vetter at the Rancho Nazareth orphanage near Tecate in 1976.

Times photo

'MAGIC PRIEST'

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to isolated areas throughout the Baja Peninsula.

In addition to the large Rancho Nazareth orphanage for boys, Vetter formed the Santa Teresita orphanage for girls in La Mesa, the Casa de Cuna home for babies in Tijuana, the Hogar Infantil de La Gloria and the new Salda Tierra girls orphanage.

The Fatima Center Medical Clinic in Colonia reportedly cares for about 20,000 patients a month and the Sacred Heart Hospital and Clinic in Tijuana is said to be the largest private hospital on the peninsula.

Vetter was born into a family of 11 children in Pittsburgh and was or-

dained in 1938. (His twin brother also is a priest.) He worked among the poor blacks of Alabama and in 1953 was transferred to the West Coast, where he saw the Mexican people as devout, hardworking and too often impoverished.

He began making trips to the out-of-the-way settlements of Baja California to offer spiritual and physical aid, then started caring for homeless children he found sleeping in doorways or wandering the streets.

The funeral Mass will be said today at 10 a.m. in St. Rita Catholic Church, Sierra Madre, with Cabot and Sons in charge. Interment will be at the monastery.