

Catholic priest Manni dies; founder of school

TAMPA – Mary Help of Christians plans to honor the late Alvin Manni with a memorial service.

By **JANET LEISER**
of The Tampa Tribune

The Rev. Alvin Manni, a Roman Catholic priest who helped establish the Mary Help of Christians School Foundation in Tampa, which provides subsidies for needy children, died Feb. 16 in his native Italy of a brain tumor. He was 79.

"He was a kind, giving individual who thought of everyone and not himself," said Tom Connor, who has known Manni since 1957.

A memorial service is being planned at Mary Help of Christians in Manni's honor, but a date has not yet been set.

Mary Help of Christians was a small orphanage at the end of an unpaved road on the shores of East Lake when 20-year-old Manni first saw it in 1941. There were no nearby shopping malls or suburban developments, but there were lots of mosquitoes and alligators.

"It looked like the end of civilization," Manni told Tampa Tribune columnist Steve Otto years later.

During the next five decades, Manni came and went from Mary Help of Christians several times,

going wherever the Salesian Order sent him.

In 1985, he returned to the school for the last time, to serve as director of development.

Five years later and 49 years after he first arrived in Tampa, Manni left Mary Help of Christians for the last time to return to Gerola, a small village in Italy, near the Swiss border.

But he didn't lose touch with his friends at the school, Connor said. There was something about Manni that made his friends want to stay in touch with him.

"He just had this way. He was so easy to talk to. He encouraged everyone," said Connor, who's now director of the foundation established by Manni.

Connor and his wife, Yoka, as well other friends, have visited Manni in Italy.

They were there in 1998 when he celebrated his 50th anniversary as a priest. The town, of about 1,000 people, threw an outdoor party under a tent.

For more information on the memorial service, call (813) 626-6191.

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