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### A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PARISH SALESIAN MINISTRY IN YBOR CITY AND WEST TAMPA (FLORIDA-USA): 1926-1935

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#### **Introduction**

The earliest Salesian works in the State of Florida were the Parish of Our Lady of Mercy, with its Mission Church of Holy Name, both in Ybor City, which was in the eastern part of the City of Tampa, and St. Joseph Parish in West Tampa. Both Our Lady of Mercy and St. Joseph Parishes had principally Spanish people, mainly Cuban, while the Holy Name Mission church was for the Italians.

Before taking up the story of the Salesian work in those parishes, it seems worthwhile to know something about the city of Tampa itself, and also about the actual social and religious situation in Ybor City and West Tampa during those years. A better understanding will more likely then be gained of the difficulties and frustrations which challenged the various priests who labored in that milieu.

#### **1. The situation**

##### *1.1. The city of Tampa*

Tampa is in western Florida. It is the seat of Hillsborough county and is 170 miles (274 km) southwest of Jacksonville. Tampa was chartered by the state legislature in 1885. It is governed by a mayor and board of city representatives consisting of 12 members.

Since Tampa is situated at the mouth of the Hillsborough River on Tampa Bay, it is a port of entry and the trade center for Florida's west coast. Tampa is also one of the most industrialized cities in the state. Citrus canning and the shrimp industry are important, and the city is a leading phosphate shipping Port.

Products manufactured in Tampa include fabricated steel, electronic equipment, cigars, beer, paint and fertilizers.

Tampa is the seat of MacDill Air Force Base. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers of the National Football League play at Tampa Stadium. Educational facilities include the University of South Florida and the University of Tampa. The latter was founded in 1931. It has a building of Moorish design beautifully situated in Plant Park. The University houses the Tampa Museum, which contains a fine collection of Venetian mirrors among its rare art objects.

Historically, Ponce de Leon visited the site of Tampa in 1521. He was followed by Panfilo de Narvaez in 1528 and Hernando de Soto in 1539. The real settlement of the site was made on March 5, 1823, when four companies of United States troops sailed into Tampa Bay from Pensacola and established the military post of Fort Brooke. Later the settlement was called by the Indian name of Tampa. In 1862, during the American Civil War, Union gunboats occupied the port. In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the port was used as the embarkation point for United States troops en route to Cuba. When the Panama Canal opened in 1920, seaborne traffic received a great impetus.

The population of Tampa in 1930, when the Salesians served the two parishes, was 101,161. In 1990 the population was 280,015<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.2. *The Church in Ybor City*

That part of Florida east of the Apalachicola River was erected by Pope Pius IX into a Vicariate Apostolic in the year 1857, and in 1870 into the Diocese of St. Augustine. The City of Tampa was in this new Diocese.

During the years 1887-1888 an outbreak of yellow fever ravaged the Tampa area. The deadly disease decimated the priestly ranks, killing three priests. Bishop John Moore, the ordinary of the Diocese of St. Augustine, then searched frantically for replacements. He wrote to Rev. John O'Shanahan, Superior of the Jesuits in Louisiana for help. It soon arrived in the person of Father Philip de Carriere. His diligent work among the fever victims prompted Bishop Moore to request the Jesuits to take responsibility for the spiritual health of all South Florida. They agreed. Father John B. Quinlan was sent late in 1889 to serve as pastor, while the Spanish-speaking Father de Carriere was his assistant. These two priests built the first Catholic church in Ybor City, Our Lady of Mercy, in 1890. Thus began the first serious efforts to minister to a fast growing flock.

<sup>1</sup> "Tampa", *The Encyclopedia Americana*. N. Y., International Edition Americana Corporation 1969, vol. 26, p. 238, and 1996, Vol. 26, p. 253.

Early in 1890, Father Quinlan wrote to Bishop Moore his assessment of the task he faced:

“The Catholics of Tampa [meaning St. Louis Parish in downtown Tampa] are fervent, attend church regularly and approach the sacraments frequently [...]. Besides these, there are 2,500 Cubans in Ybor City, all professing the Catholic religion; but, in general, they are not practicing Catholics”.

In addition to the Cubans, Father Quinlan mentioned that Italian and Spanish Catholics resided in Ybor City and “already formed the nucleus of a congregation [which was] daily increasing”. Not for a long time to come would a Catholic priest again speak so optimistically of possibilities for the Church in Ybor City.

Unfortunately, the church had, in part, compromised its position with the community by accepting donations from wealthy Spanish factory owners for the erection of Our Lady of Mercy church, even though it was a simple frame structure. This fact rankled the patriotic Cubans, who viewed the Catholic Church and the colonial Spanish government as twin oppressors of their homeland<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.3. *The builder*

In 1892, an energetic young Jesuit, Father William Tyrrell, came to Ybor City to replace Father Quinlan. He worked with such vigor that amazed even his detractors. He soon earned the name “Tyrrell the Builder” for his success in building churches, missions, and schools. But these accomplishments were not matched in building loyal congregations. There was enormous indifference toward religion and the church, accompanied by great ignorance of its teachings.

Father Tyrrell obtained the services of two Italian-speaking priests, Father Archille Vasta in 1896 and Father John A. DiPietro in 1903. Father Tyrrell believed that real progress was possible. However, in 1905, Father DiPietro wrote to Bishop William J. Kenny of St. Augustine, decrying the “slanders against the Catholic clergy and the Catholic Church circulating in Ybor City”.

By 1911 not much had changed. In a plaintive letter to the bishop, Father Tyrrell asked,

“Can anything be done to save so many of the Cuban and Sicilian and Italian population of this place, who are so indifferent about all religious practices? There have been devoted, good, and zealous priests and

<sup>2</sup> Gary R. MORMINO - George E. POZZETTA, *The immigrant world of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985*. Urbana and Chicago, IL. University of Illinois Press, pp. 210-211, *passim*.

Sisters working here for years, and yet it is hard to see the fruit of their labors”.

Father Tyrrell estimated that there were 4,520 Sicilians living within 46 blocks, and that in other sections the Cubans and Spaniards were more numerous, thus bringing the total to about 10,000 souls who should be faithful members of the true fold, for they were baptized Catholics. Father Tyrrell carefully used the terms “Sicilian” and “Italian”, “Cuban” and “Spanish” to distinguish the different identities in Ybor City.

Unfortunately, by 1920 it was clear that almost nothing had changed, as Father Tyrrell lamented in a letter to the bishop:

“As this mission has no defined limits and has a moving population of Cubans, Spaniards, Italians and Sicilians who never come to church (not 3 percent of them), and most of them have no respect for religion or priests, and many will not have their children baptized and many are married outside the Church, it is very hard to say how many are Catholic”<sup>3</sup>.

#### 1.4. *Bishop Curley, Father Dente and the Italian question*

Bishop Michael J. Curley was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine in 1914, and he remained until August 10, 1921, at which time he was promoted to the See of Baltimore. As a new generation of Italians came of age in the 1920’s, hope stirred that perhaps the futility of past efforts could be reversed. Bishop Curley authorized the creation of an Italian parish and appointed an Italian-speaking pastor, Father Vincent M. Dente, S. J. A furor erupted when Father Dente, to expedite matters, acquired land in his own name so as to build the church, and his immediate superior in Tampa, Father S. Farrell, S. J., demanded that Bishop Curley remove Father Dente for violating his vow of poverty. After bitter letters among different persons, Father Dente was exonerated and remained<sup>4</sup>.

On November 7, 1920, Bishop Curley<sup>5</sup> delivered a speech in the Church of the Sacred Heart, Tampa, Florida. That speech concerned the so-called “Italian Question”. Here are a few sentences from it:

“They [Italian mothers] appreciate the dignity of motherhood. Their children are amongst the brightest in the schools of the land. They are fast

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212-214, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Curley was born in Ireland in 1879. He was ordained on March 19, 1904. He was the Bishop of St. Augustine from 1914 to 1921, and was Archbishop of Baltimore from 1921 to 1939; the title was later changed to Archbishop of Baltimore and Washington in 1939. Bishop Curley died in 1947. Cf *1991 Catholic Almanac*, our Sunday Visitor, Inc., Huntington, IN.; cf also *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4, pp. 541-542.

forging ahead in our social life, occupying today high places in professions and in every walk of life.

Money is being spent in vast sums to protestantize a splendid people. Fifty years from now, if not before, the Italian element will be the most important element in our American population. What of their Catholic faith? If we are not up and doing, we shall see the sad spectacle of millions of them lost to the See of Peter, to the religion of Jesus Christ. What have we done for them? We have criticized them. We have written about them as problems, not as souls redeemed by the precious blood of the God-Man. We have allowed prejudice to blind us to the need of caring for their souls.

Here in Tampa I want to see something done for the preservation of the religion of our Italians. Amongst them are some of the best Catholics of the city. Let us in God's name take an interest in this work. Let us cease our destructive criticism. Let us do something worthwhile for the sake of the souls of the poor of our Italian colony in Tampa"<sup>6</sup>.

The Jesuit. Father Vincent Dente, as noted previously, was working and living in the midst of the Italian population. On November 15, 1920, a week after the above speech, Bishop Curley wrote a letter to Father Dente. In it he gave Father Dente some instructions. Here are a few quotes from that letter:

"Practically nothing has been done for the large colony of ten thousand souls of that nationality [Italians]. The patent result is that very many are losing their faith, drawn from it by the constant activities of proselytizing agencies. These latter are at work amongst our people whilst we waste our time in foolish criticism. We must take action at once, or else be guilty before God of a great neglect.

I place upon your shoulders the responsibility for this particular work in the city of Tampa. When it is a question of your doing work in the spiritual welfare of the Italians, there will be no parish limits. You may regard the whole city as your especial field in this line of work.

Working along prudent lines, you will endeavor to raise funds to purchase a site for a new Italian parish church, where our Italian people can feel at home, where they will hear their own sweet tongue used as the medium of giving them God's word. The beginnings may have to be humble. You will need all the patience you can muster.

It would be well to look forward to the establishment of a settlement house, where care can be taken of the needy and poor, where the little ones can find a centre of clean recreation, where aid can be given the poor mothers and where the church can give evidence that she is interested in the temporal as well as the spiritual welfare of her children.

You are hereby given permission to solicit funds from any and all quarters towards the carrying on of this work. It is essentially God's work.

<sup>6</sup> Archives of the Province of St. Philip the Apostle, New Rochelle, N. Y., Tampa-Ybor City, Fl., Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 1. (Hereafter cited as Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish).

Tampa has many needs. But she has none greater than this. As proof of my good will in this matter, I am sending you a check for five hundred dollars. This you will deposit in the bank in the name of your new organization. Call it "The Catholic Italian Welfare Organization". I leave the naming of it to yourself and your committee. There are no finer people in the city than the little group I met at the Italian Club. I am really proud of them"<sup>7</sup>.

As mentioned above, Bishop Curley was promoted to the see of Baltimore on August 10, 1921, but before he left the Diocese of St. Augustine, he wrote another long letter to Father Dente, dated August 15, 1921. In it the Bishop shows his great concern for the Italian Catholics of Tampa. Here are some sentences from that letter:

"The Italians are there [in Tampa] in their thousands and for them nothing has been done in the past, and little is being done now in the only matter that really matters – the care of their souls. The thousands there now, represent millions in the years to be. If nothing is done for those who are with us now, what about the future generations?

To my successor I leave it as a last request that the work already begun in a humble way be carried on. I deem it essential that a separate Italian parish should be established for the members of the Italian colony, with their own church and pastor speaking their own language.

Hence, I fully favor and approve an Italian parish, the introduction of Italian Sisters, the conducting of a day nursery, and all such works as are calculated to bring the dear, poor, neglected people nearer to their God and their faith.

Let us have no discussions about the Italians or the so-called Italian question. Let us do something for them and their little ones, future American citizens. For your zeal in their behalf, I have nothing but the highest praise. I know the difficulty of the work. I am aware of its seeming hopelessness at times. But we must not grow weary in the doing of good. To the little ones particularly we must go out in loving zeal. They are very precious in the eyes of God.

My interest in the welfare of the people of this diocese is not going to die when I shall leave here, and nothing would give me greater pleasure than to return sometime to address a congregation of Italians in a neat little church in Ybor City"<sup>8</sup>.

When the furor mentioned above concerning Father Dente subsided, he renewed his efforts to find the necessary funds to complete the church building for the Italians. The new parish was called Most Holy Name. The first Mass was celebrated on Christmas Day, 1922, perhaps hoping that the selection of the birth of Jesus would provide extra blessings. Ironically, the church stood

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

within sight of its two great rivals, the Labor Temple and the Italian Club. To the expectation of its critics and the consternation of its benefactors, Most Holy Name never attracted more than a few hundred Italians and languished in financial difficulty. A 1934 survey estimated that of 437 members in the parish register, only 115 were active, almost all of them women<sup>9</sup>.

## **2. The Salesians at Tampa**

The Jesuits returned the three churches – Our Lady of Mercy, Most Holy Name, and St. Joseph – to the Diocese of St. Augustine in 1926.

It so happened that in 1926, the Salesian Provincial, Father Emanuel Manassero<sup>10</sup>, met with Bishop Patrick Barry<sup>11</sup>, who, at that time, was the ordinary of the Diocese of St. Augustine, in order to consult with him about the possibility of opening Mary Help of Christians School in Tampa. It was during those negotiations that Bishop Barry, upon the suggestion of the Jesuit Superior in Tampa, requested the Salesians to take care of the churches which the Jesuits had relinquished.

To that request the following letter dated February 27, 1926, was sent to Bishop Patrick Barry:

“Our Provincial, Very Rev. Father Manassero has written me from Turin, Italy, asking that I inform you that our superiors have decided to accept the proposals made for our work in Tampa, Florida. Father Manassero is expected to return in March and will then take the matter up directly.

Thanking you for your kind interest in our work and asking your blessing on our Community, I remain

Respectfully in Christ,

Rev. Thomas J. DeMatei, S. C. Sec.”<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> G. R. MORMINO - G. E. POZZETTA, *The immigrant world...*, p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Emanuel Manassero was born in Benevagienna (Cuneo, Italy), on September 13, 1873. In August, 1885, he entered the Oratory in Turin. There he came to be known by Don Bosco, to whom Emanuel went for the Sacrament of Penance. Don Rua admitted him to the novitiate in September, 1888, and on October 11 of the following year Don Rua received his perpetual profession. Emanuel Manassero was ordained a priest on Holy Saturday, April 4, 1896. From 1919 to 1927 he was Provincial of the United States. It was during his term of office that the San Francisco Province came into being in 1926. Father Manassero saw to the construction of the Church of SS. Peter and Paul in San Francisco. After a number of additional assignments, he retired to Sacro Cuore Parish, Rome, and after suffering much from a stroke, he died on May 29, 1946, at the age of 73. Cf the obituary letter for Father Emanuel Manassero.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick J. Barry was born in Ireland in 1868. He was ordained on June 9, 1895. He was appointed Bishop of St. Augustine in 1922, and died there in 1940. Cf *1991 Catholic Almanac*.

<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Diocese of St. Augustine. A xeroxed copy is in the Archives of the Province of New Rochelle, N. Y., Tampa, Ybor City, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 21.

On August 2, 1926, Father Manassero wrote to Bishop Barry that three Salesians would arrive in Tampa on August 14th and assume the work of caring for the three churches. The three Salesians were Father Rinaldo Bergamo<sup>13</sup>, Pastor and Superior; Father Philip Pappalardo<sup>14</sup>, and Father Anthony Moi<sup>15</sup>. He then asked that the usual faculties for the priests be forwarded to them, c/o the Jesuit Fathers of Sacred Heart College at Tampa.

### 2.1. *The arrival of the Salesians*

According to the *Chronicle* of Mary Help of Christians School, to which canonical community the three churches later belonged:

“The first Salesians went to Tampa, Florida, in 1926. The first four Salesians (three were priests and one a lay Brother) reached Tampa on Friday, August 13, 1926. As soon as they left the Union Station in Tampa, they were greeted by a terrific downpour of rain, so characteristic in sub-tropical regions. It was only on September 17, 1928, when the first Mass was celebrated at the Mary Help of Christians School, and it was after the middle of September of that year that the first boys arrived. They were the Diaz brothers, Aquilino and Charles, from Ybor City”<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Rinaldo Bergamo was born in Romano di Lombardia (Bergamo, Italy), on August 24, 1893. He became a Salesian in Italy, served in the Italian artillery during the four years of World War I. He was ordained on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, in Turin, Italy, on June 29, 1921. Father Bergamo earned the degree of Doctor of Letters from the Royal University of Turin. He came to New York on January 14, 1922. He served as Director in various schools and parishes in the East. He was the first Pastor when the Salesians went to Ybor City, Fl., and the first Director of the Mary, Help of Christians School in Tampa. After that Rectorship Father Bergamo went to the California Province and remained there the rest of his life. He was Pastor and Director of the house of theology in Aptos, California. Father Bergamo died of cancer, on August 16, 1956, at the age of 63. He had been 45 years a Salesian, 35 years a priest, and a Director for 23 years. Cf the obituary letter for Father Rinaldo Bergamo, by Father Alfredo J. Cogliandro, Provincial, August 17, 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Pappalardo was born in 1880. He worked in the New Rochelle Province in Ybor City and at the Salesian School in New Rochelle. He returned to his native Italy and worked there for a number of years. He died in Rome, on June 8, 1965, at the age of 85. Cf Salesian necrology.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Moi was born in Ussassai (Nuoro, Italy), on December 14 1883. He began his novitiate in 1909, in Lombriasco, Italy, but he went to Mexico before the novitiate was over. Eventually he professed triennial vows in 1915 in Guadalupe and perpetual vows in Mexico City, on January 25, 1928. After philosophical studies he worked in Mexico City. He was ordained a priest on May 22, 1921. He came to the United States in 1926. Father Moi was well versed in languages and taught them in our schools. He worked in the Antilles and then again in the United States. Eventually Father Moi returned to his native country and later left the Society.

<sup>16</sup> *Chronicle of Mary, Help of Christians School, 1926-1939*, pp. 1 and 5. The *Chronicle* is in the Archives of the Province of St. Philip, the Apostle, New Rochelle, N. Y. (Hereafter cited as *Chronicle, 1926-1939*).

So runs the *Chronicle* of Mary Help of Christians School. It is, therefore, clear that the first work actually undertaken by the Salesians in Florida was the spiritual care of the Latin population in Ybor City and in West Tampa.

Although the Salesians began their stay in Ybor City and in West Tampa on August 13, 1926, the canonical erection of the community was signed only on June 1, 1932, by the then Rector Major, Father Peter Ricaldone<sup>17</sup>.

However, the Salesians were there barely five days when, on August 19, Father Bergamo sent an urgent telegram to Father Manassero, saying: "Pappalardo getting more nervous. I thought nervous breakdown was going to pass. Unfortunately it does not. I need another man at his place. Please act at once"<sup>18</sup>. Was this a portent of a troubled stay for the Salesians? Let us read on to find out.

On December 12, 1926, Father Bergamo wrote to Father Emanuel Manassero, the Provincial, that he felt very inadequate for the work. His principal reasons were that he found the work unsettling for his nerves, the lack of interest in church on the part of the people, and lastly he lamented the quality of his English for preaching to the American parishioners. Nevertheless, Father Bergamo remained as Pastor and Director of the Salesian community in Tampa<sup>19</sup>.

## 2.2. Report regarding religious instruction

On April 7, 1927, Father Bergamo wrote a report on the number of children receiving religious instruction and the method used at Our Lady of Mercy Church and at Holy Name church. The note was sent to Rev. J. Nunan in St. Augustine, Florida. The report stated the following:

"Our Lady of Mercy church, Ybor City:

- 1) There is a Parochial School.
- 2) 320 boys and 405 girls, making a total of 725 children receive religious instruction.
- 3) 675 children receive religious instruction in the Parochial school, where they have one or two questions of the catechism explained every day.
- 4) About 50 children from Public school attend Sunday School, where the Catechetical method is adopted.

Holy Name Church, Ybor City:

- 1) There is no Parochial School.
- 2) About 70 girls and 25 boys receive religious instruction at Sunday

<sup>17</sup> Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 4.

<sup>20</sup> Archives of the Diocese of St. Augustine. A xeroxed copy is in the archives of the Province of St. Philip, the Apostle, Tampa-Ybor City, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 21.

School. Out of the 70 girls about 60 have additional religious instruction under form of a short sermon twice a week, after sewing class”<sup>20</sup>.

### 2.3. *Financing a loan*

With a view to providing the boys of Our Lady of Mercy Parish with facilities for more advanced education, an extensive wing was added to the school in 1927, with an excellent social center containing appointments for the most varying activities.

In order to build that wing, The Salesians at Our Lady of Mercy Church negotiated a loan of \$50,000 through a Mr. Goldman, from the Salesians in New Rochelle. New York. The following letter was written on January 9, 1927, by Father Rinaldo Bergamo, the Pastor at Our Lady of Mercy Parish, to Father Manassero, the Provincial. In the letter Father Bergamo asked the Provincial to negotiate a loan of \$50,000 for the Parish of Our Lady of Mercy.

“V. Reverend and dear Father Provincial,

The plan for an additional building to this parochial school to be erected with the purpose of giving room for more teaching & club halls and for a temporary location of an orphanage met the full approval of His Lordship, the Bishop of St. Augustin [sic], Fla.

According to your economical scheme we are now asking you to get from any bank in New York the loan of about \$50,000 (fifty thousand dollars) at the lowest possible interest. If such a loan can not [sic] be given directly to this Parish of Our Lady of Mercy through a note signed by the Bishop of St. Augustin [sic] kindly please to borrow the money and turn the loan to this Parish, which will undergo all the obligations for interests and ammortization [sic] and for joined expenses.

Very trury yours in Xst,

Rev. R. Bergamo, S.C.

Pastor of Our Lady of Mercy P. Barry  
Bishop of St. Augustin Fla”<sup>21</sup>.

Father Manassero then wrote a letter in Italian on January 27, 1927, to Father Bergamo. The following is a translation of the salient facts from that letter, regarding the loan.

“The two [Provincial] Councilors agree about the method of loan which we decided upon obtaining for this parish, with a guarantee from the Bishop.

I will have to prepare an appropriate decision of the Missionary Society and take it to Mr. Goldman, in the company of the treasurer. I will need a few days for this.

Then, Mr. Goldman assures me that the loan will be granted to us with an open account. You must prepare 10 post dated checks of \$5,000.00 with your signature and the Bishop’s guarantee, writing them in the way

<sup>21</sup> Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 5.

I am doing at the bottom of this letter.

The phrase “on demand”, will mean that there will be no need to renew the post dated checks on the usual expiration of three months.

You could send the post dated checks one at a time, whenever you need money; or better, send them all together, so that it would only suffice to write or telegraph for the amount you need for one or more. It is better that these letters or telegrams be sent to Father DeMatei, [the Provincial secretary] in order to avoid delays in case of my absence”.

The following is the model Father Manassero sent for writing the notes and obtaining \$5,000.00 at a time:

“On demand we promise to the Missionary Society of the Salesian Congregation, Five thousand and 00/100 Dollars with interest at 5% Payable at 148 Main Street, New Rochelle, New York.

Church of Our Lady of Mercy, Ybor City, Tampa, Fla.

Each note was signed: Rev. R. Bergamo, S. C. Pastor and Treas.

Each note was also signed: Rt. Rev. P. Barry, Bp. of St. Augustine”<sup>22</sup>

It seems that the new Provincial, Father Richard Pittini<sup>23</sup>, wrote to Bishop Barry about the matter, but that letter is not extant. The following letter is the Bishop’s reply, from Miami Beach, Fla., and dated January 24, 1928:

“Very Rev. Dear Fr. Provincial,

Your letter just now reached me here & [sic] caused me some surprise.

I do not recollect that I ever borrowed any sum of money from Mr. Goldman and, therefore, I cannot deposit any sum with him for the purpose indicated. Your Fathers in Ybor City negotiated a loan with their superior. If that must be paid I presume it must be to you & [sic] at a time convenient for your Fathers. When the Ybor City superior wishes to refinance that loan I shall gladly endorse his paper for the amount he has borrowed from his order.

The original transaction was suggested & [sic] adopted by your Fathers & [sic] their superior & [sic] we were led to believe that it would be an easy matter to carry the loan in that way. If that is the way Mr. Goldman wishes to do business, after the assurances we’ve had we do not care to have any further dealings with him, & [sic] as soon as Fr. Bergamo re-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 6.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Pittini was born in Tricesimo (Udine- Italy), on April 30, 1876. He was ordained a priest on January 22, 1899, in Montevideo, Uruguay, having gone there as a missionary immediately after his profession in 1893. From 1923 until 1927 he was the Provincial of the Province of Uruguay and Paraguay. He spent thirty years in those two countries. In 1927, Father Pittini was appointed Provincial of the New Rochelle Province. His great preoccupation as Provincial was vocations. In 1933 Father Pittini’s term as Provincial ended, and in 1935 he was chosen to be the Archbishop of Santo Domingo. He was ordained bishop on December 10, 1961. Cf the obituary letter for Mons. Richard Pittini.

finances his indebtedness to you that matter shall be closed.  
I am sending your letter to Fr. Bergamo.  
With very best wishes, I am,

Yrs. sincerely,  
P. Barry”<sup>24</sup>.

A new promissory note was written, and this time it was also signed by Bishop Barry.

#### 2.4. *Father Bergamo*

On October 6, 1927, Father Bergamo wrote to the new Provincial, Father Richard Pittini, a letter in Italian. A translation follows.

“Very Reverend Father,  
It is not my intention to cause troubles, but I feel that, unfortunately, I might be an involuntary cause. Every day that passes leaves me always more nervous and depressed. Frequently, closed in my room, I pace, cursing the moment in which I came here. The superior knew for a long time that parish work is not for me, and that I am not adapted to be a superior.

I did not become a Salesian to be a pastor, and I am not too firm with myself and with others to be a Superior. On the other hand, parochial affairs here ought to be organized differently and with other personnel, if one truly wishes to reach some conclusion. It is a very difficult mission, for which I have neither the energy nor the ability. Moreover, as I have said also to the Extraordinary Visitor, none of the confreres, except, perhaps one, is happy to remain here. Therefore, it is not possible to create a reliable and stable atmosphere.

A good part of the week, beginning with Saturday, I have a headache, and I foresee that what I fear will come, which, a number of times I expressed to Father Manassero [the previous Provincial] with the statement, «I will finish, against my will, by becoming neurasthenic». I feel the effects of having been placed mistakenly here and there every year, and to have had the duty of taking charge here of affairs for which I had given the Superior unfavorable opinions. In my excitement, sometimes I cannot control what I think and what I would be forced to do.

Beginning this coming new year I have decided to give up everything next June, but if I continue in this way, I will be forced to do that much sooner. Many things which I see or which I believe I see and which I feel in myself, I cannot write.

I offer you my respect.

Devotedly in C. J.,  
R. Bergamo, S. C.”<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 7.

In spite of the above letter, Father Bergamo remained at Our Lady of Mercy Parish as Pastor and Superior of the Salesian community until the middle of September, 1928, at which time he was appointed the first Director of the newly opened Mary, Help of Christians School in Tampa.

### *2.5. Financial woes of our Lady of Mercy Parish*

The Great Depression struck in late October, 1929, with the crash of the stock market and the failure of banks around the country. As a consequence churches and organizations suffered losses also. The struggling Church of Our Lady of Mercy in Ybor City was no exception. Messrs. Lucas and Twomey were the attorneys for the Salesians in Tampa, and Father Pittini wrote to Mr. Lucas concerning the inability of the Pastor at Our Lady of Mercy church to pay the amortization payments on the \$50,000.00 loan. The following letter was written on February 18, 1931, by Mr. Lucas to Wm. C. Bitting, Jr. of Bitting & Co., an investment firm in Saint Louis, to which the loan was apparently to be paid:

“Gentlemen,

Re: \$50,000.00 Diocese of St. Augustine, First Mortgage 5% Serial Bonds for Salesian Fathers.

Reverend Richard Pittini, [sic] Provincial of the Salesian Fathers, on his annual visit, has requested me to write you in regard to the above loan.

It is possible, Father Provincial states, for the organization to pay the interest promptly, but nearly impossible to meet the amortization payments of \$2,000.00 due annually for the next three years, increasing upwards to \$6,000.00.

The failure of the Bank of Ybor City holding substantial funds of the Parish, coveting several annual principal installments, and the conditions which are countrywide, due to the present depression, makes it impossible to meet these amortization payments.

Father Provincial wishes to ask that the principal payments be deferred during the continuance of this depression.

If this request is possible of granting, on some definite terms, it will be greatly appreciated.

Prompt payment of interest is, of course, understood.

You will understand that this is a diocesan loan, under the administration of the Salesian Fathers, just as the Sacred Heart Church loan, in Tampa, is a diocesan loan under the administration of the Jesuit Fathers.

Father Provincial also stated that it is his hope to obtain relief, and avoid the necessity of calling the matter to the Bishop's attention.

Your prompt reply will be appreciated, as principal and interest payments on this loan are due April 1st, 1931.

With kind personal regards, I am,

Yours very truly,  
Thomas E. Lucas

P.S. I told the Father that I doubted the possibility of giving any relief [sic] as it is in a fixed bond issue”<sup>26</sup>.

Wm. C. Bitting, Jr. then wrote the following letter on February 20, 1931, to Rt. Rev. P. Barry, D.D.:

“Your Lordship and my dear Friend,  
In confidence, I am enclosing an original letter received this morning by airmail from Mr. Thomas E. Lucas of Tampa, together with a copy of my reply thereto, and of which reply I trust you approve.  
It is not quite clear to me why the Provincial of the Salesian Fathers should come to me about the inability of the Salesian Fathers to pay a maturity on April 1st, that is the obligation of the Bishop of St. Augustine. Nor is it clear to me how the Father Provincial thought he could obtain relief from us, and, to quote from Mr. Lucas’ letter, «avoid the necessity of calling the matter to the Bishop’s attention». For it seems to me that for us to discuss this matter with the Salesian Fathers, in any way, would be to violate the proprieties of the case, inasmuch as the obligation is yours, so far as the bondholders are concerned, not that of the Salesian Fathers.  
Of course, as I have told you so many times, we stand ready to lend you this, or any other money that you may desire, for any purpose whatsoever, so long as we have any command of credit.  
Awaiting your advices [sic] in the matter and with affectionate regards, I remain

Your Friend,  
Bill”<sup>27</sup>.

Bitting & Co. wrote a letter to Mr. Lucas on February 20, 1931, in answer to a February 18th letter of Mr. Lucas. The letter of Bitting & Co. is as follows:

“My dear Mr. Lucas,  
Re: Roman Catholic Bishop of St. Augustine, His Successor and Successors in Office, First Mortgage 5% \$50,000 Loan for Salesian Fathers at Tampa, Florida.  
I have your letter of February 18th, concerning the statement by the Rev. Richard Pettini, [sic] Provincial of the Salesian Fathers, and to the effect that while the Salesian Fathers will be able to pay interest promptly on this loan, they will not be able to pay the principal of \$2,000 due to be disbursed April 1, 1931, nor an equal amount of principal due in 1932 and 1933, owing to the failure of the Bank of Ybor

<sup>26</sup> Archives of the Diocese of St. Augustine. A xeroxed copy is in the archives of the Province of St. Philip, the Apostle, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

City, which held substantial funds of the Salesian Fathers, as well as to nationwide conditions.

Your letter communicated to us the wish of the Rev. Father Provincial that the principal payments be deferred during the continuance of the present depression. That, as I assume you explained to the Rev. Provincial, is totally impossible, because we do not own the loan, but have distributed it to investors, who expect fulfillment of the contract under which they purchased the securities.

I do not feel as though it would be proper for me to make any suggestions in the premises, owing to the fact that the obligation is that of His Lordship, the Rt. Rev. Bishop of St. Augustine, who, I believe, is the one to communicate with me concerning any aid, of any character, that he might desire in the fulfillment of this, his obligation, incurred on behalf of the Salesian Fathers.

However, en passant, it does occur to me that while this is a diocesan loan, nevertheless, the salesian Fathers constitute a «Community», whose sole source of income is not within the Diocese of St. Augustine. Accordingly, I should think that the Rev. Fathers would obtain help from their General Motherhouse in New Rochelle, New York, or elsewhere, rather than burdening the shoulders of the already heavily burdened Rt. Rev. Bishop.

Please again take this matter up with the Salesian Fathers, and if they cannot find means to meet the \$2,000 due April 1st, then immediately discuss the matter with Bishop Barry, as it must be settled forthwith.

With the assurance of my respect and kindest personal regards, I remain  
Very sincerely<sup>28</sup>.

The *Chronicle* of Mary, Help of Christians School in Tampa records that by the middle of September, 1928, that school was opened, and Father Rinaldo Bergamo was the Director<sup>29</sup>. Thus the Provincial heeded Father Bergamo's request for a transfer from Our Lady of Mercy.

The same *Chronicle* of Mary, Help of Christians School records on page 7, that towards the beginning of september, 1929, several changes in the personnel of the School were made. Regarding Father Bergamo, this is the statement in the *Chronicle*, "Father Bergamo was, at his own request, relieved of the responsibility [of Director of the School]." When Bishop Barry learned of this change, he wrote the following letter on September 14, 1929, to the Provincial, Father Richard Pittini.

"Very Rev. dear Fr. Provincial,

Your requests are hereby granted:

1. Permission to establish Archconfraternity of Mary Help of Christians in the salesian Churches of Tampa.
2. Permission to borrow cash in hand of Italian Mission for payment

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Chronicle, 1926-1939*, p. 4.

of debt of Our Lady of Mercy Church, such loan to be refunded to It. Mission later on.

Now, in regard to removal of Fr. Bergamo, it is my humble opinion that his talents and ability are very much needed in the new Salesian work in Tampa. He is very dear to me and I would deeply regret his transfer from the splendid work he has just inaugurated in Florida.

Of course I would not stand in the way of his promotion to higher position or in any way impede the designs of his superiors in his advancement but, until a suitable substitute replaces him in Tampa I would respectfully suggest that he be retained there.

I was out of town when your esteemed favor arrived, & [sic] I thank you for your kind generous prayers & [sic] remembrances of me both in Rome & [sic] my native land.

Gratefully yrs.  
P. Barry<sup>30</sup>.

## 2.6. *Holy orders at Mary Help of Christians School*

Bishop Patrick Barry was requested to confer Holy Orders on a Salesian at the Mary, Help of Christians school. With the following letter written on October 10, 1929, he accepted to confer the Orders.

“Dear Fr. Provincial,

I shall be free to proceed to ordain your young theologian beginning with Tonsure on November 18th next, dispensing interstices and concluding Major Orders that week. Please forward necessary papers and if you have any blank forms for certificates for each order you may include copies of them as I have no forms for such.

Ordinations may take place in orphanage chapel or in Our Lady of Mercy Church to suit your convenience.

Sincerely yrs,  
P. Barry<sup>31</sup>.

The *Chronicle* of Mary, Help of Christians School fully records the events of the ordination as follows:

“The Right Rev. Bishop P. Barry arrived at the Orphanage earlier than was expected. He was accompanied by Fr. Bergamo, S.C., and by Fr. McGill, Chancellor.

His Lordship remained with us until the 22nd. While here he conferred Holy Orders on Bro. Anthony Bregolato. On November 17, Sunday afternoon, he conferred the Tonsure; Monday morning the ostiariate and lectorate; Tuesday morning, exorcistate and acolytate; Wednesday, the Subdiaconate; Thursday, the Diaconate. The ceremonies took place in the School Chapel.

<sup>30</sup> Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 11.

The Priesthood was conferred at the Church of Our Lady of Mercy in Ybor City. Invitation to assist at the ceremony had been sent out to those who were expected to attend. Attendance was numerous. Fr. Bergamo was Archdeacon at all ordinations.

The Bishop was offered a \$50.00 check for his services, but he kindly refused the offer, stating he was only too glad to serve the Orphanage.

The first Mass of the newly Ordained took place in the School Chapel as Community Mass. A modest Banquet was served, followed by a simple reception given by the boys and Superiors.

The first Solemn High Mass was celebrated at Our Lady of Mercy's. The boys sang the Missa de Angelis, and then were entertained at the Rectory at dinner. After the singing of the Vespers and solemn Benediction, all returned"<sup>32</sup>.

### *2.7. Most Holy Name Mission Church*

Father Pittini wrote the following letter to Bishop Patrick Barry. The copy which is in the archives of New Rochelle, is a corrected draft of the letter and is undated.

“Your Excellency,

I respectfully submit to your Excellency's consideration, the problem connected with the future development of the Italian Mission in Ybor City, and its best solution, not to say the only one possible, to my way of thinking.

We kept so far there a “lonesome” priest, out of community, without means of life (the average Sunday collection is \$2.50), with relatively little work on account of local conditions, and no prospect in the future. On the other hand, the spiritual condition of the population is exceedingly miserable and something has to be done.

I propose Your Excellency to cede the place in perpetuity to our «Salesian Sisters», with the express condition that it is to be used for the development of such activities as their Constitutions impose on them and the local necessities request. That is: a) Festive and daily oratory for the catechetical training of the youth. b) Daily teaching of sewing, embroidery, cooking and whatever may train poor girls for life. c) Nursery and daily grammar school. d) Promotion of Religious life in the neighborhood. The fact of them being the owners of the Place will lay on them the financial burden of their existence and activities, which could never be carried on by the Mission itself.

I may assure Your Excellency that the «Salesian Sisters», will work wonderful things in the Italian colony of Ybor City as they are working everywhere, and are working just now in W. Tampa, where the Church, almost empty a few years ago, is now to be enlarged in order to contain the faithful.

If Your Excellency is favorably disposed toward this solution, I shall do

<sup>32</sup> *Chronicle, 1926-1939*, p. 8.

my best to convince the Provincial of the Sisters, to accept it, even facing certain obstacles especially at the beginning. In this case, I would withdraw the “lonesome” priest to the near community of Our Lady of Mercy, and from there he would attend the moral needs of both the population and the Sisters”<sup>33</sup>.

Since the above is a rough draft of the letter, it is unsigned, but from the following reply from Bishop Barry, written on December 30, 1932, to the Provincial, it is understood that Father Pittini, who was the Provincial, wrote the above letter. Here is Bishop Barry’s answer:

“Dear Fr. Provincial,  
 The Italian mission property has the same status as all other Church property in the Diocese. It is in the name of the bishop & [sic] for the Italian Church. The Bishop has no discretion to dispose of it for any organization. I believe there is a special clause, at least an understanding, that it must be held for benefit of Italian Church.  
 The property was originally deeded in trust to Fr. Dente, S. J. & [sic] afterwards at insistence of the Ap. Delegate & [sic] myself formally deeded to the Bishop.  
 Your proposed plan is certainly a good one – the placing of the Salesian Sisters there. The only difficulty in the way being the restriction placed upon us to hold the property for the Italian Church.  
 Why cannot it be used in same manner as the rest of the Church property now in charge of your Fathers? The priest in charge of the It. Mission could scarcely be called a «lonesome man» as he is within a few squares of Our Lady of Mercy Community & [sic] not near as far away as the W. Tampa priest who seems to be so successful. The Sisters could use the property certainly for the purposes outlined by you, the title still remaining as it is now. Whatever good can be done or hoped for in that mission must necessarily have our approval and I would feel very sorry to mark the word «failure» in that mission.  
 With every good wish for progress and prosperity in the New Year, I am,  
 Sincerely yrs.  
 P. Barry”<sup>34</sup>.

## 2.8. *The Salesian Sisters*

There is no extant record of Father Pittini’s communications to the Provincial of the Salesian sisters concerning the Italian Mission. However, the following letter to Father Pittini, written on January 25, 1933, clearly indicates that he did write to her about that Mission.

“Dear Reverend Father Provincial,

<sup>33</sup> Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

I received your Postal Card in which you express the desire to know my impressions about the Italian Mission, and willingly, before leaving Florida, I briefly state them as follows:

1. Considering the present critical financial conditions, it is impossible to start a school. There is little hope of success.
2. The cottage is very small for such purpose and it wouldn't be at all appealing, not even for a starting.
3. The economical problem is completely out of consideration, as there is no starting point.
4. The only thing that seems possible for the present moment and that seems leaving some hope of success is the opening of a kindergarten, daily catechism classes, sewing classes, Sunday and daily oratory. Of course the Sisters have to rely on the little income from the kindergarten and on the help of Divine Providence, as I saw that the conditions of the Church are entirely too poor to give them any salary.

With the approval of the provincial council and the one of our Rev. Mother General, I am willing to start next September the work in that mission, beginning as I said above. But it would be necessary to build at least two large rooms, one to use as kindergarten, and the other as sewing class, etc.

As you, Very Rev. Father recommended me in your last letter, I kept the matter secret to every one, except to dear Mrs. Neve, who encouraged me very much to start in the way mentioned above, and leave the idea of a school, for the present.

I am leaving for the North, and please, Rev. Father, if this my statement meets your approval, kindly let me know it, so that I may consider the matter with the Provincial Chapter [Council] and write immediately to the Very Rev. Mother General for the approval.

With cordial regards and imploring the blessings of God upon your days of permanence here in Florida, I remain

Sincerely Yours in J. C.,  
sr. Antonietta Pollini, Provincial"<sup>35</sup>.

The Salesian Sisters did come to the little Italian Mission of the Most Holy Name in Ybor City. They came in 1933, while the Salesian, Father

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 14.

<sup>36</sup> Archives of the Diocese of St. Augustine, *Los Compleanos de San Augustin*. A xeroxed copy is in the Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 21.

Anthony Besozzi was born at Bollate (Milan, Italy), on August 8, 1894. He came to the United States as a missionary in 1922 and had his novitiate in New Rochelle, New York, from 1923 to 1924. He professed triennial vows in 1924. Perpetual vows followed in 1927. After philosophical studies he taught at Goshen and New Rochelle from 1925 to 1928. His last two years of theology were in Turin, and he was ordained a priest there on July 6, 1930. His priestly work was at Mary, Help of Christians School in Tampa, Florida; in Our Lady of Mercy Parish and in Most Holy Name Mission, both in Ybor City. He moved to Transfiguration Parish in New York City when the Salesians left Ybor City in 1934. From 1935 to 1936 he was a teacher and confessor at Salesian High School in New Rochelle. Father Besozzi then returned to Italy. Eventually he left the Society.

Anthony Besozzi<sup>36</sup>, was in charge of the Mission. The Sisters soon found a warm welcome and were surrounded by a crowd of children and adults. They wholeheartedly dedicated all their time and energies, with an admirable spirit of sacrifice, in school work, evening and day classes of catechism, sewing classes and festive Oratory.

But, the Salesian Sisters had already come to Tampa in September, 1930, at the request of Father Luis Conde<sup>37</sup>, who was the Pastor of St. Joseph Church in West Tampa. Their work began with three sisters whose living quarters were an old factory purchased and adapted for the purpose. It was located at 2004 Armenia Avenue. The parochial school annexed to St. Joseph Church was entrusted to them. With that went also catechism classes for children of the public schools and for adults, sewing classes, evening classes, plus an after school and festive oratory.

A noticeable awakening of religious spirit and practice soon rewarded the Sisters' labors, even in West Tampa, where countless obstacles and long years of indifference and forgetfulness of Catholic doctrines, had almost wiped away any sign of Catholicity<sup>38</sup>.

### 3. The withdrawal

#### 3.1. *One Pastor's Views*

Father Peter Mayerhofer was appointed Pastor at Our Lady of Mercy Church on September 5, 1931. He wrote no less than twentyseven letters to Father Ambrose Rossi<sup>39</sup>, the Provincial, from January 3, 1934 until August 30, 1934. Sad to say, every letter contained some sort of complaint, about either his own unhappiness at being there, or his dissatisfaction with one of his assistants whom he names, or the lack of sufficient income. After Father Rossi had told him, in confidence, that the Salesians would be leaving the

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Rossi Ambrose was born in Cortenova (Lecco, Italy), on April 23, 1893. On September 23, 1923, he was ordained a priest. From 1925 until 1930, he was the Director of the Missionary Institute Cardinal Cagliero, in Ivrea, Turin, Italy, and from 1930 to 1933, he was the Director of the Institute Conte Rebaudengo, in Turin, Italy. From 1933 to 1941, Father Rossi was the Provincial of the New Rochelle Province, and for a time also of the San Francisco together. The latter Province included Australia in those years. In 1944, he was assigned to the Institute Don Rua in El Salvador. There his piety and zeal prompted him to build a magnificent church in honor of Mary, Help of Christians. Father Rossi died on March 26, 1964, in the City of San Salvador. Cf the funeral homily for Father Ambrose Rossi by

three parishes, he occasionally expressed his relief at the prospect of relinquishing the responsibility of being Pastor. All of Father Mayerhofer's twenty-seven letters are in the archives of the Province of New Rochelle<sup>40</sup>.

Apparently Father Mayerhofer wrote to Bishop Barry about his inability to pay the interest on the debt at Our Lady of Mercy Church. Father's letter is not extant, but the following letter was written by Bishop Barry to Father Mayerhofer on March 13, 1934:

"Dear Fr. Peter,

On my return from the E.C. Missions I found your letter informing me of your financial difficulty & [sic] your inability to meet it. I wonder what you have been doing or whether you took your congregation [of Our Lady of Mercy Parish] into your confidence to help in the business. What entertainments, special efforts or collections did you have? Now you have only about \$100 to meet the half-yearly interest without speaking of any principal. That is certainly very bad. When your predecessors contracted the debt they must have had a good idea of their ability to take care of it. It was not much for a large parish if any enthusiasm were put into it.

I have so many obligations all over the diocese that I can't afford to carry this load for you. I have borrowed & [sic] borrowed & [sic] get no help from you.

The enclosed check of \$1,000 is being sent to you now in the hope that you will do some work toward paying it back. You shall sign the enclosed «note» which covers the amount already borrowed from the bishop & [sic] return it to me immediately.

The interest should go forward to Bitting Co. as soon as possible to pay the coupons held by the bondholders & [sic] must be ready on date of payment, April 1st, to prevent default.

Sincerely yrs.,  
P. Barry"<sup>41</sup>.

### *3.2. Salesians return the three Churches to the Diocese*

From a letter written on March 10, 1934, to Bishop Barry, we learn that already on December 23, 1933, Father Ambrose Rossi began the process of withdrawing the Salesians from the three churches in Ybor City and West Tampa. He had met the Bishop at Mary Help of Christians School on that date and had wanted to terminate the stay of the salesians at the end of June, 1934<sup>42</sup>. In answer to Father Rossi's letter, Bishop Barry wrote the following letter:

"Very Rev. dear Fr. Provincial,

In reply to yours received yesterday I beg to state that it is my under-

<sup>40</sup> Archives, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, folder 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 16.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 18.

standing that no definite date was mentioned for withdrawing your confreres from the missions in Tampa. Eight or nine months was mentioned & [sic] the reason alleged was the order of your general Superior to withdraw from small missions. of course I do not dispute this action nor do I criticise [sic] it.

However, I respectfully submit that the missions are not small as there are about 40,000 Catholics or more in the three missions involved. There are schools caring for at least one thousand children, not small, tho [sic] a great majority of the children of the Latins go to the public schools. The Salesian Fathers soon after their arrival in the diocese contracted a debt of fifty thousand dollars to enlarge the school in Ybor City. This was a bond issue, a small portion of which has been paid & [sic] we are now refunding the outstanding bonds to prevent default.

In view of these important matters I feel that it would be untrue to call them small missions & [sic] the work unworthy of the missionary zeal of your Fathers.

Now to come to another important consideration, I have some men to be ordained in June and those men cannot report for duty before October 1st. It would not be possible for me to take over before that date. If your superiors insist, of course I shall have no way to provide for the care of those missions. It would be a bad thing to abandon them even for four months. Your men know the difficulties & [sic] the uphill work necessary to keep the remnant of these people in the fold & [sic] to abandon them even for one week would be disastrous.

I am, therefore, imploring you to let them remain until October 1st next when they may ease out quietly & [sic] without raising turmoil & [sic] disturbance.

Sincerely yrs,  
P. Barry<sup>43</sup>.

Father Rossi answered the above letter on March 21, 1934 as follows:

“Your Excellency,

I have to apologize not to have immediately answered the letter I received from Your Excellency. It was for the motive that I wanted to see how I could arrange in order to be able to let my priests stay in their parishes not till June only but till October 1st, 1934, according to Your Excellency's desire.

I did my best, and with some sacrifice and with the help of my confrere from the Province of California, who happened to be here, I think I will succeed in solving my problem for the months of July and August.

I would very respectfully implore Your Excellency to share some part of the sacrifice, by letting my priests free at the beginning of september, when I will be in a real need of them.

We are so sorry to withdraw from those three parishes, and sorry we are

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

to withdraw from several others in this Province of ours. But since the order is coming from very high, we feel sure to do God's Holy Will.

Asking Your Excellency for your precious blessing, I remain

Your humble servant,  
Rev. A. R. Rossi  
Provincial"<sup>44</sup>.

On August 15, 1934, Father Rossi wrote the following letter to Bishop Barry, reminding him of the terms in the above letter:

"Your Excellency,

As I had written to Your Excellency on March 21, 1934, I am in the necessity of withdrawing my priests from the three churches in Tampa, by the end of this month. I have therefore told them to be ready to give their books, their accounts, and all indications to those whom Your Excellency will appoint to take their places. I would humbly ask Your Excellency to let me know on what day I might consider them completely free.

In the meantime, I beseech the paternal heart of Your Excellency to benignly forgive every fault of theirs. The salesians will do their best not only to carry on, but also to improve and develop their peculiar work for the poorest boys of the Diocese at the Orphanage, always anxious to please Your Excellency and to deserve your blessings, which are a token of the blessings from Heaven.

With very respectful regards, I remain

Your humble servant,  
Rev. A. R. Rossi, Provincial"<sup>45</sup>.

On August 17, 1934, Bishop Barry answered the above letter as follows:

"Verv Rev. dear Fr. Provincial,

In reply to yours of 15th instant, I beg to inform you that I shall have two priests in Ybor City, Tampa, on the 22nd instant to take over the work. Two others will arrive by the end of the month and release your Fathers according to your Orders. It is with regret that I accept this change. However, since it is the order of your superiors, I cordially submit my own desires in the matter & [sic] hope good for all may result from the withdrawal.

I heartily commend the zeal and piety of the Fathers who have been laboring in this difficult field. They made great sacrifices to minister to the Latins of Tampa, who in most instances failed to respond to their charitable ministrations. The financial support received from the congregation of Our Lady of Mercy was inadequate to meet the obligations of the parish, and consequently the Fathers laboring so faithfully there were sorely handicapped. I sincerely hope that the good Fathers who have been with us for some time may be very happy in the new labors to be entrusted to them & [sic]

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

I thank them all and impart to them my Episcopal benedictions.

Sincerely yrs.,  
P. Barry Bp. of St. Augustine<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.3. *The arrival of the Redemptorists*

The priests who took over the care of the three churches were the Redemptorists. Father John Hosey, CSSR was the Pastor at Our Lady of Mercy Parish. From Don Bosco Seminary in Newton, New Jersey, Father Ambrose Rossi, the Salesian Provincial, wrote the following welcoming letter on September 7, 1934, to the Redemptorists:

“Rev. and dear Father,

Allow me to give you and all your Confreres who came to take up the three churches my hearty welcome. I feel glad that the Sons of St. Alphonsus enter a field for which they have a special vocation and a wonderful training. I am sure it is a great benefit for the souls of the three parishes.

I hope my priests have given you all the indications and explanations you wanted. I am only sorry you have found such a debt, part of which even towards the Salesian Congregation. We will pray that you may be able to obtain also material correspondence to your work.

If you happen to notice any deficiency for which my Confreres may be responsible, please cover it with the mantle of religious charity. Any remark you would send me, would be fraternally appreciated.

May your zeal and labors be crowned with a happy success in the vineyard of God.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,  
Rev. A. R. Rossi Provincial<sup>47</sup>.

To the above letter, Father Hosey sent the following reply on September 10, 1934, to Father Rossi:

“Very Reverend and dear Father,

Your very kind favor of the 7th instant reached me this morning and I hasten to thank you for your good wishes and the promise of your prayers.

I wish to take occasion of this opportunity to assure Your Reverence that the Redemptorist Fathers of Tampa, Florida, are deeply indebted to the good priests of your Congregation for all the wise counsels, fraternal relations and splendid example they have received from them during the time we have been permitted to know them here in Tampa. The Salesian Fathers have done good work and their memory will live in the gratitude of the people for whom they made so many sacrifices. We hope to bring into our new field here some of the zeal and charity that were so charac-

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, folder 19.

teristic of men such as Fathers Peter, Conde, and Anthony. Father Rinaldi and the confreres at the Orphanage have also been very kind and we have every assurance that the mutual relations so auspiciously begun will continue.

We have assumed all the obligations, responsibilities and joys and sorrows of the three places and in obedience to God's will and in a spirit of faith we shall do the best we can. The angels cannot do more.

Again thanking Your Reverence for your kind letter and assuring you and your worthy Community of our prayers for your continued success in your noble work, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
John J. Hosey, CSSR<sup>48</sup>.

During the 1930s the *Great Depression* was raging, and the Province of New Rochelle was in the throes of a very heavy financial burden due to construction costs for the Salesian schools in New Rochelle, New York; Goshen, New York; and Newton, New Jersey.

Consequently, it is hardly any wonder that Father Rossi, on December 29, 1934, wrote the following letter to the Superior at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Tampa, Florida:

“Rev. and dear Father,

At this time of the year, just when we are about to start our new calendars, the various problems we shall have to solve beginning with the very first days of January, come up rather vividly before our mind. The depression has not helped smooth sailing to be sure, and the waters ahead still look rough and angry. This is why I am forced to look around for some «last straws» to avoid being altogether immersed in financial difficulties.

I believe that just because you have your own problems, you will sympathize with me if I drop a line to see whether you could help me along a bit. If your Church would be in a position to send me some little amount from the \$12,000.00 loaned by our Congregation to the Parish of Our Lady of Mercy at Tampa, or at least some of the interest, what a godsend it would be! Believe me, dear Father, it is hard necessity that compels me to write to you. I am sure you will readily understand.

I wish to take occasion to wish you and all your good Fathers the choicest blessings of our Divine Savior throughout the New Year. May our dear Lord help us to meet our obligations in the coming year with less difficulty than heretofore. Let us hope that the clouds of this depression may quickly be removed from us all.

With kindest regards, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
Rev. A. R. Rossi Provincial<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

There is no extant reply to the above letter, but we can assume there was an answer, for in time the debt of \$12,000.00 was paid to the Salesians.

Two Redemptorist Fathers arrived on August 21, 1934, to take charge of the three churches, but Father Peter Mayerhofer<sup>50</sup> remained in order to inform the Redemptorists about the affairs of the three churches. Father Mayerhofer left Ybor City on September 4 of that year and took up new duties as Confessor and financial administrator in Hope Haven, the recently opened Salesian school in Marrero, Louisiana.

The two Redemptorist Fathers paid a visit to Mary, Help of Christians school on August 22. There the School band entertained them with a few pieces, and Father Louis Rinaldi<sup>51</sup> extended to them a warm welcoming speech. Father Hosey, the priest who was to be the Pastor, replied with a few very pleasant remarks about the school and the work of the Salesians<sup>52</sup>.

## Epilogue

When the Salesians turned the care of the three churches over to the Redemptorist Fathers, Our Lady of Mercy Church was a wooden building in a corner lot at 17th Street and 10th Avenue. St. Joseph's in West Tampa and Most Holy Name parishes also had wooden churches, and like Our Lady of Mercy, conducted parish schools. Both of the latter schools were staffed by the Salesian Sisters.

During their stay in Ybor City, the Salesians at our Lady of Mercy

<sup>50</sup> Peter Mayerhofer was born on June 27, 1880 in Bavaria (Germany). He was a novice at Ivrea (Turin - Italy) in 1901, and professed triennial vows on October 1, 1902. He was sent to Mexico in 1904. There he had his practical training and was ordained on December 4, 1910. When persecution broke out, he came to the United States. Here he exercised his apostolate in parishes, and lastly in Hope Haven, Marrero, Louisiana, from 1934 until he died at DePaul Hospital in New Orleans, LA., on September 7, 1964, at the age of 84. Father Mayerhofer spoke German, English, Spanish, and Italian. He was a priest 54 years and 62 years a Salesian. Cf the obituary letter for Peter Mayerhofer.

<sup>51</sup> Louis Rinaldi was born on October 28, 1902, in Lu Monferrato (Alessandria, Italy). His grand uncle was Blessed Philip Rinaldi. At first he went to medical school and later decided to become a Salesian. Louis came to the United States as a missionary in October, 1922, and was a novice under Father Francis Binelli. He professed in 1923. His last year of theology was in Turin, and he was ordained in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians. Back in the United States, he at first worked at Salesian High School in New Rochelle, New York; then in Tampa as a parish curate in Ybor City, then as Catechist (Director of Religious Activities) in Mary, Help of Christians School in Tampa. In 1932 he was appointed Director of that School. From then on until he died on July 22, 1956, he was a Director in different schools. Father Louis was 53 years old, 33 years a Salesian, and 27 years a priest. Cf the obituary letter for Father Louis Rinaldi.

<sup>52</sup> *Chronicle, 1926-1939*, p. 44, August 21 and September 4, 1934.

Church added to the school erected by the Jesuits in 1921, an extensive wing with classrooms, study hall, and rooms for the teaching staff. The Sisters of St. Joseph were in charge of our Lady of Mercy school. The Salesians at the churches labored tirelessly in the formation of parish societies and instruction of the young.

There was much cooperation with the Salesians at Mary Help of Christians School and vice versa. All the Salesians in Tampa celebrated Don Bosco's Beatification in 1929 at Our Lady of Mercy Church. Salesians from the School helped with Sunday services at the three churches, and those from the parishes occasionally preached or heard confessions at the School<sup>53</sup>.

The various churches in Ybor City during those early years were unable to assimilate or Americanize the Latin immigrants. The reasons were largely external to church policies. Ignorance shown by clerics and protestant proselytizers of the sociocultural backgrounds of the Latins, and the political infighting within the Catholic church in Florida, influenced developments. Also, the weakness of the Catholic church and its protestant rivals in Ybor City was in direct proportion to the strength of the mutual aid societies, labor unions, and radical groups, and to their ideology.

Neither Catholics nor Protestants succeeded in challenging the apathy and even hostility toward organized religion in Ybor City. These feelings were in each of the Latin ethnic groups. These factors prevented full Americanization and assimilation of those groups of people.

Until well into the 1930s there was a continuance of folk religious practices apart from formal church connection, as well as the avoidance of church attendance by males, and a strong attachment to clubs which opposed participation by the church. Whatever success organized religion enjoyed occurred mostly among immigrant women<sup>54</sup>.

In a 1935 letter to the Apostolic Delegate to America, an exasperated Bishop Patrick Barry of St. Augustine assessed the work of the Tampa church. Responding to questions concerning the condition of Italians in this location he explained:

“There are members who should belong to the Church of many nationalities in Tampa, who never attend services, never receive the sacraments and whose lack of interest and support of church and school may be attributed to their membership in secret societies condemned by the Church.

Some of the more prosperous Italians in Tampa belong to condemned societies and they are never seen in our churches nor do they send their

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-44, passim.

<sup>54</sup> G. R. MORMINO - G. E. POZZETTA, *The immigrant world...*, pp. 228-229.

children to the Catholic schools. The poorer classes, who look up to these leaders amongst them, copy their example and follow them in absence from church and sacraments.

This indifference to the desires of the church in their regard is not peculiar to the Italians alone. The Spaniards, Cubans, and other nationalities are equally at fault in this report, and no amount of zeal and effort on the part of Jesuits, Salesians and Redemptorists has been able to convert them to the practices of religion. For fifty years and more, zealous, unselfish priests and sisters have exhausted themselves in trying to save these people, and their reward must be sought in heaven for they receive no earthly one<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.