



Volume II, Issue 1

Don Bosco

Insights

A Publication of the Province of St. Philip the Apostle



Celebrating



*the legacy of
Mary Help of
Christians,
Tampa
1928-2028*

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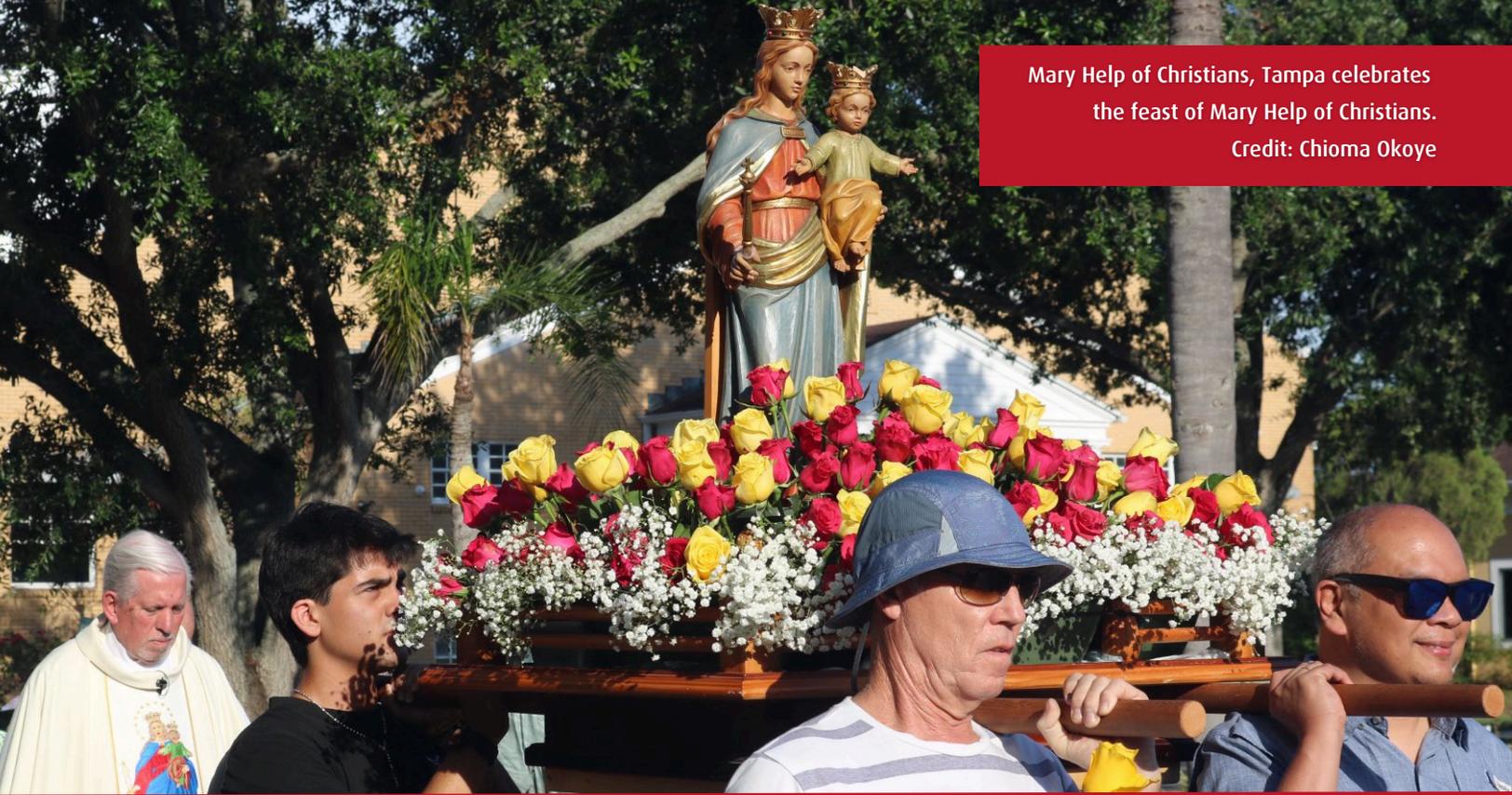
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**Closing
A Four-Dimensional Journey**

Photo credits | Cover: Chioma Okoye

In This Issue: Mary Help of Christians Center, Chioma Okoye, and Julia St. Clair





Mary Help of Christians, Tampa

A Century of Faith, Hope, and Youthful Spirit (1928–2028)

In 2028, Mary Help of Christians in Tampa will commemorate an extraordinary milestone: 100 years of joyful service, spiritual formation, and community outreach — a century since its founding in 1928. What began as a humble act of generosity and faith has grown into one of the most beloved Catholic institutions in the Tampa Bay area, honoring its Salesian heritage and the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

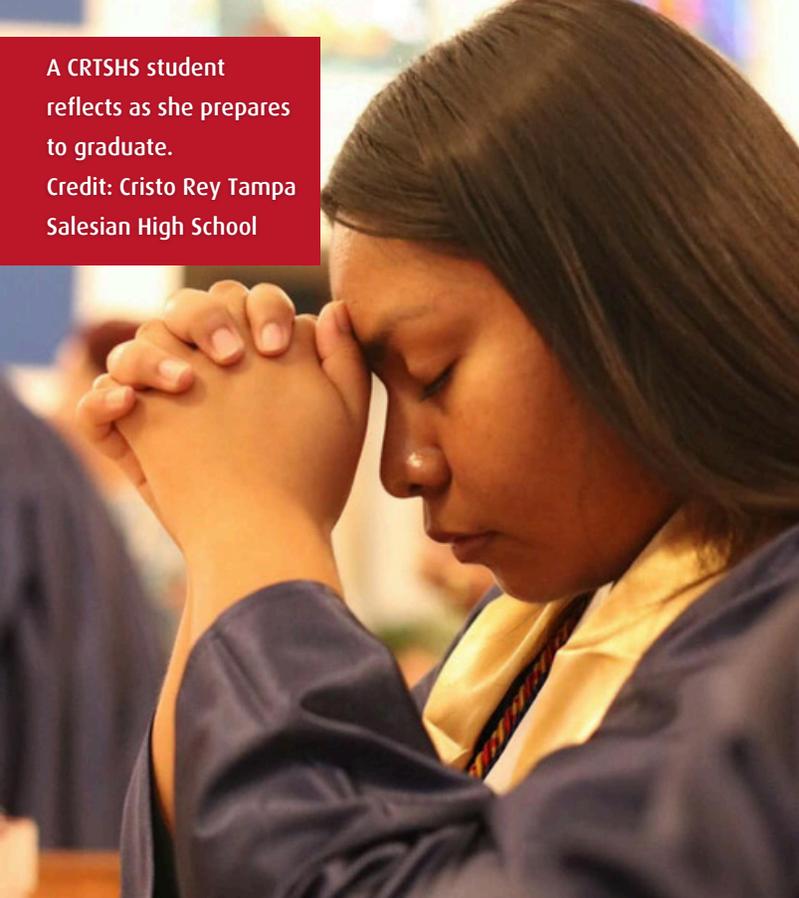
A Gift of Faith and Compassion

The story of Mary Help of Christians began in 1928 when Alicia Gonzalez Neve donated over a hundred acres of land on East Lake to the Salesians of Don Bosco for the establishment of an orphanage for boys — an institution rooted in the Salesian charism of education, accompaniment, and love for young people. Her gift — property, home, and savings — reflected a profound trust in God's providence and a deep commitment to youth in need. The orphanage was later known as the Mary Help of Christians School, modeled after Don Bosco's Oratory at Valdocco in Turin, Italy, the birthplace of the Salesian mission.

From Orphanage to Center of Service

Through the decades, the campus evolved with the changing needs of the Church and community. What started as a boarding school offering grades 1–12 became a day school and later, as enrollment declined, transitioned into the Mary Help of Christians Center in the early 21st century. Rather than closing its doors, the Salesians reimagined their mission — expanding from education into a multifaceted center offering spiritual retreats, youth programs, parish life, and community outreach.

A CRTSHS student reflects as she prepares to graduate.
Credit: Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School



Staff and campers at Camp Mary Help participate in arts and crafts.
Credit: Chioma Okoye



Today, Mary Help of Christians encompasses:

- A vibrant Catholic parish serving families throughout the region with daily Mass, sacramental life, and ministries. The Korean Catholic Mission of Tampa is attached to the parish.
- Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School, a dynamic school providing quality education grounded in faith and real-world work experiences for students from underserved communities.
- Retreat and youth programs, including summer camps and Antioch retreat experiences, designed to deepen spiritual growth.
- Unique community attractions like Mary Has a Little Farm and events that welcome families and groups to experience God's creation in a spirit of joy and learning.
- A home for elderly Salesians. It houses men who have given of themselves to their very end to Christ's mission in the charism of Don Bosco.

Rooted in Salesian Spirituality

The heart of Mary Help of Christians is its Salesian spirit — an approach to ministry drawn from the example of St. John Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, which emphasizes reason, religion,

and loving-kindness. This spirituality views every young person as beloved by God and fosters environments that are welcoming, joyful, and formative.

The Salesian mission at Mary Help of Christians continues to prioritize serving young people and families, especially those who face economic and social challenges. Through parish ministries, youth outreach, education, and pastoral care, the center embodies Don Bosco's conviction that every young person deserves hope and opportunity.

A Journey of Faith and Outreach

Over its long history, Mary Help of Christians has become more than an institutional presence — it has become a spiritual home for thousands of individuals and families. The parish church and Good Shepherd Chapel are places of daily prayer, Eucharistic celebration, and encounter with Christ. The center also welcomes pilgrims and visitors drawn by its rich collection of sacred relics and devotional spaces.

For decades, parishioners and volunteers have lived out the Catholic call to mercy and service — from feeding the hungry and supporting families in need to fostering faith formation



CRTSHS students during their pilgrimage to Italy.
Credit: Chioma Okoye

The heart of Mary Help of Christians is its Salesian spirit — an approach to ministry drawn from the example of St. John Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, which emphasizes reason, religion, and loving-kindness. This spirituality views every young person as beloved by God and fosters environments that are welcoming, joyful, and formative.

across generations. These works of charity and evangelization echo the very name of the community: Mary, Help of Christians — invoking the Blessed Virgin as protector and guide.

Looking Ahead to 2028 and Beyond

As the century mark approaches, the Tampa community is preparing celebrations that not only honor the past but also inspire future generations to continue the Salesian mission. Events, liturgies, and community projects are being envisioned to commemorate how far the center has come — from its humble beginnings to a dynamic Catholic presence deeply woven into the spiritual life of the Tampa area.

The centennial is more than a milestone; it is a testament to faithfulness, transformation, and hope — rooted in Mary’s maternal care and carried forward by those who continue to serve, educate, and proclaim the Gospel with joy.

Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB
Vice Provincial

Archival photo of Mary Help of Christians, Tampa.
Credit: Mary Help of Christians Center



A (Brief) History of the Salesian Presence in Tampa

By Julia St. Clair, Province Communications Director

THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO ARRIVED IN FLORIDA in 1926. Although they took over St. Joseph Catholic Church and Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church, the Salesians were not at either parish for long. Very much in line with the motif of Don Bosco's life, Divine Providence led a widow named Alicia Gonzales Neve to notice the Salesians. From there, she resonated with the Salesian mission and became the order's benefactor.

Lovingly referred to as "Mrs. Neve" by the Salesian Family of Tampa to this day, she donated acres of land in Tampa to the Salesian priests and brothers to open an orphanage for boys styled after Don Bosco's Oratory at Valdocco in Turin, Italy. After stewardship of both parishes was handed on, the Salesians began to pour their work into what would become Mary Help of Christians in Tampa.

"The [Mary Help of Christians] property is [its] history," Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School coach and theology teacher Keith Aeschbach proclaimed. "Well into the 1970s, they had shops built to teach boys trades like Don Bosco at Valdocco. For example, the woodshop is where the boys built all the pews that are still

inside Mary Help of Christians Church, and my classroom is in the old woodshop! Although these boys didn't have families, this was their family."

Mrs. Neve's love for the Salesians was not just for the priests and brothers, but for the sisters, too. "Mrs. Neve's house is now Villa Madonna School," Fr. Jay Horan, SDB, shared. "She invited the Salesian Sisters to come down and became attached to them. So, she gave her house to the sisters and moved into the gardener's house."

Mrs. Neve put the young and the poor in Tampa first, even when she was dying of cancer. "She still supported Mary Help and Villa Madonna and refused to take expensive pain meds," Fr. Jay revealed. "Fr. Joseph Kormann went to see her to convince her to take the medication. She told him, 'I'm not wasting money on pain medication when those boys are hungry.'"

The Salesian Family remains grateful to Mrs. Neve and her spirit of loving-kindness to this day.



“A True Salesian Home” Mary Help of Christians Parish

By Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB, and Julia St. Clair

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS STANDS TODAY as a living testimony to faith, perseverance, and the unmistakable charism of St. John Bosco. Its story is one of transition, providence, and unity — blending the heritage of Good Shepherd Parish with the long-standing Salesian presence in Tampa.

The Early Years: School, Chapel, and Community

For decades, the Mary Help of Christians Chapel primarily served the young boys who boarded at the Salesian school. The campus was alive with the spirit of Don Bosco — prayer, study, recreation, and formation. Holy Mass in the chapel was central to daily life.

Though the chapel was intended for the students, a small number of local Catholics from the surrounding neighborhoods began attending Mass there as well. They were drawn to the reverence of the liturgy and the welcoming spirit of the Salesian priests and brothers.

Not far from the campus stood Good Shepherd Catholic Church, a parish established to serve Catholics in East Tampa.

Good Shepherd Parish was canonically established in 1966 within the Diocese of St. Petersburg. It served the growing Catholic population of East Tampa and the surrounding communities. Historical reporting from the *Tampa Bay Times* in 1999 indicates that Good Shepherd likely began in the early 1960s as a mission parish before being formally erected as a canonical parish.

For many years, Good Shepherd was a vibrant parish community. However, as the decades passed, even though the Church in the United States grew, there was a shortage of priests. Eventually, the diocese made the difficult decision to close Good Shepherd Parish.

Rather than allowing their community to dissolve, parishioners asked the diocese for permission to attend Mass at the nearby Mary Help of Christians Chapel. Many were already attending there with the boarding students. Gradually, the life of Good Shepherd and Mary Help of Christians became intertwined.

Fr. Steve Dumais holds a sign to advertise the parish's community outreach.
Credit: Chioma Okoye



Two youths at Mary Help of Christians Parish prepare to bring up the gifts during Mass.
Credit: Chioma Okoye



Diocesan documentation from the 2021 anniversary listings reflects this union clearly, listing the parish under one founding entry: Good Shepherd/Mary Help of Christians — a recognition that the present parish community is rooted in both histories.

A Providential Return: The Salesians Take Over

One of the most touching chapters in this history involves Deacon Ed Anctil. Years earlier, he had been a Salesian brother assigned to Mary Help of Christians during its boarding school days. While serving there, he discerned that God was calling him not to the priesthood, but to married life.

"This is where I met my wife, Lorraine; she was here before I was!" he recalls warmly.

He was ordained to the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of St. Petersburg in 1997 and assigned to Good Shepherd Catholic Church — located just one mile north of Mary Help of Christians.

Then came an unexpected turn of events.

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On July 1, 1998, at the request of Bishop Robert Lynch, the Salesians of Don Bosco were entrusted with the pastoral care of Good Shepherd Parish. Fr. Bill Keane, SDB, who served as director of Mary Help of Christians (1997–2003), became the first Salesian pastor of the parish.

"In God's sense of humor," Deacon Ed shared, "He sent me right back to Mary Help of Christians, where it all started."

"This is where my heart lies and always has," he said joyfully. "It's a blessing that the Lord has called me back here to minister with and for the Salesians."

What seemed like a coincidence was, in truth, Providence. The parish and the Salesian community were being united more fully than ever before.

A Parish Becomes Truly Salesian

The transition did not go unnoticed. Long-time parish manager and member Pam Brewer observed the gradual transformation.



East Lake, which borders the grounds of Mary Help of Christians, Tampa.
Credit: Julia St. Clair

“Salesian priests are extremely patient and understanding.”



Presentation of the gifts at Mass at Mary Help of Christians Parish.
Credit: Chioma Okoye

“[The parish] gradually became Salesian,” Pam explained. “I felt the difference, especially toward youth and being service-oriented, as Salesian priests are extremely patient and understanding. It’s been amazing being in a Salesian community.”

Under Salesian leadership, the parish deepened its identity:

- A strong focus on youth ministry
- A family-centered atmosphere
- A spirit of joyful service
- Patience and pastoral care rooted in Don Bosco’s Preventive System

The parish was no longer simply near the Salesians — it had become a true Salesian parish.

Relics and Devotion: A Pilgrim Church

Over the decades, Mary Help of Christians Parish has grown into a vibrant spiritual center known far beyond Tampa.

One of its most remarkable treasures is its extensive collection of around 700 relics of saints. These include relics of apostles, popes, martyrs, and many lesser-known holy men and women. Available for veneration, these relics draw pilgrims, visitors, and parishioners into deeper devotion and communion with the saints.



Outdoor Mass at Mary Help overlooking East Lake
Credit: Chioma Okoye

This rich devotional life reflects both Catholic tradition and Salesian spirituality — leading souls to holiness through tangible encounters with grace.

Sacraments and Liturgical Life

The parish offers a full schedule of Masses celebrated in both the main church and the Good Shepherd Chapel.

The Good Shepherd Chapel continues to live on — especially for weekday Masses and Korean-language liturgies — preserving the historical memory of the parish’s origins.

The sacramental life of the parish remains vibrant, as it offers:

- Daily and Sunday Mass
- Confessions
- Baptisms and weddings
- Eucharistic devotion
- Marian celebrations

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The legacy of Good Shepherd is not forgotten. It lives in the chapel’s name and in the canonical record linking the 1966 founding of Good Shepherd Parish to the present Mary Help of Christians Parish.

A Foundation Built on Two Great Loves

Today’s parish stands on a foundation shaped by:

- The shepherding care of Good Shepherd leadership
- The maternal protection of Mary Help of Christians
- The joyful Salesian charism of St. John Bosco

It is a parish where the Good Shepherd continues to guide His flock, and where Mary continues to intercede for Christians of all ages.

Today and Into the Future

Mary Help of Christians Parish remains a vibrant Salesian-charism community deeply committed to:

Statue of Don Bosco at the entrance
of Mary Help of Christians, Tampa
Credit: Bro. Kevin White, SDB



“[Mary Help of Christians,
Tampa] is, in every sense,
a true Salesian home”



A young boy stands by the crowned
statue of Mary Help of Christians
Credit: Chioma Okoye

- Faith formation
- Catholic education
- Liturgical reverence
- Service to the poor
- Youth ministry

Its journey — from orphanage and boarding school chapel to unified parish community — reflects decades of faithful Catholic witness in the Tampa Bay area.

What began as a chapel for boarding students has become a spiritual home for generations.

It is, in every sense, **a true Salesian home** — where hearts are formed, saints are honored, and the Good Shepherd continues to lead His people under the loving mantle of Mary Help of Christians.



CRTSHS students Daniel N., Lucas W., Lia C., Johatzy D., and Alicia S.
Credit: Julia St. Clair

“The Perfect Educational Marriage”

Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School at the Mary Help of Christians Center

By Julia St. Clair

AS CRISTO REY TAMPA SALESIAN HIGH SCHOOL (CRTSHS)

CELEBRATES its tenth anniversary, it stands as a beacon of hope for students determined to shatter glass ceilings. Founded in 2016, CRTSHS is the second Salesian school in the Cristo Rey network—following Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School in Takoma Park, MD—and the first in the southeastern United States. From day one, its mission has been clear: help students from limited economic backgrounds not just succeed but excel in school and life.

What sets CRTSHS apart is its uncompromising commitment to academic excellence. It's one of the few Cristo Rey schools offering Advanced Placement classes to all students—and they start early. "The level of academic rigor is different than anywhere else," explains Keith Aeschbach, CRTSHS coach and theology teacher. "Students start taking AP classes in their sophomore year, then take on more in their junior and senior years. This place is not easy, but it's worth it."

The Heart of the Mission: Corporate Work-Study

Beyond rigorous academics lies another defining feature: the renowned Corporate Work-Study Program (CWSP). This isn't just a job placement initiative—it's a transformative experience that pushes students beyond their comfort zones and into professional environments where they discover their untapped potential.

"It's amazing to see what students are capable of when given the opportunity," says Vanessa Vasquez, vice president for CWSP. "When we make assumptions about young people, we miss out on all the gifts and beauty they have to contribute. Part of our role as educators is to advocate for them and teach them how to advocate for themselves."

For senior Alicia S. '26, the impact was life-changing. As a freshman student associate at Metropolitan Ministries, she confronted her shyness head-on. "I was shy and nervous before

CRTSHS students peruse a newly released yearbook. Credit: Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School



“It’s amazing to see what students are capable of when given the opportunity.”

Issa D. '26, during her workday at USF Health
Credit: Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School



and got pushed out of my comfort zone to be more involved and outgoing," Alicia reflects. "It was a big part of forming me into the outspoken person I am today." Now she serves as a student ambassador, president of the Black Student Union, and member of the National Honor Society — a testament to how far she's come.

A Culture of Authentic Dialogue

At CRTSHS, the relationship between students and faculty transcends traditional boundaries. True to the Salesian charism, teachers don't just instruct—they listen, learn, and grow alongside their students.

“Communication is key,” Andrea Diaz-delle Valle, AP biology and pre-AP biology teacher, explained. “We need to humble ourselves enough to recognize when we need help and be open enough to anyone who comes to us—students, admin, staff, everyone.”

This openness creates opportunities for collaboration that empower students to take initiative. Senior Johatzy D. '26 experienced this firsthand when she approached marketing and communications director Terrie Dodson-Caldevilla with an idea for a school sports Instagram page. “I loved the way Miss Terrie was so open to starting a sports page so students can engage and know what's going on within CRTSHS athletics,” Johatzy said. “The page is still active, and it is our go-to for any sports events.”



Tampa Director Fr. John Serio, SDB, addresses CRTSHS students during Don Bosco Day. Credit: Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School

“If Don Bosco were alive today, he would be all in on this Cristo Rey approach to Catholic education.”

Faith at the Foundation

The bonds between faculty and students extend far beyond academics and professional development. At CRTSHS, spiritual formation is woven into the fabric of daily life.

“I tell my volleyball team that their priority is God first, then family, then academics, then volleyball, then everything else,” Keith reflected. “It’s all about balancing kids’ school and work lives. Everything else comes after these top priorities.”

For sophomore Daniel N. ’28, the focus on faith is his favorite aspect of CRTSHS. “They really get students to deepen their faith,” he said. “I love how they share wisdom in the morning convocation. My favorite memory so far has been going on the Valdocco Retreat in 2025. I felt so open, and it was such a renewing moment for my faith.”

Senior Lia C. ’26 credits her theology teacher, Keith, with leading her on spiritual retreats that deepened her relationship with God. For Lucas W. ’26, CRTSHS and the Salesian Leadership Retreat opened his eyes to a possible vocation to the priesthood. “I’m grateful for campus ministry, and especially for Fr. Josh [Sciullo, SDB], who ensures everyone is spiritually fulfilled, whether they’re Catholic or not,” Lucas shared.

Witnessing Transformation

The adults at CRTSHS speak with genuine awe about the transformation they witness in their students. “I love being able to journey with the students,” Vanessa exclaims. “It’s amazing to see how much they grow, evolve, and mature. I also love when our CWSP partners express how impressed they are with our students—when our students break through these ceilings and our partners recognize it.”

A Message to Future Students

To prospective students considering CRTSHS, the message from the community is clear: don’t let fear hold you back from pursuing the dreams God has placed in your heart. “If God put it in your heart that the school might be good for you, it’s like what Eli said to Samuel, ‘You have to trust God, even when it’s challenging,’” Lucas advises. “That’s the only way to make it through—you have to trust God.” Keith puts it best: “If Don Bosco were alive today, he would be all in on this Cristo Rey approach to Catholic education. The marriage between the Salesian charism and the Cristo Rey network is perfect for preparing students for life well beyond the classroom.”

At Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School, that perfect marriage is producing graduates who are academically prepared, professionally experienced, spiritually grounded, and ready to break through any ceiling that stands in their way. Viva Cristo Rey!



Clark Elementary School children interact with the animals on a field trip to Mary Has a Little Farm.
Credit: Julia St. Clair

“This is Her Farm”

Mary Has a Little Farm at the Mary Help of Christians Center

By Julia St. Clair

AN “OUT OF THE ORDINARY” BUT VERY POPULAR ELEMENT of Mary Help’s educational ministry is “Mary Has a Little Farm.” Situated on the campus, it offers a valuable experience of God’s creation and nature to over 5,000 youngsters and adults throughout the year.

Mary Has a Little Farm is home to bunnies, horses, goats, chickens, hens, pigs (Chloe and Rosie), a donkey named Jenny, sheep (Shamrock and Molly), cows (Annabelle and Rodeo), and a mini-horse named James Bond. Visitors learn about these animals, the responsibilities of a farmer, including the types of farmers (livestock farmers and grain farmers), and even get the chance to work like farmers; visitors can attempt to lift a bale of straw or bag of grain!

Additionally, there is a nature trail, which can be accessed by walking or via a hayride. On the nature trail, visitors learn about the various sights they behold, such as animal bones, fruit trees, and butterfly houses.

Today, the farm is known for its safe and well-organized program, and it is all thanks to the collaboration of the Salesian community, Kay Conroy, and our Blessed Mother! “In 2018, Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB, was looking for ways to serve more young people in the Tampa area and supported the idea to start the educational farm field trips,” Mary Has a Little Farm coordinator Kay Conroy shared. “Mary Has a Little Farm blossomed into what we see today,” Kay continued.

“This is our devotion to Mary.”

Mary Has a Little Farm is a beautiful place that enchants visitors of all ages. Along with hosting school field trips, the farm hosts birthday parties and many other events. This ministry would not be possible without the support of volunteers who are all grateful to give back to Mary Help and the greater Tampa area in the name and under the protection of our Blessed Mother.

“This is our devotion to Mary,” Kay beamed. “This is her farm.”



“Perfect for Lovers of History and the Faith” Relics at Mary Help of Christians, Tampa

By Julia St. Clair

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, TAMPA IS HOME to one of the largest collections of relics in the southern U.S. The relics’ journey began at the former Salesian novitiate in Newton, NJ, before they made their way to the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Stony Point, NY, then, three and a half years ago, to Mary Help of Christians, Tampa.

“We received 887 relics in total,” Carolyn Espinosa, who, at the time, was the assistant to the director at the Mary Help of Christians Center, shared.

Under the guidance of then-director Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB, Carolyn organized and categorized the relics throughout the Mary Help of Christians campus. “We have around 700 relics in the church, chapel, and relic room,” Carolyn explained. “The plaques are artistically appealing and help to attract people. The cabinets were the vision of Fr. Franco, who had Thai Nguyen build and mount them.”

The relic room, a part of the church since it opened, also houses a life-sized replica of the Shroud of Turin. At the end of each school year, Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School’s theology teacher Keith Aeschbach brings his freshmen to the replica of the Shroud. “I first have my freshman students look at the Shroud of Turin’s scientific reality and leave them with it,” he detailed.

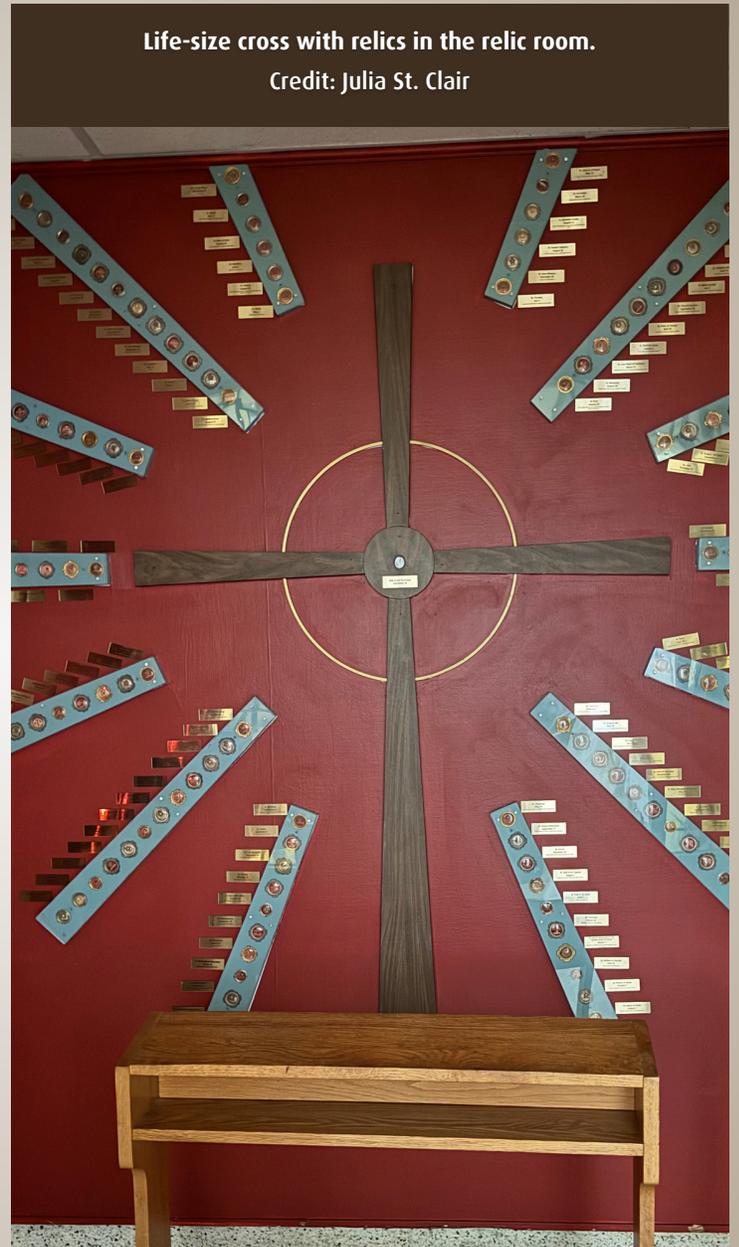
“We have around 700 relics...”

Over the years of pioneering this project, there have been many moments of learning on the job. “Before Fr. Franco brought the relics back, I didn’t know much about them, though I knew and read the lives of the saints,” Carolyn recalled. “Relics are perfect for lovers of both history and the faith. It’s such a tremendous gift to be able to work with them. I am grateful that Fr. John Serio has been super supportive and wants me to continue my work.”

“Relics are perfect for lovers of both history and the faith. It’s such a tremendous gift to be able to work with them.”



Life-size replica of the Shroud of Turin in the relic room.
Credit: Julia St. Clair



Life-size cross with relics in the relic room.
Credit: Julia St. Clair

As the custodian of the collection, Carolyn remains dedicated to researching and preserving the remains of the saints. She also recommends three ways to experience the relics: “the first one is to wander around and look, the second is to visit www.mhcrelics.org and enter a saint’s name, feast date, or patronage. You can read their biography and find the location in the church or chapel. The third is to browse the folders located on the back-left table in the church, which lists the relics alphabetically and by cabinet.”

For more information and to learn more, visit www.mhcrelics.org.

Tampa Korean Catholic Outreach during a past outing
Credit: Mary Help of Christians Center



“All We Can Do Is Go in Deeper” Korean Catholic Church Outreach

By Julia St. Clair

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS IN TAMPA IS HOME to the Korean Catholic Church Outreach. “We’ll celebrate our fiftieth anniversary in Tampa in 2032,” Juliana Kim, who has been a member since she first came to the U.S. from Korea in 2004, shared. “We’ve been with the Salesians since 2003, so half of our history has been at Mary Help of Christians.”

The Korean Catholic Church Outreach began its Salesian roots in 2003, when the first Korean Salesian priest arrived in Tampa. “Before then, Fr. Gus [Baek, SDB] came and learned Tampa didn’t have a Korean priest,” Juliana said. “So, he contacted the powers that be, and they sent the first [Salesian] Korean priest to Tampa that May.”

It was perfect timing for Juliana, who arrived in the U.S. a year later, to find a faith-based community and another family. “I felt like everything was ready,” she recalled. “At the time, there were only fifty people in the Korean community, and we were at Good Shepherd Parish first before it merged with Mary Help of Christians and moved into the church on the Salesian property at the Mary Help of Christians Center.”

Since the first Korean Salesian priest arrived in Tampa nearly twenty-three years ago, there have been seven Korean Salesian priests, including the presently serving priest, Fr. Jaejun Chong, SDB. “Salesian priests are very open-minded, and we love that, Juliana remarked. “That’s our blessing—we have Salesian priests.”

“Salesian priests are very open-minded, and we love that.”

The Korean Catholic Church Outreach at Mary Help of Christians, Tampa belongs to the Southeast region that also has communities in Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Alabama. There are currently twenty of these Korean church communities within the U.S.

“One hundred and thirty members come here, and we’re the only Salesian Korean community left in the U.S.,” Juliana explained. “Although we have only a little bit of the first-generation left, our second-generation English-speakers go to English Mass.”



Around 120 people attend Sunday Mass, where they'll find a home that welcomes. "Because we're a small group, we're just like a family—we are a Christian family," Juliana beamed. "People talk with their friends and family members and say how much they love the community."

The community is inclusive and welcoming to everyone. "We welcome new people and invite them to Mass and lunch," Juliana exclaimed. "We take their info and keep in touch with them. We put in the effort because we want people to know they're welcome here."

The Outreach offers a lot of activities and ways for the community to stay connected. "We have lots of spirituality groups, like the Legion of Mary and Bible studies," Juliana reflected. "Twenty to forty people make up our young adult group, and we have seven members who get together once a month. We also have a Korean drum circle, Catholic catechism, and do faith formation together. We try to offer as much as we can."

Juliana remembered how one Salesian priest united everyone through the gift of music. "When Fr. [Francis de Sales] La was here, he played the Korean drums for everyone," she reminisced. "Fr. La was very talented with musical instruments and played ocarina, guitar, and drums for us. Salesians do all activities with us together as one. I love that about them."

**“ We put in the effort
because we want
people to know they’re
welcome here.”**

The doors of the Korean Catholic Church Outreach at Mary Help of Christians, Tampa are open to all, regardless of faith background. "We have postcards with cartoons on the backs of them with our information that we leave at Korean groceries and restaurants," Juliana detailed. "There are also two people in the community who play golf together. One decided to come here and become Catholic. We also have nine people in the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults (OCIA) class and two who will make the sacrament of Confirmation."

Maintaining a sense of community is important to the Outreach, especially during changing times. "Our growth is on hold due to a decline in immigration from Korea at the moment," Juliana revealed. "There is a billboard in front of Mary Help of Christians' gate with a Don Bosco quote that says, 'We are called to help each other grow in holiness.' All we can do is go in deeper."

Mary Sverko takes Bros. Alfred Flatoff and Dave Iovacchini, SDBs, out for a drive.

Credit: Mary Sverko



“A Pretty Strong Community Life” St. Philip the Apostle Residence

By Julia St. Clair

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS IN TAMPA IS ALSO HOME to the St. Philip’s Residence, one of two retirement houses for older confreres of our Salesian province. “Being at St. Philip’s [now] is great,” Fr. Bill Keane, SDB, shared.

During Fr. Bill’s many years of active ministry, he served as vice provincial under Fr. Jim Heuser, SDB. “I wrote the first Safe Environment package (now called Safeguarding), which was just six pages at the time,” he recalled. Fr. Bill also served as director of Mary Help of Christians, Tampa from 1997 to 2003. His most recent return to Tampa in 2023 was preceded by years of serving at the Salesian Boys and Girls Club in East Boston.

In shifting from decades of varied ministry into retirement at St. Philip, Fr. Bill explained, “We have prayers at 7:30 am, and Mass at 8:15 am. Most of the guys go out to celebrate Mass; I used to go to Concordia (a local assisted living facility), but now I stay

here (to celebrate Mass). [Unlike before,] I don’t need an alarm clock; it’s nice that I don’t have to rush through anything — I always make it on time.”

When asked about community life at St. Philip’s Residence, Fr. Bill remarked, “We have a pretty strong community life [that spans from] evenings of recollection once a month to celebrating birthdays.”

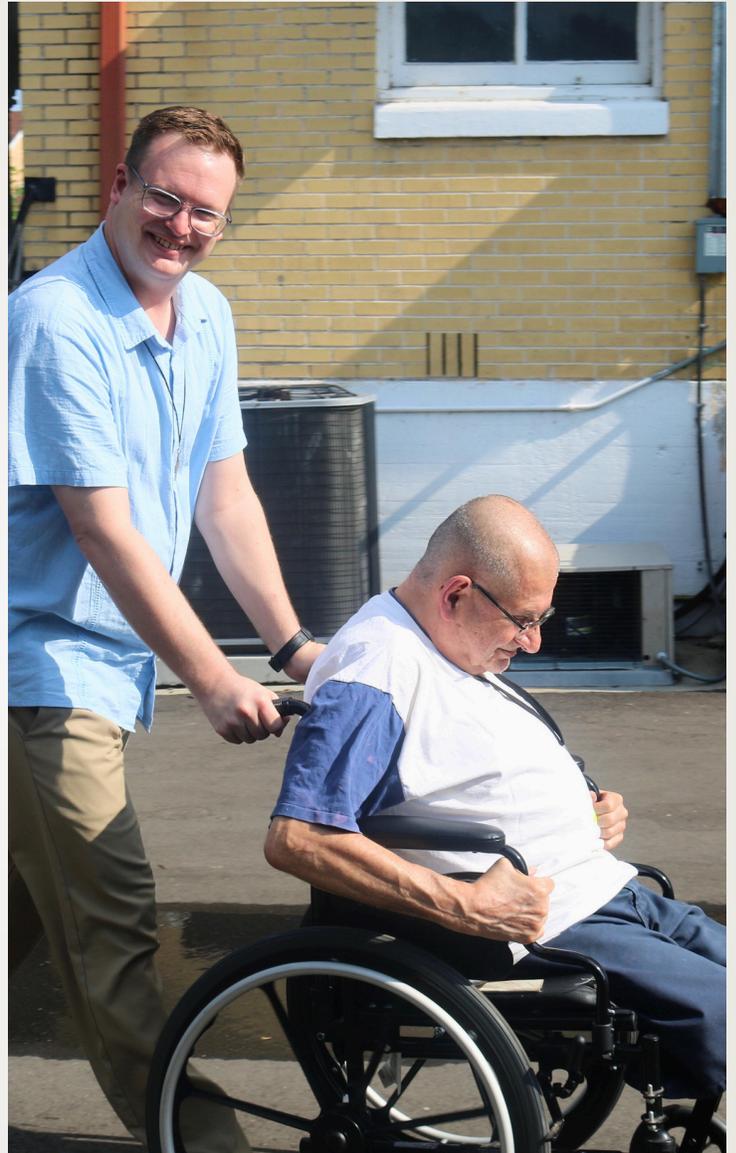
Along with an overview of his daily routine, Fr. Bill also provided insight into the operations of the St. Philip Residence: “Mary Sverko, administrator of the St. Philip Residence, is a godsend. She does it all and keeps things going.”

When asked about the Salesians at St. Philip’s, Fr. Bill explained, “Everyone at St. Philip’s is perpetually professed, and Salesian Lay Missioners will sometimes serve at St. Philip’s. “Once in a

“I don’t need an alarm clock; it’s nice that I don’t have to rush through anything — I always make it on time.”



Mary Sverko and Bro. Alfred Flatoff
Credit: Mary Sverko



Fr. Craig Spence, SDB, accompanies Bro. Dave Iovacchini.
Credit: Chioma Okoye

while, we have volunteers who stay here and help out,” Fr. Bill detailed. “Lorenzo from Turin was here all summer. In 2024, we had volunteers from Montreal who served at summer camp.”

The St. Philip Residence remains both a dynamic and active community, though it primarily houses retired Salesians. For confreres like Fr. Bill, this is exactly how he likes it to be.

Fr. Josh Sciallo, SDB, plays cards with the young during a Fourth of July celebration.
Credit: Mary Help of Christians Center



Closing A Four-Dimensional Journey

Don Bosco's first Oratory was more than a place—it was an experience. It was, in his own vision, a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared for life, and a playground where friendships flourished (Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, Art. 40). Nearly a century later, that vision continues to find concrete expression at Mary Help of Christians, Tampa.

For ninety-eight years, Mary Help has faithfully embodied these four dimensions—home, parish, school, and playground—serving as a living continuation of Don Bosco's original dream. When I was entrusted with the responsibility of animating this mission, I made a conscious effort to reconnect with past pupils. What I encountered was deeply affirming: men and women who had gone on to successful careers, carrying with them a profound sense of gratitude for an institution that did more than educate them—it prepared them for life.

Much has changed over the decades. Programs have evolved, facilities have expanded, and new ministries have taken root. Yet the familiar Salesian pedagogy—the Preventive System grounded in reason, religion, and loving-kindness—remains unmistakably intact. Today, the mission encompasses Cristo Rey Tampa Salesian High School, a parish, a retreat center, a farm, a sports complex, a camp, the Korean Catholic Mission of Tampa, and a home for elderly Salesians. Together, these form a vibrant ecosystem dedicated to the holistic development of young people.

Fr. Steve Dumais confirms a young man, who is sponsored by Fr. Josh Sciuillo.
Credit: Chioma Okoye



The spirit of understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect shared by Salesians, past pupils, Cooperators, and members of the wider Salesian Family reveals the true strength of this community.

As a playground, Mary Help is among the largest complexes in the area. But more significant than its size is its spirit: a place where friendships are formed, memories are created, and alumni continue to feel at home long after graduation. Evangelization, too, remains central—not only through catechesis and religious instruction, but through the consistent transmission of values and virtues that shape good Christians and honest citizens.

Mary Help of Christians in Tampa has also served as a parish in the truest sense, where many young boys first encountered God and, for some, discovered a call to the priesthood and religious life. Above all, Mary Help has been a home — especially for those coming from difficult family situations. For them, belonging to this community has been a tangible experience of God’s love, made visible through the dedicated care of Salesians and lay collaborators who have treated them as their own.

Regular visits from alumni are a testament to the enduring bonds formed here. Their stories — of mentors who believed in them, of joy-filled boarding days, of lessons learned beyond the classroom — speak volumes. Equally moving is the familiarity and warmth evident in everyday interactions between students and Salesians, whether on the grounds, during tutoring, or in moments of quiet personal guidance. The spirit of understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect shared by Salesians, past pupils, Cooperators, and members of the wider Salesian Family reveals the true strength of this community.

The articles in this issue echo these sentiments, offering reflections from Salesians, teachers, alumni, and collaborators who attest that Mary Help of Christians, Tampa is an institution that has touched lives—and continues to reach out through the many dimensions of its apostolate.

As we approach the celebration of our 100th anniversary, we entrust the future of this mission to God’s providence. May Mary Help of Christians continue to bless this institution, so that it may remain — now and always — a school, a playground, a parish, and a home for the countless young people who will cross its threshold in the years to come.

Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB
Vice Provincial

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SAVE THE DATES

June 27: *Priestly ordination,
St. John Bosco-St. James Parish, Chicago, IL*
October 17: *Province Jubilees, National Shrine
of Mary Help of Christians, Stony Point, NY*

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