



**Franciscan Friars
Holy Name Province
Communications Office**
129 West 31st St., 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001-3403
646-473-0265

For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Jocelyn Thomas, director of communications
jthomas@HNP.org

FRANCISCANS TO WITHDRAW FROM ST. MARY'S PARISH

Transition To Take Effect Summer 2012

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Oct. 31, 2011 — The Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province announced this weekend that they will be turning over the pastoral care of St. Mary's Church to the Diocese of Providence. The Rev. Steven Patti, OFM, pastor, delivered the news at Masses on Sunday.

As Patti explained, the Province's withdrawal from St. Mary's Parish is tied to its decision to close St. Francis Chapel on Westminster Street. The Franciscans have staffed St. Mary's Church for five years and have served the downtown chapel, in one location or another, for more than 50 years.

"We know this is an extremely sad moment for you, and it is also sad for us," said Patti in a letter he read to parishioners. "We have a history in Providence that goes back to 1956."

As announced last week, the chapel will shut its doors on Nov. 7 mainly because of finances, Patti said. "The chapel and its associated ministries have been struggling financially for some time, but the declining number of friars in our province also played a role."

He said on Sunday: "We want you to know that this decision was made only after serious consideration by the administration of Holy Name Province in consultation with Bishop Thomas Tobin."

"Our decision comes after an in-depth review of finances," said the Rev. John O'Connor, OFM, provincial minister or chief executive of Holy Name Province, to which Patti belongs. "The increasing costs of the chapel and parish, coupled with decreasing donations, necessitate the withdrawal."

In addition, the province, like many religious communities, would not have enough men of working age available to continue maintaining the parish very many years in the future, O'Connor said. "Our personnel resources are becoming more strained each year, making it impossible for us to maintain the ministerial commitments we once did."

In the last two decades, like most religious orders, the Franciscans have been aging and decreasing in number. At its peak in 1965, Holy Name Province had more than 1,000 friars compared to its current 350 friars, of whom a third are over 75 years of age.

According to a plan worked out with Bishop Tobin, the friars will return the pastoral care of St. Mary's Parish to the Diocese of Providence on June 30, 2012.

In 2006, Holy Name Province Franciscans began staffing St. Mary's Church to diversify its presence in Providence, with the hopes of building up a sizeable worshipping community, said Patti, who assumed his role as pastor this summer.

In its recent financial review, the province concluded that St. Mary's Parish alone could not support a community of friars. "Realistically, it can pay only one priest's salary, and since it is part of our Franciscan life to minister together as brothers wherever possible, we made the difficult decision to also withdraw from St. Mary's," said Patti.

"We are grateful for the words of support from many of you," Patti told parishioners. "You have shared your experiences, going back many years, of coming to the chapel and, more recently, of worshipping with us at St. Mary's. Our friars, too, speak fondly of their time in Providence."

About the Franciscans

Headquartered in New York City, Holy Name is the largest of seven provinces in the United States that belong to the Order of Friars Minor. With ministries in 12 states along the East Coast, its nearly 350 Catholic priests and brothers serve in colleges, parishes, urban ministry centers and a wide variety of social ministries, as well as in missions in Africa, Asia and South America.

The Order, founded in 1209 by St. Francis of Assisi, commemorated its 800th anniversary in 2009. Today, St. Francis, whose feast day is Oct. 4, remains one of the most widely known saints, revered for his dedication to peace and care for creation.

Information about Holy Name Province can be found on HNP.org. News about the friars and their ministries is available on the [Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province](#) Facebook page.

Interview and photo requests should be directed to Jocelyn Thomas, HNP director of communications, at 646-473-0265 ext. 321 or 732-829-1513 (mobile) or jthomas@hnp.org.