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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Harlem Parish Installs New Pastor**

NEW YORK, N.Y. -- Oct. 9, 2008 — Father Steven Pavignano, OFM, was installed recently as pastor of All Saints Church on East 129<sup>th</sup> Street, the first Franciscan formally appointed to that post. Fr. Steven came this summer to the Harlem church from Hartford, where he had ministered for the last three years, after spending more than two decades in the South.

All Saints Church is one of four Manhattan parishes that the Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province staff. The others are St. Francis of Assisi Church on West 31<sup>st</sup> Street, Holy Name of Jesus Church on West 96<sup>th</sup> Street, and St. Stephen of Hungary Church on East 82<sup>nd</sup> Street.

The Sept. 28 Mass, celebrated by Fr. Steven, was a festive event. It was attended by friars in residence at All Saints -- Father Christopher Keenan, OFM, Father Charles Gilmartin, OFM, Brother Glenn Humphrey, OFM, and Brother Daniel Sulmasy, OFM -- as well as Father Jerome Massimino, OFM, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, Brother Michael Harlan, OFM, Holy Name's provincial secretary, and Father Brian Smail, OFM, the province's vocation director. Relatives and friends from New England also attended the Mass and the reception that followed.

Father Benedict Taylor, OFM, founder of Create, Inc., the respected social services organization in Harlem, preached the homily. He and Fr. Steven became acquainted while serving on the Province's African-American committee. In his homily, Fr. Benedict spoke of how the friars at the Harlem church are all, in various ways, healers. "Chris is chaplain with the fire department, Charlie leads 12-step programs, Glenn is a teacher, and Dan is a physician," Fr. Steven said.

Fr. Steven said he has great respect for Fr. Benedict. "Many people owe their lives to Ben because of how Create has helped them," Fr. Steven said. "He's essentially the healer of Harlem."

### **Franciscan Spirit**

Staff member Diane Holmes-Sumpter, an employee for six years and a parishioner for 20, said "Friars seem much more community-involved than other priests," adding "many people in the neighborhood know brothers Glenn, Dan and Charlie."

Franciscan leadership of All Saints began in 2002 when Father Neil O'Connell, OFM, took over as administrator. Before that, the parish was served by three other religious orders, said Holmes-Sumpter.

All Saints Parish was established in 1879; its beautiful church, dedicated in 1893, was the last one designed by the architect of St. Patrick's Cathedral, James Renwick. Located in a neighborhood of mainly African-Americans since the late 1940s, it also attracts worshippers from outside the community. Many came for the Sept. 28 Mass, which was a celebration of homecoming, Fr. Steven said.

In a recent message in the parish bulletin, Steven welcomed those who had returned for the celebration. “It is good to gather and recall stories of the past, on which we have built, and from which we continue to grow.”

Attendance at Mass grew during the last six years, while Fr. Neil was here,” Fr. Steven said.

### **Background in Diversity**

Fr. Steven, a New Jersey native, comes to the parish from Hartford, where he served three years at St. Patrick-St. Anthony. He spent 27 years in the South, at Province ministries in Athens and Thomasville, Ga., and then in Greenville, S.C.

Fr. Steven said he enjoys working with diverse cultures, an interest that evolved from a research project about the African-American community he did while an undergraduate at Siena College in Loudonville, N.Y.

“I want to build the strongest Catholic church here that I can,” Fr. Steven said.

“As I begin my role as pastor, I ask your support and prayers,” Steven said, in the parish bulletin. “I look forward to working with you, witnessing to the kingdom of God. With the guidance of our pastoral council, we have started developing a strategic plan to help us develop as a stronger faith community.”

He continued: “There are two areas I want to focus on. The first is prayer and the second is justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC).”

The most consistent ministry at All Saints is the food pantry, a valuable service that is open on Saturday mornings. It was established 18 years ago, Fr. Steven said, and is run by Stephanie Ali, pastoral council chair, and Laura Robinson, of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

During his first two months, the pastor has been working on a variety of initiatives. With members of the parish, Fr. Steven is evaluating the physical condition of the church complex to determine what repairs are needed, reviewing the mission statement of the parish, and getting to know the community.

“Since I have a strong bent toward social justice, I am enjoying reaching out to the community,” Fr. Steven said, adding that he wants to set up a gathering at the parish this fall to build on a November event happening in Rome, a meeting of Muslim and Catholic theologians.

“I hope to invite the Manhattan Muslim community to share fellowship, prayer, and discussion. It will be a way to reflect locally on what is happening internationally,” he said.

Shown in the photo are, from left to right: Fr. Steven Pavignano, OFM, Kevin Little, Gregory Hochstein, Stephanie Ali, Gregory Sumpter, Tyson Boudreaux, Dorothy McWhite and Michael Ohuche.

*Holy Name Province, the largest community of Franciscan friars in the United States, has priests and brothers serving in colleges, parishes, urban ministry centers, and a wide variety of social ministries along the East Coast, as well as in overseas missions.*

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