



Franciscan Friars
Holy Name Province
129 West 31st Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001-3403

January 3, 2020

Andrew J. Reitz, O.F.M.
Pastor
St. Francis of Assisi Church
135 West 31st Street
New York, NY 10001-3429

Dear Fr. Andrew and Parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi parish,

Over the past two years the Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province have completed a thorough examination of all the fraternities-in-mission (FIMs) where we currently serve the Church, with the goal of identifying where we will remain and where we will need to withdraw following our Provincial Chapter in June of 2020. This was not an easy process, but it was a prayerful, comprehensive and realistic one.

I am very happy to share with you that we have informed Cardinal Dolan of the Archdiocese of New York, that we are able to continue our ministerial commitment to St. Francis of Assisi parish for the next three years.

Why did we engage in this two-year discernment process? It was a response to two decisive factors that affect our life as Franciscans: our declining numbers and fidelity to our Franciscan charism.

In 1985 we had 708 friars actively working in ministry in our province. In 2001, we were down to 443 friars in active ministry. Today in 2020, we are about 120. Very simply stated, we no longer have sufficient friars to staff all the ministries where we have served in the past.

Additionally, our Franciscan charism calls us to live and minister as brothers *in community*. Our fraternal life together is a central priority for us—it is the core component of who we are and profess to be: lesser *brothers*. With our diminished numbers, it is impossible for us to maintain all of our current ministerial commitments while also maintaining fraternities composed of several friars living in community.

Moreover, as Franciscans we are called to imitate the itinerancy of Jesus who moved throughout the towns of his native land, never settling forever in one location. Thus Francis, in his Later Rule, admonished the friars, “Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. [Live] as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility...” (*Later Rule*, 6)

It is for these reasons, and with deep sadness, that we made the difficult decision to withdraw this summer from nine of our current FIMs.

In addition to “right-sizing” the number of our ministerial commitments, this evaluation process was also designed to provide the opportunity for reimagining how our ministries might serve the People of God more effectively. Hopefully the process of moving from ‘good’ to ‘better’ will continue in each of the FIMs where the friars remain. May we all be guided by the spirit of St. Francis who — as one of his early biographers, friar Thomas of Celano, reports — “did not consider that he had already attained his goal, but in tireless pursuit of holy newness, constantly hoped to begin again.”

Please know that I and all the friars of Holy Name Province are very grateful for all the support and collaboration that you, the community at St. Francis, have extended to us. On behalf of all the friars of our province, thank you for your goodness, understanding, generosity, patience and faith.

May the Church in New York continue to grow and bear witness to the Risen Lord who is the center and foundation of our life and who calls us each day to continue “on the Way” toward the fullness of God’s kingdom. We give thanks to God that we are able to continue partnering with you in faith and community at this time.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fr. Kevin J. Mullen, O.F.M.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

(Rev.) Kevin J. Mullen, O.F.M.
Provincial Minister

CC: David Convertino, O.F.M.
Guardian