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For Immediate Release

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**ST. FRANCIS BREADLINE — OLDEST IN COUNTRY — TO MARK 80th
ANNIVERSARY WITH CONCERT**

NEW YORK — Sept. 22, 2010 — To commemorate the 80th anniversary of the city’s historic breadline on West 31st Street, the community of St. Francis of Assisi Church is holding its second annual Viva Francesco! benefit concert. The event, at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 2 in the church, will feature music from memorable films. The food ministry is the oldest continuously-running breadline in the country.

St. Francis Breadline, operated by the Franciscans of Holy Name Province, was launched in September 1930, a year after the stock market crash. It currently feeds more than 300 people each day.

Brother Gabriel Mehler, OFM, established the breadline after seeing the growing number of men and women begging for food, clothing or money. “When Brother Gabriel opened the door of the monastery on Sept. 26, 1930, he little realized that he was beginning a form of organized charity for which St. Francis of Assisi Church would soon become internationally famous,” according to *The Saint Francis Breadline: 80 Years of Franciscan Compassion*, a booklet published this month by the friars.

The breadline operates seven days a week, from 7 to 7:30 a.m. Volunteers give a sandwich and cup of coffee to each guest on the breadline who line up along the sidewalk, outside the church between Sixth and Seventh avenues. Over the years, several prominent figures, including actor Martin Sheen, have served with the food ministry.

On Sept. 30, the church community will mark the launch of the 80th anniversary celebration by distributing “extra goodies in the food bags,” according to the Rev. Michael Carnevale, OFM, director of the breadline.

An annual budget of roughly \$900,000 is required to fund the food ministry. It is gathered from donations — from individuals and groups — through varied methods that include the sale of greeting cards, collection boxes in the church and other programs.

“We receive donations from all over,” Father Carnevale said. “Visitors who have passed the church and liked what we’re doing give to the breadline. They’re both Catholics and non-Catholics from the United States and foreign countries.”

Several special events are offered each year to guests of the breadline to add warmth to their holidays. On Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, clothing items are added to the bags given to people who come to the ministry.

The Oct. 2 concert, open to the public, will feature performances by Meredith Augustin, music director at St. Francis Church, and an assortment of singers and instrumentalists. Tickets can be purchased at the St. Francis Parish House, 135 West 31st Street (212-736-8500).

The St. Francis of Assisi Breadline: 80 Years of Franciscan Compassion, which describes the first 15 years of the breadline, will be available at the concert and from the parish house.

The St. Francis Breadline is one of many food programs run by the friars of Holy Name Province. Others can be found at All Saints Church in Harlem, Holy Name of Jesus Church on the Upper West Side, and St. Stephen of Hungary Church on the Upper East Side as well as in New England (Boston, Hartford and Providence), at five New Jersey parishes, in Buffalo, N.Y., and at churches in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas and Florida.

“It is our responsibility as Franciscans to respond to God’s poor and needy,” Father Carnevale said.

About the Franciscans

Holy Name Province is one of seven provinces in the United States that belong to the Order of Friars Minor. Holy Name is the largest U.S. province, with ministries in 12 states along the East Coast. Its more than 350 Catholic priests and brothers serve in colleges, parishes, urban ministry centers, and a wide variety of social ministries as well as in overseas missions.

More than 800 years since its founding by St. Francis of Assisi, the Order continues to minister to the poorest of the poor. Today, St. Francis, whose feast day is Oct. 4, remains one of the most widely-known saints, revered for his affection for nature and care for creation.

Information about Holy Name Province can be found on www.hnp.org.

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