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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Franciscans to Turn Over Bronx Parish to Diocese

NEW YORK, N.Y. – Feb. 5, 2008 -- The Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province, with headquarters in New York City, announced that it is turning over operation of Holy Cross Church on Soundview Avenue in the Bronx to the Archdiocese of New York.

The announcement was made at parish Masses the weekend of Feb. 2 – 3. Provincial Minister Father John O'Connor, OFM, met Jan. 25 with Auxiliary Bishop Dennis Sullivan, vicar general of the Archdiocese of New York, to discuss the decision and to begin transition plans.

The Province decided to release Holy Cross after a study of nine of the Province's parishes in the metropolitan New York area determined that a declining number of friars would soon prevent it from having enough staff to support the church.

"We are diminishing and we are aging," Father O'Connor said in a joint letter with Provincial Vicar Father Dominic Monti, OFM, that was read to parishioners. "The Province has 375 friars -- of whom 115 are 75 years of age or older. We do not have the number of friars necessary to meet the extensive commitments of staffing two colleges, three large service churches, five urban ministry centers, 28 parishes, our missions, spirituality centers, and a wide variety of ministries serving the poor. Our resources are becoming more strained each year."

Father O'Connor also said that the decision was not made lightly, but rather, after months of discernment, consideration and meetings on the issue. "This was a very difficult decision to make, and I know the parishioners of Holy Cross have great affinity for the friars and the Franciscan presence in the community. It is my hope and prayer that the faithful will build on our legacy of service and further strengthen Holy Cross in the coming years."

Bishop Sullivan, in the name of Cardinal Edward Egan, has assured Holy Name's leaders that he will work with the friars to assure a smooth transition to diocesan clergy. The official turnover from the Province to the diocese will be this summer.

Holy Cross, which was visited by a team of Province friars and lay advisors, was selected by the Provincial council in light of several factors:

- It is now a well-established parish; the Franciscan Order traditionally devotes its resources to developing parishes in need of support.
- It is a stable, largely assimilated Latino community; the Province currently has a more pressing ministerial need for its Spanish-speaking friars where there are large numbers of recent immigrants.

- Because the Province no longer has a large number of men in pre-novitiate formation, it no longer needs to maintain the large Bronx friary that has been used for 35 years for the training of postulants.

“It has been our privilege to serve Holy Cross parish for over 85 years,” Fr. John said in the letter. “You are a great people and together with our friars have built up over the years a powerful Christian-Catholic worship community in the Bronx.”

Holy Cross pastor Father Todd Carpenter, OFM, and parochial vicar Father Raymond Selker, OFM, are talking with parishioners to answer questions.

The Bronx parish is one of two that Holy Name Province is turning over to diocesan leadership this year; the other is Our Lady of the Holy Angels Parish in Little Falls, N.J.

The friars have a long history in the metropolitan New York Archdiocese, beginning with St. Francis Church on West 31<sup>st</sup> Street, Manhattan, entrusted to the Order in 1864. When the Clason Point neighborhood of the Bronx began developing after World War I, friars from St. Francis were asked by Cardinal Patrick Hayes, in 1921, to come to the area. The friars have served the parish ever since.

In the last two decades, the Province has been aging and growing smaller. It has also attempted to respond to the needs of the church. In the last 15 years, the Province has emphasized ministry to the marginalized and the poor, which has led Holy Name friars to take on new multi-cultural urban ministries in a number of cities. They have taken these new initiatives despite declining numbers. At its peak in 1965, the Province had more than 1,000 friars compared to its current 375 members.

Both the urgent needs in the Church and the declining number of friars have prompted the Province to return to its original policy of turning back to diocesan care some of its more established parishes, according to Father Monti, a specialist in Franciscan history.

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*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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