



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

**For Immediate Release**

CONTACT: Jocelyn Thomas, director of communications  
JThomas@hnp.org

**Reflections Approaching Sept. 11, 2010:  
Franciscans Lift Voices Against Tide of Anti-Muslim Rhetoric**

Rev. Dominic Monti, OFM, and Rev. John O'Connor, OFM

NEW YORK — Sept. 9, 2010 — For eight years, throughout our nation the anniversary of the horrific September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has been marked by remembrance of the victims and prayers for peace and reconciliation in our world. Each year, the Memorial Mass at our Church of St. Francis of Assisi in New York City has called to mind the self-sacrificing dedication of our brother, Fr. Mychal Judge, OFM, and the thousands of others who perished on that day. It has also offered an opportunity to pray for healing among the peoples of the world so that such tragedies might not occur again.

This year, however, the mood in our nation is different. Members of a small independent church in Gainesville, Fla., declaring that “Islam is of the Devil,” have announced plans to mark the Sept. 11 anniversary by publically burning copies of the Qur’an. A project to build an Islamic center in New York several blocks from “Ground Zero” has unleashed vitriolic abuse against Islam as a religion; strong local opposition has surfaced in a number of places against Muslims providing places of worship for themselves in their communities. Perhaps heightened by our current economic insecurity, there is a mounting cry against the perceived “other” in our midst and that “true” — i.e., Christian — Americans must somehow “take back” the country.

As leaders of the Franciscans of Holy Name Province, we wish to lift our voices against this tide of anti-Muslim rhetoric in our nation. We cannot help but recall that in the 19th century, there was a similar outcry against Roman Catholics as a foreign, inassimilable mass within the nation, that our Catholic practices and values were contrary to the American way of life. Time, of course, proved those sentiments wrong. We must give our Muslim brothers and sisters the same opportunity. We must accept them as fellow-worshippers of our common God.

Our position as Catholics is grounded in the clear teaching of our Church. The Second Vatican Council’s dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, after speaking of the People of God who have explicitly professed faith in Christ, and then the Jewish people, goes on to state: “God’s plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, first among whom are the Muslims: they profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge all human beings on the last day” (*LG*, 16). The Church clearly

teaches that Muslims are not “pagans” or “idolaters” but children of the same loving God as Christians and Jews.

On a practical level, the Decree on Religious Liberty of the same Council, *Dignitatis Humanae*, states that: “religious groups ... must be allowed to honor the Supreme God in public worship ... and promote institutions in which members may work together to organize their own lives. ... Religious communities also have the right not to be hindered by legislation or administrative action by the civil authority ... in erecting buildings for religious purposes, and in the acquisition and use of the property they need.” (DH 4) This has clear implications for how Catholic Americans should accept Muslims in our society. We cannot allow the actions of a fanatical minority to define an entire religion.

In a particular way, we Franciscans cannot help but recall that we are followers of a man who crossed frontiers, even battle lines, to offer a message of peace to the perceived enemies of Christianity. As Paul Moses has strikingly portrayed in his recent study, *The Saint and the Sultan*, at a time when some preachers were urging Christians “to kill a Muslim for Christ,” Francis boldly defied the prejudices of his era to demonstrate to the Sultan of Egypt that Christianity had another face than that of the Crusaders who faced him in battle. Francis was not able to win the Sultan over to the Gospel of Christ, but returned to Europe impressed by the faith he had experienced among the followers of Islam, convinced that he had met other worshippers of God like himself. Our General Chapter in Assisi last year urged Franciscans throughout the world to take up this heritage and to work in a special way at dialogue among Christians and Muslims and be architects of peace and reconciliation in society.

Three pieces of steel from the tangled mass of debris of the World Trade Center were entrusted to the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in New York and now form a memorial to the victims of September 11th, including our own brother, Fr Mychal. The compressed pieces of steel vividly summon the grief and unspeakable sadness of that tragic morning. Still, a single golden rose rises gently from the mass of contorted steel, transcending the senseless brutality with an enduring promise of hope.

Let this September 11th be an opportunity for all of us to summon the better angels of our nature, to rise above the anger and bitterness that seem to be an increasing feature of our country, to show respect to all people who seek the face of God, and to be agents of true and lasting peace and reconciliation in our own land and among all nations.

*Rev. John F. O’Connor, OFM, is provincial minister of Holy Name Province, the largest group of Franciscan friars in the United States, serving an area from New England to Florida. Rev. Dominic Monti, OFM, is provincial vicar and a Franciscan historian. Information about Holy Name Province can be found on [www.hnp.org](http://www.hnp.org).*

---

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