



A History of the 31st Street Project of Holy Name Province Order of Friars Minor

The friars of Holy Name Province had, over the course of some 80 years, assembled land between 31st and 32nd streets on the west side of Manhattan. For almost as many years, they debated what to do with this land. Most friars agreed that it was valuable land which someday should be developed. In 1987, the friars seriously considered moving ahead with plans to develop the site, to the point of hiring an architect and contacting possible developers. Unfortunately, that year the stock market suffered one of the most significant losses in its history and subsequently the real estate market in Manhattan went sour.

In the year 2000, Fr. Ronald Stark, OFM, the guardian and pastor of St. Francis Parish and Friary in Manhattan on the 31st Street property, approached Fr. John O'Connor, OFM, who, at that time, served as Director of Properties and Finance for Holy Name Province. He asked Fr. John if he would support his request to the Provincial Minister and the Provincial Council to make a commitment to set aside funds to build a new friary. He explained that the current friary was in very bad condition and was becoming a fire trap. Fr. John O'Connor agreed with Fr. Ron that something had to be done and suggested that the better approach to the problem would be to get permission to do a feasibility study to see if the entire assemblage of property could be developed. This would have the effect of both producing funds for the construction of the friary as well as developing an income for the friars. Fr. John then approached the Provincial and Council with his idea.

After considerable discussion, the Provincial, Fr. John Felice, OFM, and the Council gave permission to hire a firm to conduct a feasibility study. The firm chosen, Perkins and Eastman, assembled a team of professionals from several pertinent fields and conducted a three-month study. The consultants concluded that the plan to develop the site was feasible and recommended that the Province of the Most Holy Name proceed. This information was given to the Provincial and Council and, again after considerable discussion, he was given permission to work with a team of professionals to develop an RFP (a Request for Proposal), describing to developers the program of construction that a client would like to achieve on site). The RFP, in turn, was sent to a number of developers in the New York area. Several major developers responded and eventually three finalists were chosen. Fr. John O'Connor, Fr. Peter Brophy, OFM, and Fr. Joe Hertel, OFM, met with the three finalists and, in the end, selected the development partners Sidney Fetner Associates and The Durst Organization, both highly-respected developers in New York.

Fr. John O'Connor, after days of training and tutoring by his team of advisors, Ken Lore, David Tiger, Mel Oncu and their associates, then began with this legal team several years of negotiation with the partners of the friars in this project. Part way through these negotiations, Fr. John was informed that the American Cancer Society was interested in purchasing part of the building for a Hope Lodge, a residence where cancer patients can stay free of charge while receiving chemotherapy treatment or wait for bone marrow replacements. After a period of negotiations, a separate deal was signed to sell several floors of the building to the American Cancer Society.

On Sept. 13, 2007, after years of negotiation and construction, we dedicated this magnificent facility. It is a building that holds within it the new home of the Franciscan Friars, the new Provincial Offices of Holy Name Province, and a new gathering space for major events of the Province and the parish of St Francis of Assisi on West 31st Street. In addition, it contains several floors where cancer patients can find hope and lodging while being treated for their illness. This new building also contains a significant number of apartments for those who would be considered low-income tenants. Finally, this structure is considered a Green building (environmentally friendly) by the United States government, and will soon be certified on one of the highest levels as such.

The friars of Holy Name Province give thanks for this great project. We appreciate all who made this building possible -- the friars in administration, the local friar community of St. Francis parish, our benefactors and friends, and, last but by no means least, the loving God who created us and blessed us with the life and vision of our father St. Francis of Assisi.

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