



**Franciscan Friars
Holy Name Province
Communications Office**
129 West 31st St., 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001- 3403
646-473-0265
www.hnp.org

Contact: Jocelyn Thomas, director
JThomas@hnp.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Franciscans to Turn Over Little Falls Church to Paterson Diocese

NEW YORK, N.Y. – Feb. 4, 2008 -- The Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province, with headquarters in New York City, announced that it is turning over operation of Our Lady of the Holy Angels in Little Falls, N.J., to the Diocese of Paterson.

The announcement was made at parish Masses the weekend of Feb. 2-3. Provincial Minister Father John O'Connor, OFM, had met Jan. 28 with Bishop Arthur Joseph Serratelli, bishop of the Diocese of Paterson, to discuss the decision and to begin transition plans.

The Province decided to release Holy Angels 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 the joint letter with Provincial Vicar Father Dominic Monti, OFM. "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 made following months of discernment, consideration and meetings on the issue. "This was a very difficult decision to make, and I know the parishioners of Holy Angels have great affinity for the friars and the Franciscan presence in the parish. It is my hope and prayer that the faithful will build on our legacy of service and further strengthen Holy Angels in the coming years."

Bishop Serratelli 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.

As a well-established parish in a suburban setting, Holy Angels is atypical of many of the parishes served by the friars. The Franciscan order traditionally devotes its resources to developing parishes in need of support, with most of the parishes located in more urban areas. As a suburban parish, Little Falls does not reflect the province's current priority of serving in multi-cultural settings.

Holy Angels Pastor Father Robert Sandoz, OFM, and the parish vicar, Father Gregory Gebbia, OFM, have both served the parish for nine years. They will be re-assigned once the transition is completed this summer. The province has a term limit of nine years for pastors so this is a logical time of transition, Father Monti added.

The Little Falls church is one of two that Holy Name Province is turning over to diocesan leadership this year; the other is Holy Cross Church in the Bronx, N.Y. The friars have a long history in the metropolitan New York area, particularly in the Paterson area, where the Franciscan friars settled in 1876, as refugees from the policies of the German government. Beginning in the 1880s, many mission parishes were established in North Jersey, one of which was in Little Falls, where a small church was built in 1883.

Over the years, the Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province went out from their two established friaries in Paterson and Butler to serve these new mission parishes. The post-World War II years were a time in which Passaic County grew rapidly and the small missions became full-fledged residential parishes, with larger churches and parochial schools. Since the mission churches had been served by Holy Name Province Franciscans for years, it was natural that the people in them wanted the friars to continue to staff them. In that time, the Province had many friars in training; in 1941, Holy Name boasted 665 members. In 1943, 150 of the young friars were preparing for ordination, so staffing parishes was easy. At its peak in 1965, the Province had more than 1,000 friars compared to its current 375 members.

In 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.

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 a diocese some of its suburban parishes, according to Father Monti, a specialist in Franciscan history. In 1982, the Province withdrew from churches in Wyckoff, N.J., and in 1990 from Ringwood and Wanaque. Earlier this decade, it turned over to the diocese parishes in West Milford (2003) and Hewitt (2004). Parishes in the neighboring Diocese of Newark have also been turned over by the friars.

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.