The Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province

An Introduction
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What Is A Province?
Only eight years after St. Francis’ band of Lesser Brothers received papal approval, its rapid growth led them to form regional units, or provinces, in 1217. Today, the Order of Friars Minor comprises more than 100 provinces, generally defined by political or linguistic boundaries.

Although all Franciscans form one great brotherhood, a friar’s primary “home” is his province. It forms a network of brothers who share his Gospel ideals grouped in local fraternities (friaries) that provide him a base of common prayer and personal belonging, as well as a variety of ministries through which he brings the Gospel to the world. The friars of each province meet every three years to set priorities for their life together and to elect leaders.

What Is Holy Name Province?
Holy Name Province is the largest of the seven OFM provinces in the United States. The province traces its roots to Franciscan missionaries who arrived in the eastern United States in the mid 1800s to minister to a flood of European immigrants. In 1855, Fr. Pamfilo da Magliano, OFM, and three other Italian friars came to Western New York where they founded St. Bonaventure College. Twenty years later, friars from Germany, led by Fr. Francis Koch, OFM, fleeing persecution in their native land, settled in Paterson, N.J. In 1901, these early foundations were regrouped and Holy Name Province was established.

Who Belongs To Holy Name Province?
With more than 250 friars, the Province typifies the American melting pot, including men from a wide spectrum of backgrounds: African-American, Canadian, Colombian, Cuban, Filipino, German, Haitian, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Mexican, Polish, and Vietnamese.

What Is The Mission Of Holy Name Province?
Holy Name Province has long been characterized by the wide diversity of its ministries and a talent for innovative service. Today, we continue Francis’ mission to bring the Gospel message alive in our contemporary world.
As our mission statement expresses: “Holy Name Province is an evangelical and missionary fraternity called to minister in the eastern United States and abroad. Rooted in the Catholic and Franciscan tradition, we are disciples of Christ who seek to bring the Gospel into the everyday experience of all people through Franciscan witness, popular preaching, teaching, and pastoral leadership. We foster Christian discipleship by collaborating with those whom we serve and by standing in solidarity with all people, especially the alienated, the immigrant, and the poor.”

Our message is simple: God loves each of us totally and unconditionally.

**What Makes The Friars Of Holy Name Province Different?**
The Franciscan friars have always been thought of as “of the people and with the people.” Living in community is a core value and helps the friars to put things in a more “down to earth” perspective. The friars never see themselves as better than anyone, and therefore they withhold judgment and accept everyone as they are, those who are in the faith community and those who are not.

“All are welcome” is the phrase at the core of Franciscan hospitality.

Our identity as a province, however, comes not so much from what we have done, but from what we believe. Our Provincial Minister and his Council recently expressed our beliefs in these terms:

“As a local church, we believe that Holy Name Province can offer the wider Church a true gift through our internal and external life. Our internal life is marked by three characteristics. First, a sense of trust among members, whereby we presume good intentions, not self-seeking motives behind another’s actions; we find understanding, not judgment, when weakness is found; we experience encouragement, not cynicism, when dreams are shared. Second, a spirit of collaboration, whereby Provincial leadership works with local leadership, providing both support and challenge, while local leaders work with their communities in advancing Franciscan life. Third, our internal life is characterized by a shared spiritual life, so that our common life is shaped by a desire to become even more Christ-like and not merely similar in dress, recreation, and friendships.”
“A Church without a sense of mission is not a Church at all. Here, too, we believe that Holy Name Province can offer itself as an example to other local Churches and the universal Church. The three priorities of our external life call us to promote ministry of lay Catholic men and women in the Church and especially in the world, to intensify our commitment to the social teaching of the Catholic tradition in matters of justice and peace, and to reach out to the alienated in our society, particularly immigrants and the religiously alienated.”

“With this vision, we believe we can enter that future with the same confidence that we have had in the past about the distinctive role that Franciscans bring to both the American nation and the Roman Catholic Church.”
Love, for St. Francis of Assisi and his followers, is not only a “home” but also an “action” word, a word that demands commitment and dedication to service. As Franciscans, we are called to live simply in solidarity with the poor and to give of ourselves in serving others.

One day at Mass, Francis heard the Gospel passage describing how Jesus sent his apostles out on a mission to proclaim the reign of God. He took this as a revelation that his main work was to do exactly what Jesus had commissioned the apostles to do.

Our General Constitutions today restate that same ideal:

“Just as the Son was sent by the Father, all brothers are sent to the whole world to be heralds of the Gospel to every creature … whether they live a contemplative and penitential life together as brothers, working for the fraternity, or in the world while undertaking intellectual and material activities, or exercising a pastoral ministry in parishes and other ecclesiastical institutions, or finally by the witness of a simple Franciscan presence that announces the coming of God’s reign.”

Just as our sense of fraternal community is colored by minority or littleness, so too is our apostolic ministry. Our Constitutions admonish us that “the brothers should consider work and service as a gift of God … they should present themselves therefore as lesser brothers whom no one need fear, for they want to serve others and not be their masters.”

Franciscan ministry has always been flexible. Its guiding principle is to witness the Gospel according to the real needs of people within the context of their individual culture and their particular time in history. However, Francis believed that we should always prefer those ministries which express solidarity with the poor and service to the poor.
“Each and every brother should show a preference,” our Constitutions direct, “for the marginalized, for the poor and the oppressed, for troubled and sick people, and be happy to live among them and show compassion.”

Today, as Franciscans of Holy Name Province, we are committed to these same apostolic ideals, to bring the Good News to all people, not in abstract terms, but in the concrete reality of their lives. Our current priorities, as determined by our most recent Provincial Chapter are these:

1. empowering lay leadership both within and outside of the Church
2. ministering in the areas of justice and peace
3. ministering to those who are alienated from Church or society

More concretely, as brothers, priests, novices and even candidates for the Order, we are involved in many different apostolic ministries: parishes, schools, seminaries, downtown service churches, urban ministry centers, and campus ministry; chaplaincies; communications, missions, retreat centers and other preaching ministries; services and shelters for the homeless, hungry and mentally ill; “come home” programs for alienated Catholics; and ministry to persons with AIDS.
Among these ministries are:

St. Bonaventure University, the Franciscan Institute (an international center for Franciscan research, study, and publication); Siena College; downtown service churches of St. Francis of Assisi in New York City and St. Anthony Shrine in Boston; three residences for homeless, mentally ill persons in New York City; the oldest continuing breadline in the U.S. at St. Francis of Assisi Church in New York City (launched during the Great Depression of 1929); ministries to the needy at St. Francis House, Boston; St. Francis Inn’s services for the destitute and poor in Philadelphia; the Franciscan Missionary Union; St. Anthony’s Guild; the Ministry of the Word including the Lateran Center for Franciscan discernment.

Today, as in Francis’s time, the chief characteristics of all these Franciscan ministries are friendliness, kindness, love, and compassion.
Franciscan Community: Love At Home

The Gospel, the Rule of St. Francis and the present General Constitutions are for us the threefold source for living the values of Francis today. Indeed, all three are in a sense the same source, since Francis’s original intent was to have no other Rule except the Gospel itself.

Our present Constitutions (interpretations of how the Rule is to be lived today) give an accurate summary of Franciscan life:

“Founded by St. Francis of Assisi, the Order of Friars Minor is a brotherhood in which the brothers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus Christ more closely. By their profession, they are totally consecrated to God, whom they love above everything else. They live the Gospel in the Church according to the vision that St. Francis lived and taught.”

“As followers of St. Francis, the brothers are held to live the Gospel vision completely in the spirit of prayer and devotion and brotherly sharing. They are to give witness to a life of penance and lowliness and, with love for all, they are to bring the Gospel message to the whole world, proclaiming reconciliation, peace, and justice by their works.”

Our Franciscan life centers around two essential functions: fraternal community and apostolic ministry. Both, however, are strongly colored by another essential characteristic: minority – a simple, humble, selfless and non-power-seeking approach to both community and ministry.

The following quotation about the “golden age” of Franciscan community is taken from one of the earliest biographies of Francis:

“How great was the love that flourished in the members of this pious society! For whenever they came together anywhere, or met one another along the way, there a shoot of spiritual love sprang up, sprinkling over all the seed of true affection. What more shall I say? Chaste embraces, gentle feelings,
a holy kiss, pleasing conversation, modest laughter, joyous looks, a single eye, a submissive spirit, a peaceable tongue, a mild answer, oneness of purpose, ready obedience, unwearied hand — all these were found in them . . . They came together with great desire; they remained together with joy; but separation from one another was sad on both sides, a bitter divorce, a cruel estrangement.”

That kind of ideal fraternal community, of course, is possible only when it is strongly motivated by the powerful, charismatic presence and influence of a person such as Francis, or Jesus, or other great people-oriented religious leaders.

As the Constitutions explain:

“With the love of God poured out into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, all brothers should promote continually a family spirit and friendly relationships, especially among themselves. They should be courteous and cheerful and develop all the other virtues. Thus they can continually encourage one another to be men of hope, peace, and happiness. United in true brotherhood, they should reach a maturity that is fully human, Christian and religious.”

(Article 39)

“Every brother is a gift given by God to the brotherhood. Brothers differ in temperament, cultural background, customs, abilities, gifts, and specific traits. They should accept each other as they are as equals. The whole fraternity then becomes the privileged place for encountering God.”

(Article 40)

In Holy Name Province, although some of us are involved in “individual” ministries, the majority of members live together in fraternal communities. Most of these communities are small (two to six members), such as those in Franciscan parishes or specialized ministries for the poor.

A few of our communities are quite large (10 to 25 members), such as those at the service churches, of St. Francis of Assisi in New York City and St. Anthony Shrine in Boston, St. Bonaventure University, Siena College, and Holy Name College in Silver Spring, MD, (the residence for the interprovincial postulancy program).
In addition to shared life within individual communities, the Province has an excellent heritage of fraternal relations within the entire Province. Our Communications Office publishes *HNP Today*, a blog to keep us informed of provincial happenings and to promote fraternal relations. We also have *The Catalog of the Province*, with a photo and pertinent information about each member, *The Provincial Annals*, and *The Anthonian*.

Perhaps the best building block of fraternal relations in our Province is the individual Franciscan’s ability to visit with other Franciscans around the Province and to attend chapters, workshops, retreats, solemn professions, ordinations, jubilee celebrations, funerals, and other provincial gatherings.

The Franciscan ideal has always been that love starts at home.
Is God calling YOU to be a Franciscan Friar?
This is the peace proclaimed and given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and preached again and again by our father Francis.

At the beginning and end of every sermon he announced peace; in every greeting he wished for peace; in every contemplation he sighed for ecstatic peace.

~St. Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*
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