



Franciscan Friars
Holy Name Province
129 West 31st Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001-3403

January 3, 2020

Steven Patti, O.F.M.
Pastor
St. Francis Church
11401 Leesville Road
Raleigh, NC 27613-5954

Dear Fr. Steven and the Community of St. Francis of Assisi,

In a very moving passage in the Gospel of Luke, the crowds go searching for Jesus and, when at last they find him, they try to prevent him from leaving their village. Despite their pleas and urgings, Jesus does not grant their request. Instead, always focused on his mission, Jesus responds, “To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Lk 4:42-43).

It is with great sadness that, echoing the words of Jesus, I write to you today to announce that the Franciscans must withdraw from Saint Francis of Assisi parish in Raleigh. After thirty-three years in Raleigh, we are no longer able to continue serving the community of St. Francis. Because we have shared so much history and life with you over the years -- beginning with the first friars and continuing right up to the present moment with Jim, Steve and yourself -- our departure will be a difficult moment for all of us.

So, why must we leave you? First of all, please know that this is not due to any failing or shortcoming on your part. Nor on the part of the diocese of Raleigh. Rather, when all is said and done, the motive for our departure comes down to two decisive factors having to do with the Franciscans: our declining numbers and fidelity to our Franciscan charism.

In 1985 we had 708 friars actively working in ministry in our province. In 2001, we were down to 443 friars in active ministry. Today in 2020, we are around 280. Very simply stated, we no longer have sufficient friars to staff all the ministries where we have served in the past.

Additionally, our Franciscan charism calls us to live and minister as brothers *in community*. Our fraternal life together is a central priority for us—it is the core component of who we are and profess to be: lesser *brothers*. With our diminished numbers, it is impossible for us to maintain all of our current ministerial commitments while also maintaining fraternities composed of several friars living in community.

Moreover, as Franciscans we are called to imitate the itinerancy of Jesus who moved throughout the towns of his native land, never settling forever in one location. Thus Francis, in his Later Rule, admonished the friars, “Let the brothers not make anything their own, neither house, nor place, nor anything at all. [Live] as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility...” (*Later Rule, 6*)

It is for these reasons, and with deep sadness, that we have made the difficult decision to withdraw this summer from St. Francis.

Please be assured that this has not been a hasty or casual decision. Rather, during the past two years, each of our existing Fraternities in Mission (FIMs) completed a thorough self-study and, working with our provincial Fraternal Life in Mission Directorate, developed a report on the state of their FIM. Visits were made by members of the Directorate to each of the FIMs to allow the friars, their partners in ministry and their local bishop to discuss the report and share concerns about the future. The Directorate, current leadership of the FIMs (Pastors and Guardians), and all the friars of Holy Name Province were given the opportunity to make recommendations to the Provincial Minister and his Council as to where to stay and where to withdraw. With the wisdom gleaned over the past two years, the Provincial Council and I prayerfully made our final decisions in December, 2019.

This was not an easy process, but it was a prayerful, comprehensive and realistic one.

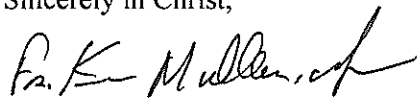
I have spoken with Bishop Zarama about our decision to withdraw from St. Francis and he has assured me that he will provide for the continued pastoral care of the faithful of the parish. I am very grateful to Bishop Zarama and his predecessors for their goodness to the Franciscans during the years of our service in the diocese of Raleigh. I am also grateful to Steve, Jim and yourself for your dedicated service to the parish in the last few years. I am thankful, too, for the many other friars who served in Raleigh over the past many years.

Most of all, I am very appreciative of all the support and collaboration that you, the community of St. Francis, have extended to us. On behalf of all the friars of our province, thank you for your goodness, understanding and faith.

The earliest followers of Jesus referred to themselves as those who “belonged to the Way” (Acts 9:2). This ancient description of the Christian community conveys a sense of movement, of pilgrimage, of never sitting still or remaining fixed in one location. To be a follower of Jesus is to be “on the road,” “on the way toward ...” the fullness of life that God intends for each of us and for creation.

May the Church in Raleigh continue to grow and bear witness to the Risen Lord who is the center and foundation of our life and who calls us each day to continue “on the Way,” amidst all life’s changes, toward the fullness of God’s kingdom. We will miss you, but you will continue to be with us in spirit and prayer.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Kevin Mullen, O.F.M.", written in a cursive style.

(Rev.) Kevin J. Mullen, O.F.M.
Provincial Minister

CC: James Sabak, O.F.M.
Guardian