

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May the Lord give you peace!

Today, with the celebration of the First Sunday of Advent, we begin a new liturgical year. Once again, we renew our commitment to follow the Lord Jesus throughout the coming year: from our hopeful longing for the new life promised to us in the eagerly-awaited *Emanuel* (God-with-us), to our joyful proclamation of Christ as *our* King on the last Sunday of the liturgical year.

This First Sunday of Advent is also a good moment to share with you news about a new chapter in the life of the Catholic Center community here at the University of Georgia, Athens. Specifically, a change in leadership at the center that will take place in the near future.

Franciscan life is rooted in two core priorities: to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to do so as brothers who live together in community. No surprise then, that Francis of Assisi called his new group of followers the Order of “friars” (“brothers”) minor. Our dedication to living the Gospel finds its first concrete expression in sharing a fraternal life as brothers to each other. We live this life in local fraternities and, where there are not many friars, in regional fraternities.

Fraternal care allows us—humbly and honestly—to make known our needs to each other. As most of you know, our brother, Fr. John Coughlin, within the past year suffered the death of first his mother and then his father in rapid succession. John shared with me and with his brother friars some of the personal difficulties he was experiencing as a result of the loss of both his parents.

In my conversations with Fr. John, the idea surfaced that a change of location might be helpful for him as he continues to process and work through his parents’ deaths. Specifically, John had been invited to join our fraternity in Macon, GA where there is a pastoral need for a friar-priest who speaks Spanish.

While this discussion was taking place, a number of long-standing administrative issues at the Catholic Center came to light. The Archdiocese of Atlanta was most helpful to, and supportive of, Fr. John. With him, they developed a solid action plan that will ensure that the Catholic Center is compliant with best practices in parish administration, including staff effectiveness and transparency in all actions.

Even with this administrative blueprint for the Center, Fr. John continued to feel considerable stress in trying to implement the plan at this moment in his life. Therefore, he continued his fraternal discussions with his brother friars in Macon where he would have much fewer administrative responsibilities.

In early October, Fr. John approached me about the possibility of a transfer to Macon. He also shared with me that Fr. Frank Critch—a friar currently in Macon and who is known here at the

Catholic Center—is eager to work with college-age students and the community at Athens and is willing to serve as Director of this Center.

After additional discussion with Fr. John, Fr. Frank and Fr. William McConville, I made the decision—approved by my Provincial Council—to propose this transfer.

I next consulted with Archbishop Wilton Gregory to share my decision and its rationale. The Archbishop was most fraternal and gracious—noting his concern both for Fr. John’s well-being and for the important ministry at the Catholic Center. He agreed with my decision. And he agreed to appoint Fr. Frank Critch as the new Director of the Catholic Center.

This transfer will take effect on January 1, 2018.

On behalf of all the brothers of Holy Name Province, please know that I am very grateful for the support that you have extended to Fr. John. He is grateful as well. I am also grateful to Fr. John for his good work here.

We Franciscans highly value our ministry here, and its rich history that began 60 years ago in 1957 with Fr. Cronin Kelly. We hope, with the help of God, to continue serving here for as long as our numbers allow.

I ask for your support of Fr. Frank as he begins to serve the ministry at the Catholic Center. And please keep Fr. John in your prayers as he joins the fraternity and parish ministry in Macon.

Sincerely,

Fr. Kevin J. Mullen, O.F.M.
Provincial Minister
Holy Name Province