

Franciscan Friars Now Accepting Texted Prayer Requests

The largest group of Franciscan friars in the United States is offering the faithful a new way to **pray** in the digital age by accepting **prayer requests** via text messages.

The Friars of Holy Name Province, who staff 40 parishes and have colleges, soup kitchens and food centers along the eastern seaboard, as well as groups in Peru and Tokyo, are among a few religious groups offering this type of digital service.

Its "Text a Prayer Intention to a Franciscan Friar" initiative, which is described as **faith** at your fingertips, is a novel way for Roman Catholics to connect.

"People are always saying to friars, 'Can you say a **prayer** for me?' Or 'Can you remember my mother who has cancer?'" Father David Convertino, the New York-based executive director of development for the Franciscan Friars of the Holy Name Province, said in an interview.

"I was thinking that a lot of people text everything now, even more than email, so why not have people have the ability to ask us to pray for them ... by texting."

The faithful simply text the word 'prayer' to 306-44, free of charge. A welcome message from the friars comes up along with a box to type in the request. When the it is sent, the sender receives a reply.

The intentions are received on a website and will be included collectively in the friars' prayers twice a day and at Mass.

It is one of several ways the friars hope to reach a younger

audience, increase the number of faithful and spread the faith. They have already renovated their website and the next step is moving into Facebook and tweeting.

"If the Pope can tweet, friars can text," said Father David.

The friars also have a presence on LinkedIn and have been streaming some of their church services.

"We're trying," said Father David when asked if the friars are well into the digital age, adding that they were "rushing madly into the 19th century."

Most of the 325 friars, whose average age is about 60, are comfortable with the technology.

"We have a friar who is 80 who was texting today," said Father David.

The friars are following the example of 85-year-old Pope Benedict, the leader of the world's 1.2 billion Roman Catholics, whom the Vatican said had 2.1 million followers on Twitter just eight days after sending his first tweet.

The Pontiff tweets in several languages, including Arabic, and plans to add Latin and Chinese to them.

"We're really excited about this working," said Father David, about the new program. "I think we'll be able to keep up (with all the intentions). That's what we do, we pray for people."

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