

“Come Try Our Way of Life:” Disciples Together as We Consider 30 Years and More!



In the last newsletter I began to tell the story of our beginnings: what inspired us to look for a Mountain and begin to found this way of life. As we found it, began to discover it, we realized that this life would lead us beyond our Mountain home.

Studies and experiences with others of Franciscan life let us know that it was always true for Franciscans – disciples of Jesus growing to become Apostles. This is true, I would say, of most great religious movements. When we learn something we want to practice it, we want to bring it into other’s lives so their lives are also productive – full of peace and happiness. We learned here that we wanted to go beyond here, deepening our spiritual journey.

This life helps us to see that all life is *educative*; all life leads us to the knowledge and the love of God and each other if we have the heart to see.

“Come, and I will make you fishers of men and women,” Jesus said to his disciples after they had an “empty net experience.” They had been fishing for a while with no luck. If you remember the story, whether you are Christian or not, whatever your background is, you may know and feel the challenge of trusting “beginning again” when you are rising up out of a time of “failure,” an empty net time. To trust Jesus as a friend and as “the teacher of my heart,” as St. Francis spoke of him, to have the courage to lower our nets, our hearts and hands one more time is to find and draw others into a new way of life.

In the Gospel story – and it is true for all of us here at the Mountain young and old – the Disciples, friends of Jesus, were still learning *how* and also learning *what* it was that moved them to take action, that opened their hearts to listen to Jesus as a teacher and then to try, to try *one more time*, something *new*.



Bona alumni and future Bonnies, including the Specht family, reflecting by the pond.

Mt. IRENAEUS

FRANCISCAN MOUNTAIN RETREAT

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They were gathering around Jesus and finding their way together, but each of them - obviously as we do as well - had their own feelings, doubts, hopes, hesitations as well as great expectations! As they grew to those we call Apostles they were learning how to step out "two at a time" to serve and to speak - to proclaim the Good News sometimes in hostile or non-receptive places and populations.



Joe Flynn, Mountain Companion in the midst of many old and young Mountain friends.

Might that sound somewhat like today? Might that sound like some of what has us either hesitant or hopeful for the future of the Church, the Mountain, our homes, and places where we gather for worship wanting to make a difference?

It is a risk for us to follow, to be transformed and partner with Jesus in the transformation of our world.

From our very beginning, when we longed for a mountain and it, as yet, did not have a place or a name; we had talked about it *as a place of learning*. We brought with us ways of reflection and movement to action that we had learned in other places. In my early education as a friar, my involvement in the service of the poor, and outreach to the disenfranchised, allowed me to gather with people of other traditions. I began to understand a nonviolent way of looking - observing, judging, and taking new actions for change and growth.



The altar is set with multiple alter cloths and each one has its own story.

Here at the Mountain, over time, we began to name this as a transformational process of **remembering** - what has transpired, what we have been involved in, how things have gone - **reflecting** upon this, hearing the word of God and the Spirit movement in our life, our gifts and challenges, that might transform what we are doing even further so that we might **respond** in a new and deeper way for ourselves and others.



Br. Joe Kotula greets people who wanted to come back to help us celebrate our 30th Anniversary.

"Ours is a life founded on the sapiential tradition, finding experience a most profound way to knowledge, finding that doing leads us to knowing." Some of the first things I had written and reviewed with others in the early 70s were expressed this way: the need for such "a retreat" has arisen from the life of the University community and the Franciscan Orders and expressed needs of area men and women. - To offer a live-learning supplement to the usual University academic/social/spiritual life and to foster changing interaction from vertical/hierarchical to horizontal/mutual (the Gospel relationship fostered by St. Francis).

I have never been accused of saying something in two words that could take 10! But it seems to me as I look back on these words that were embraced and made real by others, we moved ahead together to find a mountain and form a way of life - which we knew was about "living and learning." We knew that it was about a movement from a hierarchical or vertical way in which we are oppressed, or exercise power to oppress others, to a horizontal/mutual. We are moved to this wonderful experiential sense of Bonaventure's image of a God as a circle or sphere whose center is in each one of us and whose power and service and goodness just wells up and flows out from and to everyone in an infinite and inclusive way.



The 30th Anniversary Team who worked together from far and wide to organize a year's worth of events.

"This, my friends, is only the beginning" a song begins from a musical long ago. This, my friends, truly is the new beginning each time

we begin again at the Mountain, in the Valley, in our homes and workplaces. In fact you might remember that this expresses our one-line mission statement *"to join Jesus Christ in making all things new."*

God's Word and our company with each other are the foundational places where empty net experiences invite us to go to find fullness, to discover the wealth and capacity we each have to help the helpless even in ourselves and among us as we go out to the others who are "lost and marginalized."

A number of years ago, friends of the Mountain living in different places began a group called Franciscan Sojourners. The deep sense of traveling in life a day at a time and traveling together in the spirit and way of life of Francis of Assisi was the inspiration for this group. Practice and a practical way of living are always foundational to wisdom and to a wisdom tradition. It is part of all ancient practices that we do and learn, learn and do, side-by-side with each other and in the dynamic that we sometimes call remember, reflect and respond – action, contemplation, action – observe, judge and then act – moving back into our life to the marketplace, wherever we have been, to bring a renewed stance, to bring the newness of life to "make all things new with Jesus Christ."

Now in homes around the country and in other settings we are slowly but surely forming small local groups who are trying out a simple series of recipes to share spiritual evenings and afternoons related to their life and work and their own vocations. Here on the Mountain, and you've read about it here, we are blessed with more and more interest in joining our life as Mountain Companions, or in taking sabbatical time with us.

We are interested in how our life is transformative for us here, for those who join us here, and for where you are now living and for those in your circle as the Mountain circle grows. And so, simply, I would invite you to consider joining us in the expanding process of reflection and consider when you might come here to the Mountain or how and when the Mountain might come to you. We are happy to tell you about regional gatherings, however we may not be gathering in your region.

The autumn air on the Mountain today came over our hilltop, moving down on a golden valley and sapphire pond – but it did not stay here nor do many. Let us celebrate all the ways in which we are seeking and practicing transformation and let us continue to welcome others into the Good News.

"On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will prepare a banquet for all peoples"
~ Isaiah 25

*MERRY BLESSED
CHRISTMAS!
Dan & Fran*

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!!

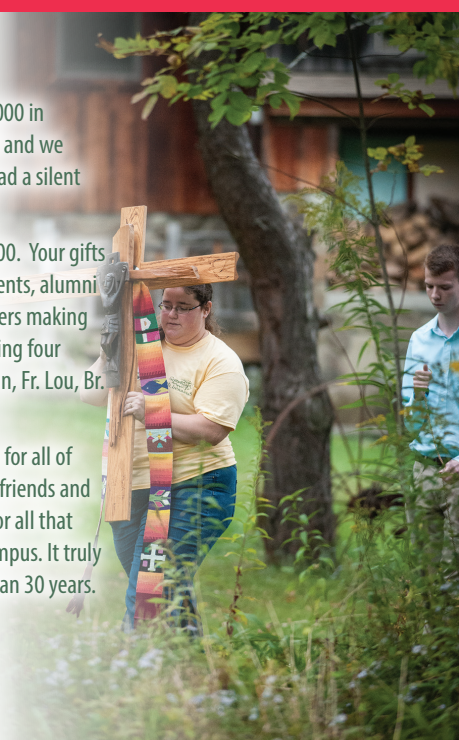
As Chair of The Mountain Fund, I want to express my gratitude for your support which helped us achieve a record \$200,000 in donations for the first time in history. When I was asked to be The Mountain Fund Chair in 2012-13, our goal was \$150K and we received \$167K. In fiscal year 2013-14 our goal was \$160K and you gave \$178K. Last year our goal was \$175K but we had a silent target of \$200K. I don't know if any of us thought it was possible, but thanks to your generosity, we raised \$201,332.

The Mountain Fund is critical to the funding of the Mountain. Our annual budget for Mt. Irenaeus is a little over \$500,000. Your gifts funded approximately 40% of this amount. The most important use of our funds goes to visits to the Mountain by students, alumni and friends and bringing the Mountain into your homes and other gatherings in the Valley. Our annual budget also covers making necessary repairs (remember the Mountain just celebrated its 30th Anniversary); paying food and utility bills; maintaining four vehicles; and sending out monthly communications. I'm sure you know how much your support is appreciated by Fr. Dan, Fr. Lou, Br. Kevin, Br. Joe and all whose lives have been transformed by Mt. Irenaeus.

I also want to thank our wonderful Mountain office team - **Mary Schlosser**, **Mary Giardini** and **Michelle Marcellin** - for all of their help in achieving this goal. I want to thank the many Phonathon volunteers who make Fall and Spring calls to our friends and benefactors. And, of course, I want to thank Fr. Dan, Fr. Lou, Br. Kevin, Br. Joe and our Mountain Companion, Joe Flynn for all that they do for the Mountain. St Bonaventure University is blessed to have this beautiful mountain home so close to our campus. It truly is a "Diamond in the Rough," a spiritual center for peace and love that has enriched "Bonaventure & beyond" for more than 30 years. Thanks to your support, we know it will continue to enrich countless lives for at least another three decades!!

Looking forward to another record setting Mountain Fund Campaign,

~ **Marv Stocker '65** Chair of the Mountain Fund



MT. IRENAEUS CELEBRATES 30 YEARS, WHILE LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

30

When the Mt. Irenaeus community recently took a weekend to celebrate 30 years of life and ministry, it was both a look to the future and a celebration of the past. The Mountain marked its 30th anniversary on Saturday, Sept. 19, with a gathering of about 200 people of all ages. The day included a memorial ceremony in the labyrinth, a Mass celebrated by **Dan Riley, ofm**, Mountain founder and animator, with participation by students, alumni and other friends of the Mountain, a dish-to-pass supper and a concert by **Kim and Reggie Harris**, joined by **Glenn McClure**. The celebration was warm and conversational. During the labyrinth ceremony, names were read of friends who have supported the Mountain and loved ones of those attending; **Kevin Kriso, ofm**, Guardian of the Mt. Irenaeus Friary, led the prayers and remembrance, and **Kim and Reggie Harris** held a conversation as they led the assembly in singing. During the Mass, **Maura Bednar Parda**, a native of Olean, noted that "it took going away to realize the beauty of the mountains, and of this Mountain," while Bonaventure senior **Mike Specht** pointed out that the celebration could have been held anywhere, because what makes the Mountain special is the community. **Both Dan and Chris Domes**, one of the first lay people to live at the Mountain and now president of a Franciscan college, Silver Lake College of the Holy Family, took time to discuss the people who have shaped the Mountain, and what it offers both the Church and the world as a whole. Dan noted, "In our early years we were able to, with the significant gift of generous benefactors, complete our most essential buildings which have really shaped and supported our Mountain mission and culture from the design of the Chapel through our very last construction of La Paz hermitage."

He said he and architect **Grant Scott** had developed an exceptional concept design/build relationship, which through the generosity of Scott and his firm was essential to the growth of the Mountain. "With this growth was the ability to grow our friar community and have companions and guests with us. The shape and form of our life and the longevity of the commitment of our founding friars, **Dan Hurley, Lou McCormick and Joe Kotula**, and their singular dedication to our manner of life and ministry have lent to dynamic continuity and the success of our mission, along with a very vital and always vigilant Board of Trustees."

Domes, who spoke at the anniversary Mass, recalled being one of the group of students who visited in the fall of 1984, when Fr. Dan celebrated Mass and the group met the owner of the land that is now the Mountain. Domes graduated in May 1985 and lived in the friary at Bonaventure until the property officially became Mountain land in early June, then helped to load donated furniture stored in garages in Doyle Hall and moved to the property.

"People just started coming over time. We put a screened-in tent on a platform and had Masses there," Domes recalled. But prayer was accompanied by a lot of hard work, such as using a brush hog to clear land for the first cabin, Sunrise, and to groom old logging trails to create walking paths. "We started doing dish-to-pass brunches after Mass that first summer. I remember sharing in the work, sharing in the prayer services - it was very, very powerful."

One major change that Domes sees from the early days is that the Mountain now has the facilities - the Chapel, several cabins - to accommodate people as needed, when in the early days it was very difficult to accommodate large groups of people.

But one constant has been the sense of community, and the rhythm of Mountain life.

"Whether you come on Sunday for Mass or to stay for a week, you become part of the life of the community," Domes said. "The prayer life here is also a practical way of living: prayer and solitude when you need it, but being part of the life of the community."

Dan sees the inclusion of laypeople into Mountain community life as one of the signature aspects of the Mountain.

"In a world that still sees Church from a clerical perspective, the Mountain, from the beginning, has been blessed with the growth and commitment of many single and married persons, and with this, the formation of a Secular Franciscan community and our Franciscan Sojourners, women and men who are growing the Mountain experience in their homes and hometowns," Fr. Dan said.

Domes agreed: "This is a very distinctive experience of Church, because it allows the laity to enter into it on an equal footing. The other thing, I think, is that it is not prescriptive; it's not ritualistic. You bring all your 'stuff' with you and you are accepted as you are. It reaches out to each person, no matter where they are on their faith journey."

While the location of the Mountain and its natural beauty are key to the Mountain experience, Dan notes that its impact reaches far beyond the mountaintop.

"Part of it is what has always been a special charism of ours, which is the formation of relationships and the growth of human intimacy, as well as the comfort and companionship of all creation here as a foundation of our spirituality. We are blessed by the natural beauty of this place and it took us three years to find it!" he said, adding that the selection process "was probably the most important part of our beginning" in that worshipping in the small space together taught the community the importance of closeness as an essential part of Gospel living.

"The simple, rich blessing of daily life - and simple is one of the essential words - in a very complex world makes what is most important about Mt. Irenaeus 'transportable,' as I like to say. We barely know we are taking it into ourselves, and then taking it away to give away and share it with others in other places," he said. While they both expect changes, both are hopeful about the future of the Mountain. Domes sees a need for greater dependence on, and involvement of, the laity, along with friars and sisters. "This place offers an opportunity to think about vocations differently," he said. "I see the Mountain as a place for education in vocational discernment, but one that is different from the seminary model," adding that while he didn't choose religious life, "the Mountain was part of my formation as a Catholic, and as a leader in Catholic higher education. It offers an opportunity to slow life down; to think about relationships, about your environment. That is learning - in the deepest sense of the word." To further the end of greater lay involvement, the Mountain Board is leading a search for an executive director, who would work in tandem with Dan and Kevin, taking on a more managerial role that will free them to focus on ministry. Dan said he expects the Mountain to continue to expand its circle, offering its unique gifts to a broader community.

"The Mountain has always been a place of education - particularly of heart-knowing - but also of expanding our capacity to know in other ways, both in the marketplace today and in the sphere of personal life, companionship people who are hungry to know," he said. "And so our growth beyond our particular mountaintop will be a major part of our future attention to our manner of life and ministry as we companion persons and intentional communities in other places beyond West Clarksville, New York. With some of the additional land and our great consciousness of living as a community of God's creatures, I see a deepening of this mystical and moral relationship: the call to live well with one another and learn from each other."

~ Suzanne Wilcox English



As I sit thinking about what I want to write in this space, especially as we wrap up our 30th anniversary celebrations, my mind wanders to the many wonderful memories I have of being at the Mountain. I can still remember my first time there, during a work afternoon that **Jim Kane**, **Marty Shields** and I attended. Many other visits have followed, including helping lead retreats as a student. Two of my best summers were living in community with the friars alongside **Jason Free** and **Katie Rinaldi Trosch** in 1990 and 1991. I have also been fortunate to live near the Mountain during my adult life, and being a part of its maturation and development, most notably serving on the Mountain Board of Trustees since 2007, and now as Chair for the past two years. As I look back over the past 25 years, it has been a true blessing to have had the Mountain as such a significant part of my life.



While it brings a lot of happiness looking back on the Mountain's rich history, it's also exciting to think of what the future holds. The Board is engaged with the friar Community and staff in planning for the next 30 years of our existence, asking important questions such as "Who will be living on the Mountain in the future? Who will we be serving?" As we start our planning, it's exciting to see our future begin to take shape.

One simple example to share is the establishment of a program called Mountain Companions, which invites others to live amongst our resident friars in ministry to our guests. **Joe Flynn** is well into his second year of this program, and has been a wonderful addition to the life of the Mountain. As the years move forward we expect this program to evolve even further, with other Mountain Companions joining the friars in ministry.

It is also exciting to see the evolution of who we minister to taking place as well. For example, before liturgy starts on Sunday morning, and guests introduce themselves, we have found a steady contingent of students from Houghton College join us in prayer and sharing. Who else may be drawn to us – both near and far – as we continue to live a way of life and ministry that is open and inviting to others that want to share their faith?

No matter what the next 30 years hold for us, I am especially grateful to all of you who help support the Mountain's way of life. Your gifts of time, talent and treasure allow us to move forward with this ministry, and along with God's Grace will help the Mountain continue to thrive for decades to come! Thank you!

~ **Mike Fenn**, Chair of Mt. Irenaeus Board of Trustees



Kim and Reggie Harris and Glen McClure, longtime friends of Mt. Irenaeus, lend their gift of voice to our celebration.



15TH ANNUAL MOUNTAIN AUCTION A SUCCESS

The 15th Annual Mountain Auction was held on November 7th at Premier Banquet Center in Olean.

The Mountain Auction is our largest annual fundraising event. The evening began with mass celebrated by Fr. Dan Reilly, ofm followed by both a silent and live auction of over 200 items. While raising needed funds for the Mountain is paramount, bringing the fellowship of the Mountain to the community remains the center of the event. Fr. Dan Riley, ofm, Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm, Br. Joe Kotula, ofm, and Fr. Lou McCormick, ofm all joined us as we celebrated and reminisced of what 30 years of Mt. Irenaeus has brought to St. Bonaventure and the surrounding community.

It all began 15 years ago, when two Mountain supporters, **Margaret Bryner** and **Bea Sear**, created the Mountain Auction to support the maintenance of the Chapel and ongoing Mountain operations. Over the last 15 years, the auction has raised over \$400,000 for Mt. Irenaeus. Three years ago we were forced to make major renovations to our Chapel including all new windows and re-siding one side of the building. The cost to do this work was over \$30,000. "Having the funds already available in the Building Maintenance Fund allowed us to do all the work at one time which saved both time and money. "The forethought of those before us who created this maintenance fund in the early years, and then the generosity of those who continue to fill those coffers allows us to continue the work of the Mountain without having to raise money for each individual project," stated **Michael Sullivan**, co-chair of the Auction Committee and Chair of Buildings and Grounds Committee. Upcoming projects include repairing windows and a new roof on the House of Peace.

Items that were auctioned off included a Drone, Go Pro Camera, Grill, weekend getaways to Niagara on the Lake, Quail Hollow Resort in Ohio, Mark Twain Country/Corning, and the Famous Gitt Estate in Gettysburg as well as Disney Park-Hopper passes, Cutco knife sets, a diamond bracelet, a Tao Cross Blessed By Pope Francis, homemade goods produced by the friars at the Mountain and more. Although, final numbers aren't available yet, we hope to have raised at least \$25,000 again.

"We can't thank the community, volunteers and committee members enough" said Kim Palmer, co-chair of the event. "We do this out of love for and in support of Mt. Irenaeus and all the work that the Friars and our volunteers provide for the students and the Mountain Community. We are already planning for next year!"



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Help us as you can, join us when we come to where you are.

AS ALWAYS WE APPRECIATE THE GENEROSITY OF OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS!

Many efforts are currently underway to raise funds in order to sustain our Mountain life. We are very excited to share information about some of these fundraising efforts:

- In the near future, we will be sharing planned giving information about how you can include the Mountain in your will and estate planning. Look for further details coming soon!
- Over the last year, we traveled around the country celebrating our 30th anniversary with friends near and far, in their homes and in their communities. We are looking forward to revisiting some of these locations to talk in more detail about the Mountain's programs and how friends can choose to support these through major gifts and / or volunteer efforts.
- Our Mountain Fund is currently under way! We look forward to reaching out to you for your continued support. Gifts to our Mountain Fund go towards our operating expenses which are approximately \$500,000 per year. If you'd like to make a gift, please visit our website at www.mounti.com, or send your gift in the envelope included in this newsletter, or mail your gift to Mt. Irenaeus Mountain Fund, Box 100, West Clarksville, NY 14786.

It is through all of these efforts that we continue to raise needed funds to sustain the Mountain now and in the future.

Please contact us if you would like further information ~ Peace!

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HOLIDAY MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2015
9:00 p.m.

Christmas Mass at Night

December 25, 2015
11:00 a.m.

Mass for Christmas Day

New Year's Eve
December 31, 2015
11:00 p.m.

New Year's Eve Prayer
Service

January 1, 2016
11:00 a.m. Mass

