

Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm

**Guardian of the Holy Peace Friary
and Animator of Mt. Irenaeus**

Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm, grew up in Greenlawn, Long Island, a suburb of New York City, where he says the sisters at his Catholic grammar school had a positive influence on his early spiritual development.

But it was his experience attending Siena College, getting to know the friars on campus, that planted the idea a Franciscan vocation would become his chosen path.

“When I met the friars, it was no longer just an option—it was like, ‘You could actually do this,’” he said. “The models of the guys who were there were just really good. They were happy, they were down-to-earth...their influence and their humanity, that was a very big, big part of it.”

Fast forward to 2024, when Br. Kevin completed his 16th year of residence at Mt. Irenaeus. Having joined the Mountain community as a resident in 2008, Br. Kevin assumed the role of Guardian of Holy Peace Friary in 2014.

In 2024, after the passing of Fr. Dan Riley, ofm, he also took on the role of Animator for Mt. Irenaeus.



For Br. Kevin, wearing two large and important hats is simply a reflection of his worldview as a Franciscan and a friar.

“If love is the center of one’s life, it leads to abundance. If fear is the center, it leads to scarcity. We serve others out of a sense of abundance, hope and encouragement. That mindset informs both of my key roles at the Mountain,” he said.

To appreciate the full scope of Br. Kevin’s responsibilities, it’s important to understand the Mountain’s two distinct but related dimensions.

Mt. Irenaeus, the Franciscan Mountain Community, was founded 40 years ago serving the St. Bonaventure community as well as the broader Franciscan world.

The Holy Peace Friary, established in 1990, serves as the residence for four professed friars, whose ministry focuses on living in fraternity and

working at Mt. Irenaeus.



Do these two key roles parallel each other, overlap, or do both? Br. Kevin sees them as “non-dualistic” — a term he uses often in describing the essence of the Mountain's mission.

“I like to say we 'live in the ambiguity' in a number of ways. For example, we embrace contemplation, as a way to inform our commitment to action in serving others. For us, contemplation and action go hand-in-hand.”

He sees a similar dualism in the Mountain's goal to increase geographic and age diversity.

“We have long ministered to young people who come up from St. Bonaventure, as well as other colleges and high schools, and we participate actively down at Bonas in university ministry,” Br. Kevin said. “However, we have expanded greatly in our outreach to a wide variety of adult groups and individuals from this area

and across the country.”

As the Mountain expands its scope and scale, Br. Kevin sees both roles — Guardian and Animator — as the person who makes sure the Franciscan spirit lives on and permeates every decision and action taken. He uses another of his favorite terms to describe his approach: “intentional.”

“When you look back at the 40-year history of the Mountain, what's striking is that the mission has not changed a bit. The work has expanded, and deepened, but it has not wavered from the 'Developing Notions' and basic philosophy, rooted in Franciscan tradition and spirituality, that Fr. Dan Riley wrote in 1979, five years before the Mountain community was established,” said Br. Kevin. “That is the essence of being 'intentional' — it means 'thoughtful' — staying true to our core beliefs and values.”

Br. Kevin credits Fr. Dan, in his longtime role as Animator, with keeping the Mountain's mission on track, and he intends to follow that strong example of dedication and focus.

With the recent historic consolidation of several U.S. Franciscan provinces into one, the new Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Br. Kevin is optimistic about the Mountain's

potential for serving more people across the nation and the greater Franciscan world.

“We would like to offer Franciscan contemplative experiences for friars, sisters, secular Franciscans and lay people from the entire province,” said Br. Kevin. “This spirit of outreach and hospitality is consistent with the founding principles of the Mountain.”

As the Mountain’s key liaison to the new Atlanta-based province, Br. Kevin is building relationships with fellow Franciscans nationwide, and looking forward to more interaction, both home and away.

“We really want to become a resource, a prayer center for the Province and the greater Franciscan world. A live, living experience of what our order is calling a contemplative fraternity in mission.”

Br. Kevin journeyed to Kansas City in January 2025 with Mountain Companion and Director of Faith Formation Karen Pulaski, and two lay people—Dr. Aleda Leis ‘13 and author Stephen Copeland, to attend the Franciscan Provincial Synod, where more than 200 participants discussed recommendations and priorities for the new province. Two of the themes discussed — yearning for community, relationships and belonging; and a search for new models of engaging young people in the Franciscan

Charism — seem to be right up the Mountain’s alley. “Most communities were invited to bring two delegates. We were told we could bring four. They said ‘we need young people. And you have them.’ So I think we are well positioned to play an important role in the evolving direction of the province.”

Br. Kevin points out that the Mountain has had a growing impact on the faith formation of young Franciscans discerning a vow for the brotherhood or priesthood. Several friars who are now in formation across the province spent meaningful time at the Mountain during their discernment period.

“The Mountain offers an authentic experience. We’re the real thing — a true community of prayer, communal living, and serving each other and the outside world,” said Br. Kevin. “This is a place of service, to be of service. There’s a lot of joy here, but also a lot of hard work as well. We grow vegetables, buy food, prepare meals, wash dishes, do laundry, and mow the grass. And pray together as community. It’s a commitment.”

As one who enjoys interacting with young people, especially Bona students both on campus and at the Mountain, Br. Kevin is excited about the growing numbers of students spending time at the Mountain. He credits Natalie Pronio ‘09, Ministry

Coordinator, with making a difference in attracting students who are looking for a deeper spiritual encounter away from the chaos and stress of campus.

In his role as Animator, Br. Kevin sees outreach beyond the physical confines of the Mountain as “critical to our call to evangelization. We want to continue Fr. Dan’s amazing use of technology and electronic communication, including social media, videos and podcasts, to spread the good news about making all things new in Jesus Christ.”

In addition, Br. Kevin sees the “old school” model of physically taking the Mountain away from West Clarksville, N.Y. and out to communities nationwide as a continuing and growing part of the mission. The Mountain on the Road and Mountain in the Home initiatives started by Fr. Dan two decades ago have expanded as more events have been held and are being planned.

During his years in residence, one of Br. Kevin’s favorite activities has been gardening, helping provide much of the fresh and canned food consumed by residents and guests. He sees his and the other residents’ work on the land as a central part of the Mountain mission.

“Caring for creation is deeply ingrained in the Franciscan charism,” he said. “The vast majority of the

acreage at the Mountain is purposely left in its natural state, as a home for plants and animals, and a way to help mitigate planet warming. It’s also practical, helping prevent water erosion, for example. A Franciscan approach means not just stewardship of the land — but kinship with the land.” Br. Kevin sees the Mountain’s conversion from oil/propane to solar energy and reduction of fossil fuels in its buildings and vehicles as another important dimension to its care for the environment.

As he looks to the future vitality of the Mountain’s mission, and his role in guiding its growth and direction, Br. Kevin also wants to make sure Fr. Dan Riley’s legacy is honored and preserved.

Br. Kevin has spent considerable time since August going through Fr. Dan’s papers and archives, dating back some 50 years to the origins of the Mountain concept.

“When we met with Richard Rohr (noted Franciscan priest, author and teacher) a few years ago, he impressed on us how important it is to have a core team that is really grounded in mission. As we continue to carry the torch that Fr. Dan lit, we will work hard to preserve his vision and our mission of service for the next 40 years.”

