

Natalie Pronio

Ministry Coordinator, Mt. Irenaeus

Natalie Pronio began work at Mt. Irenaeus in the Fall of 2023 and is the organization's Ministry Coordinator. This position - created and funded by the Mountain - is the liaison between the students at St. Bonaventure University and Mt. Irenaeus. Natalie, a 2009 graduate of SBU's Russell J. Jandoli School of Communication, is one of five members of the Mountain team who maintain a presence and an office in the University's McGinley-Carney Center for Franciscan Ministry. She builds relationships with students which lead to their engagement at the Mountain. She works closely with Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm, and Director of Faith Formation Karen Halliday Pulaski '84 in the design of meaningful student experiences and opportunities at Mt. Irenaeus, including evenings away, overnights, and retreats. Natalie also interfaces with the University Ministry team as a partner in growing faith in the SBU community.

"The incredible sense of community and the Franciscan tapestry that weaves through everyone on campus and at the Mountain are some of the wonderful gifts I experienced as a student, and I recognized them



immediately when I came back." Natalie said.

While Natalie's official duties began in 2023, her relationship with the Mountain began in 2005 when she was a first-year student at St. Bonaventure. Like many alumni involved in the Mountain community, she was invited by Fr. Dan Riley, '64, ofm, to make her first journey to West Clarksville, N.Y. as part of a student overnight. She recalls fondly the memorable 40-minute ride to the Mountain with Fr. Dan, but it was her first step on Mountain land that began the slow work of transformation her life.

"I got out of the car and felt like I took a giant breath of fresh air for the first time," Natalie said. She immediately felt a sense of belonging at the Mountain. "It was clear that I could be myself at the Mountain. In fact, I felt

emotional when leaving the Mountain for the first time.”

Not only did Natalie breathe freely at the Mountain, but she also embraced Mt. Irenaeus’s presence on campus. The Hummelstown, Pa. native attended an on-campus Bible study session in 2005, facilitated by Father Dan, at the urging of her floor Resident Assistant (RA) in Devereux Hall, and later emerged as a leader. At the first night of the Bible study, she was rather reserved in her comments but left feeling “really peaceful.” At one point, Fr. Dan said to Natalie, “You don’t say a lot, but I think you have a lot to say. I’d like you to lead next week.” So, she did.



Fast forward to her junior and senior years at SBU, when she became a leader for women’s overnights with Michelle Marcellin, one of the Mountain’s senior most staff members. “Michelle became like a mom to me. We both developed a sisterhood in these women’s overnights.”

She joined Mt. Irenaeus’s Fr. Bob “Tony” Struzynski, ’56, ofm, for prison ministry outreach and collaborated with Fr. Harry Monaco ’85, ofm, in music ministry on campus. Both friars had a significant impact on Natalie’s time as a student and Mountain participant.

Natalie, a talented vocalist, was honored to sing at Fr. Dan’s funeral in August 2024. After the passing of Fr. Dan Riley, it was determined that Natalie would move into Fr. Dan’s old office, honoring the extraordinary relationship-building role that Fr. Dan played for nearly 50 years on the SBU campus. We are certain Fr. Dan would be pleased to know that the Mountain’s chief ministry liaison to Bonaventure students is now occupying his former office in the heart of campus.

Natalie brings ministry and communications expertise and knowledge of the cultures of both the Mountain and University to the table. Her professional experience includes work in the Press Office for the Attorney General of Pennsylvania and for a small publishing company before she moved into a ministry career at Catholic churches in Pennsylvania and Maryland. For over 12 years, Natalie has ministered across ages and demographics, including children’s ministry, middle and high school youth groups, campus ministry, inter-generational women’s

ministry, and sacraments. Most recently she directed a county-wide program for young adults ages 18-39, in addition to leading youth ministry and local service work for middle and high school teens in Annapolis, Md.

“When I began working in my first parish, I realized that I learned how to do ministry from Fr. Dan and Michelle (Marcellin),” she said.

Natalie loves working with the students because she sees herself in the young people she serves. Some students arrive with little understanding of their faith, or with no faith or formal church experience. She invites young people to the Mountain where new horizons become visible. Some see the Mountain as a getaway from campus; others find the space to explore their relationship with God; all recognize that preparing a meal and serving one another is a rewarding and meaningful experience; many develop friendships—often across class years—that last a lifetime.

One of the keys to Natalie’s success is her ongoing work with student athlete groups and campus clubs and organizations. Many students arrive at the Mountain for the first time and are often not sure what to expect from their time at Mt. Irenaeus. From the men’s and women’s rugby teams to the women’s and men’s swim & dive teams to the Latin American

Students Organization (LASO) to SBU Step Team and Dance Team, Natalie creates an on-ramp for students to engage at the Mountain.

Natalie also enjoys the opportunity to supervise and mentor Mountain student interns who help with event planning and promotion, social media postings, and writing for the Mountain newsletters. These student experiential learning opportunities are a great service to young people.

University life is, indeed, more challenging to some students than others and Natalie is quick to invite all students into the circle; just like her mentor, Fr. Dan, had done for her nearly two decades earlier. She leads with empathy and visible compassion. “I really struggled internally my first year or so on campus and being at Mt. Irenaeus as a student was one of the reasons I chose to stay at Bona’s,” Natalie said. “I take great pride in seeing today’s students take ownership of themselves, their lives, and their faith journeys at the Mountain and at the University.”

