

A Mt. Irenaeus Ministry Profile

Karen Pulaski

**Director of Faith Formation
and Mountain Companion**

Karen Pulaski, who took up residence at Mt. Irenaeus in March 2022, is the Director of Faith Formation and a long-term Mountain Companion. From the very beginning, the Mountain's life and ministry has been shared among friars, Franciscan sisters and lay people. It has also always been founder Fr. Dan Riley's vision that a core resident community comprised of vowed and lay men and women would model a life of simplicity and hospitality—a community that strives to live a Gospel centered Manner of Life and Ministry embracing the lived value of servant leadership. Karen is the 8th lay person to live in community, however, has lived at Mt. Irenaeus longer than most companions, now in her third year in residence.

While Karen's current title is quite new, she has been involved in the "Mountain" for 45 years—before Mt. Irenaeus was formally established in 1985. She met Fr. Dan Riley in the fall of 1980 as a St. Bonaventure first-year student and was persuaded to go on a Franciscan retreat held at a Portville, N.Y. farmhouse. Her involvement deepened when she served on the Mountain's Board of



Trustees in the 2000s and played an active role in the Council of Spirit and Life—ministering side-by-side with Fr. Dan in her role as a volunteer.

Karen Halliday Pulaski is a St. Bonaventure 1984 graduate and a retired occupational therapist who worked for 35 years in both Massachusetts and North Carolina. She and her late husband, Kevin, were married for 21 years and have one son. Jon, now 26 years old, holds a degree in environmental science and works in various capacities in the outdoor recreational world.

Karen's return to her native Upstate New York to join the Mountain team has been reinvigorating and has offered her an unexpected but fulfilling post-retirement "plan." She wears many hats but is primarily active in the Mountain's ministry to St. Bonaventure students and with

the adult/alumni outreach ministry. Karen, who works closely with Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm, and (student) Ministry Coordinator Natalie Pronio, helps plan and execute student experiences at the Mountain in the form of evenings away and overnights, as well as on campus assisting the entire Mountain team and University Ministry for such events as Francis Week and planning fall and spring break service trips. The past two years, Karen has secured grants that provided funding to allow students to attend the Franciscan Action Network Youth Leadership Conference in Washington D.C. as well as the Siena College Ecological Symposium. More than 300 students have participated in some sort of Mountain experience from June to November 2024.

In addition, Karen continues to be highly involved with the Mountain's Council of Spirit and Life, a volunteer group that works to identify, develop and offer multiple opportunities for adult exploration of the Franciscan charism. These experiences are offered in various ways including staffing the Mountain, "on the road" in various cities, and virtually through small group gatherings. From the nationwide Mountain on the Road events to Mountain in the Home evenings to Women's Retreats to Sunday Mass in the Holy Peace Chapel, Karen's voice is engaged in

the daily work of the Mountain. She, along with many volunteers, facilitated the highly successful Build with Living Stones journey where nearly 70 alumni and friends, from coast to coast, gathered monthly for readings, deep sharing and prayer via Zoom communications technology. She was and continues to be inspired by Father Dan, whom Karen co-ministered closely with for the past 10 years.

Karen's life at the Mountain has brought her "new challenges, new opportunities, and an ever-deepening abiding love for a more integrated Christ-centered life," she said. "Also came the invitation to step much more fully beside Dan as collaborator for many of our ministries. What an incredible gift this has been—my friendship with Dan grew into something so much more profound as we ministered together; so many deep discussions, so much laughter and yes, at times, the shedding of a few tears for both of us."

While Karen is externally focused, she quickly reminds us that it is essential that she is grounded in the life of the Mountain's core residential community. She notes that she is "sister to my brothers in community and we are attentive to one another. The core community and our Gospel manner of life are at the center of all we do – every ministry grows out of how we live with one another each

and everyday.” Her daily routine begins when the core community meets for morning prayer and then reconvenes for dinner and evening prayer. She also works with Fr. Lou McCormick, ofm, on hospitality for Mountain guests—from the cleaning of cabins to community/guest laundry to meal planning and preparation. She works alongside Br. Kevin, in the Mountain vegetable garden, a significant source of fresh and pickled food for the residential community and hundreds of visitors. She also meets regularly with Mountain Executive Director Mike Fenn and Guardian and Animator Br. Kevin for overall operational planning.

“I even go with Br. Joe (Kotula) to the dump to drop off the Mountain’s trash and recycling,” Karen said. Given that the tiny Allegany County hamlet of West Clarksville, N.Y. does not provide trash pickup for the Mountain, this is an essential chore of the resident community.

“All of these activities allow me to work with and spend time with my brothers. While the various tasks, of course, need to be completed, the task itself isn’t the focus. The focus is on being fully present and in service to one another, as well as to all who come to the Mountain. This is at the core of who we are and how we choose to live in community with one another.”

While Karen’s Mountain life is intentional and busy, she finds time to be highly engaged as a member of the St. Bonaventure University community. She was one of 12 members of the University’s Sustainability Task Force and is involved in NetVue, a University Ministry initiative for faculty and staff that will explore how students can lead meaningful post-collegiate vocational lives. She also helps to facilitate a Franciscan Justice Circle comprised of members of the Mountain community, students, faculty, University Ministry staff, Sisters of Allegany and community members.

Karen’s 45-year mentor was Fr. Dan Riley. Today, Karen is inspiring those in her midst and serves as a role model for future lay people who will take up residence to help sustain Mt. Irenaeus for the next generation.

