

## **Mt. Irenaeus Center for Social Discourse**

### **The Evolution of the Idea**

Our Mountain short mission statement is, “To join with Jesus Christ in making all things new.” From our inception community formation, diversity, equity and inclusion, justice and peace, care for creation and bringing people of different viewpoints together have been the conscious and unconscious grounding of our life and ministry.

During our Strategic Planning Process in response to the political fragmentation of our country the Idea of having a more explicit response for Civil or Social Discourse gained more traction.

Over time we have discerned several ways to bring this about.

First, we envisioned a new building mainly dedicated to social discourse, perhaps hiring staff and a director as this initiative would be too much for the current resident community. It would be a new 501©3 perhaps an interested friar would run it. This idea seemed daunting.

Later we considered the kind offer of Marcia Kelley, niece of Bob Lax, Thomas Merton’s friend to give the Lax/Marcus family “Cabin” to the Mountain. This cabin is in the woods south of Olean. Merton and Lax and other friends spent summers there in the 1930’s honing their ideas of peace, art, racial equality, writing, etc. This seemed like a wonderful connection as Merton and Lax’s ideas were very formative to our Mountain’s mission and First Notions. The building would be a great structure for our Center for Discourse with obvious historic implications. Unfortunately, the cabin is old and rickety and in a very tricky spot to try to move. The cost would be prohibitive. Our next thought was to incorporate parts of the Cabin into a new Building on the Mountain. Again, this was too large.

Our next step was to have some relatively frequent events done by our Weekends and More Branch of the Mountain’s Council for Spirit and Life. We had some success here but the task seemed too broad for one branch of the Council for Spirit and Life.

Our current thought is to form a new branch of the Council for Spirit and Life with its own leadership. Several people have expressed interest in being in leadership and we would like to move forward with it. For starters, this Branch would offer two social discourse events per year.

### **What Would be Its Work?**

- Resolution of Conflicts/ Seek Creative Alternatives to fighting
- Therapy for a fragmented culture
- Communication, Dialogue, Communion
- Discern, Evaluate, Ongoing Discernment

### **Tasks**

- Hope and Encourage each other
- Help each other to Divest from Disenchantment
- Find what we each hold in common- fear

### **Layout and “Location”**

- Nice inviting meeting spaces at Mt. Irenaeus with comfortable chairs
- Would cross the Three Peaks of the Mountain- SBU, Adults, Franciscan World

### **Partners**

- CAC Movement Partners
- SBU Presidents Commission
- POLG JPIC Initiatives

*Submitted by Kevin Kriso, OFM November 2025*