

Declan Donahue

Mountain Companion

The circumstances that led to Marquette University alumnus Declan Donahue's first visit to Mt. Irenaeus in September 2025 were anything but typical.

But the warm welcome and sense of belonging he experienced during those four days would sound very familiar to most guests.

Declan is the newest Mountain Companion, having joined the community as a full-time resident in November 2025. He helps with all aspects of daily life — from preparing meals, doing chores and welcoming guests, to participating in liturgy, assisting with on-site retreats, and visiting with students on campus at St. Bonaventure.

But Declan's journey to the Mountain was unusual — even unlikely.

A native of Hershey, Pa., Declan attended Marquette University, graduating in May 2024 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biophysics.

While in college, he gained valuable experience in medical research, including developing an imaging system for cancer research from



scratch, and helping train new students.

He also was an avid volleyball player and became assistant coach for a nearby high school team in Milwaukee. Much of the discipline and rigor he learned, and taught others, in the research lab, came in handy in his approach to coaching young volleyball players.

“You learn, in mentoring and coaching, that each person has unique talents and skills, as well as attitudes and levels of resilience.”

Declan said. He enjoyed his interactions with younger students and players — a sign of what might potentially lie ahead in his journey.

After graduation, Declan thought about attending medical school. But he had always wanted to live in New

York City, so he moved to the New York area and looked for a job.

While no appropriate employment opportunities surfaced, Declan worked as a volunteer, assisting in several pop-up food pantries and food banks in the city. He enjoyed the experience of helping others and wondered if this might be a career path to consider.

“When the one-year lease on our apartment was up, I came to a fork in the road,” Declan said. “I kept thinking, ‘maybe service and volunteering is what I’d like to do.’”

Declan went to a website, catholicvolunteernetwork.org, and indicated “New York” as his desired area to search. “I was thinking New York City, not 300 miles to the north-west,” he said with a laugh. When Mt. Irenaeus

popped up as one of the first options, Declan liked what he read and arranged a visit.

Declan drove up from his hometown, Hershey, not knowing exactly what to expect. He did not know anyone. The only information he had came from perusing the Mountain’s website...and

he wasn’t even a Bonaventure graduate!

“My first impression was, ‘wow, this is beautiful.’ The natural setting is so impressive,” Declan said. “And everyone was so friendly and welcoming. I felt comfortable immediately.”

He had read that the Mountain is place to experience quiet and stillness. “Even the name, the Mountain, was appealing. It seemed to convey a spiritual essence.”

What he soon learned is that while peace and contemplation are essential parts of the Mountain experience, they fit into a broader

tableau of robust activity and action. “The pace was much faster than I expected,” he remembers. “It was Family Weekend, so we had a number of

students and their parents visiting. Several priests were also visiting for a few days. And there were several other guests as well.”

Having attended a Jesuit university, Declan said, “I did not know anything about Franciscan spirituality before I





Mountain Companion Declan Donahue is joined by Mt. Irenaeus Ministry Coordinator Natalie Pronio '09 on a walk to the Holy Peace Chapel.

came here. I'm learning a lot. Especially how diverse the church is."

Declan recently joined Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm, the Mountain's Guardian, for a visit to a group of 20 monks in Geneseo, N.Y. "I had no idea communities like this existed — they make bread and pray together six times a day. It's amazing."

He noted, "the stack of books people have given me is growing. I have a lot of learning that I want to continue to do."

Declan said he feels privileged to be living in community at the Mountain, and to be immersed in the mission and lifestyle.

"Ultimately, I want to get better at listening to God," he said. "Instead of trying to answer the question 'what do I want', I'd rather ask, 'what am I being invited to, or called to, by God?' Part of the answer is getting engaged in something much bigger than myself. The Mountain certainly fits that profile."

