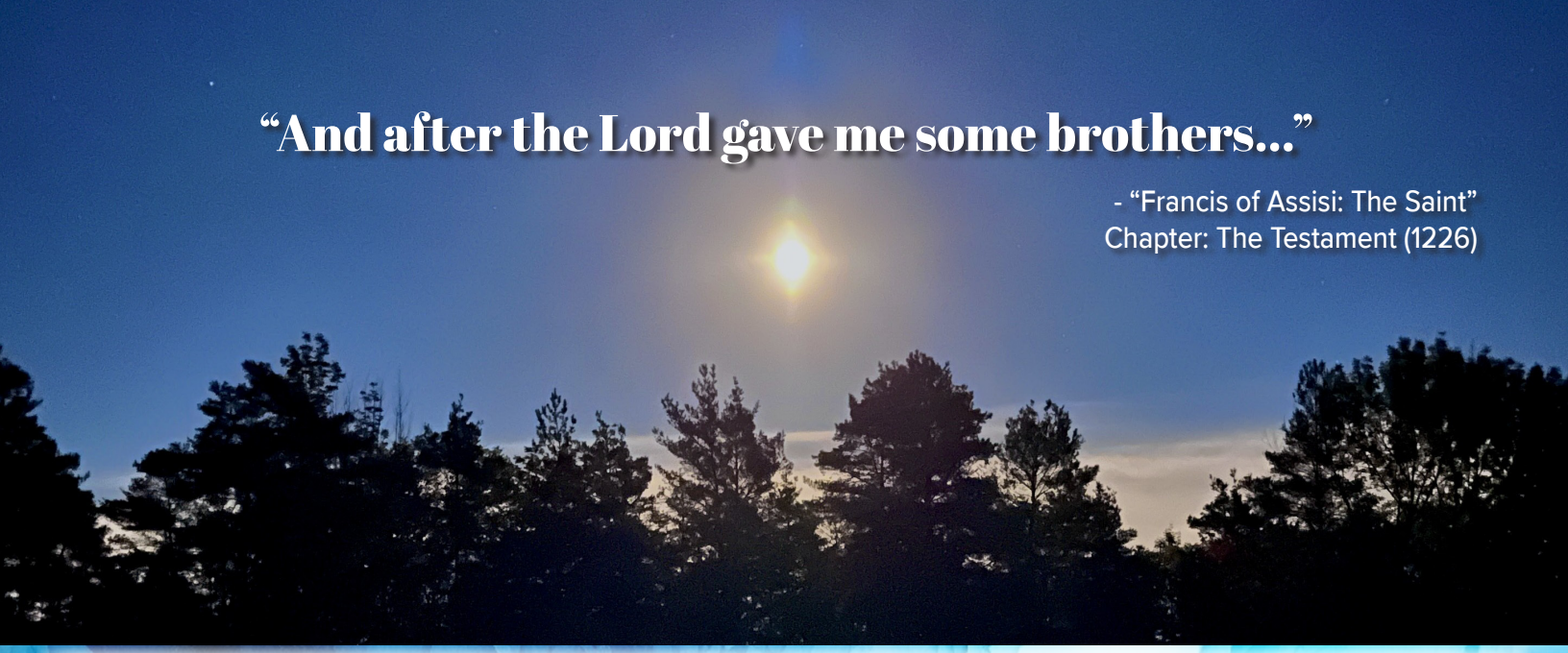
"And after the Lord gave me some brothers..."

- "Francis of Assisi: The Saint"
Chapter: The Testament (1226)



As we start to close out the Franciscan Jubilee Year, it's fitting to revisit St. Francis' Testament. This is one of the last documents he dictated. His Testament outlines the basic principles of his Gospel. At one point Francis says,

> *"And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words, and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me."*

Francis started out his religious search alone. He probably assumed that it was his individual vocation to follow Christ in his own particular way. Francis was a man of the Gospels. He read, contemplated and prayed over the Gospels, pondered what they had to say and what he should then do. This is what he means when he said he would follow "the pattern of the Gospel." So far so good. However, and maybe surprising to him, others soon wanted to join his Gospel patterned way of life.

Maybe he thought, OK, so a bunch of people are showing up who also want to follow Christ in this way. How will we organize ourselves? Perhaps we can be a sort of team with a common Gospel inspired goal. But things soon went deeper than that. Francis realized that the Lord did not give him acquaintances or co-workers or teammates or helpers. The Lord gave him brothers. Brotherhood brings things to a whole new level. Recently when the St. Bonaventure University Men's Rugby team visited the Mountain, one of their stated goals for the team was to keep moving from "a team to a family." So how do you move from being a team to a family?

There is a saying, Be the change you want to see in the world. There is another saying that in order to make a friend, you have to be a friend. The same goes with family. If you want to form a family, you have to form deeper relationships and family will "happen."

But then things can really start cooking. When you build families, you build a community. When you build communities, you build a society. When you build societies, you build the Kingdom of God.

Francis may have started out on a solo Gospel patterned spiritual journey, but God had bigger plans for him and gave him brothers. Francis came to realize that building fraternity is actually the whole purpose and goal of the journey. We say at the Mountain that we join with Jesus Christ in making all things new. We join with Jesus to form relationships. This is what leads to renewal of families, communities, societies and the Kingdom of God.

Take a look around you. What relations might you be called to deepen? Neighbors you do not know? Co-workers of different faiths? A family member you do not see eye to eye with? Ask the Most High to help you to identify the people already in your life with whom you should form a deeper relationship and to reveal to you how to relate to them.

At another point in his Testament, Francis says,
"The Lord revealed a greeting to me that we should say, 'May the Lord give you peace.'"

Here is another Gospel-patterned way to relate. Jesus often said, "Peace be with you." Is wishing all people peace the key to forming brotherhood, sisterhood, family, community, society and the Kingdom of God? Francis would say so. Wish God's peace for everyone and only good things can happen.

- Br. Kevin

Mt. Irenaeus
FRANCISCAN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY

Visit Mt. Irenaeus online at www.mountainonline.org or email us at peace@mountainonline.org

The Mission of Mt. Irenaeus is to join with Jesus Christ in "Making all things new!" (REV. 21:5) Fall 2026 Vol. 43 Number 3



Every person experiences specific seasons in their life that shape their world view, form their humanity or ignite the soul's desire to connect them to their Creator! Rarely, is one able to experience the trifecta of their entire being awakened in all three areas of their person! "Thanks be to God" I was awakened again to the great presence of our lord within our concrete world.

In a little mountain top community nestled in the forest of Upstate New York I was reminded that we are not abandoned to a broken world steeped in pain, bigotry, and war. We are carriers of the creative light, a light that loves everyone, especially with those whom we disagree. A light that heals the wounds of societal pain, through mutual understanding and respect. A light that guides the world to peace through personal practice in our private lives.

The four months I spent on the Mountain reminded me of some basic spiritual lessons in life, lessons that keep us grounded in our own humanity.

For starters, the beauty of the land reminds me that I am a caretaker of this great gift of God. I am not a thief that steals and hordes the natural resources of this beautiful place for my own wealth.

The community, and its common life, remind me that I am but one opinion and view among many; and that my thoughts may contribute to the life of the community, but they do not rule it!

The influx of guests from a variety of backgrounds allows me the opportunity to hear what others are experiencing in their own life journey. This shared life of the Mountain community is a great platform for one to expand their personal understanding of the world and their own place within it.

The Mountain has become my teacher. It is here where I am able to listen with my eyes and see with my heart. Within the deep silence of the forest I am one. One seeker, one lover, one listener of the ancient echoes that stream among the treetops of this sacred place.

This land has so much to offer if one is willing to 'Be still and know.' I was granted that gift, a four-month opportunity to 'Be still and know.' To know that God still cares, is present, and wants to speak to each one of us if we allot him the time and space! The Mountain was my place and the last four months were a wonderful time to listen.

- Br. Rick Phillip, OFM



Bona Buddy Coordinators visit the Mountain.



Br. Kevin addresses the attendees of Pax et Bonum day.



A nice group of freshman at the Mountain for "New Student Day."

Big Bids. Great Finds. Mountain Spirit.

The Mountain Auction returns October 23–November 1, with something for everyone—from unforgettable experiences and vacation getaways, Franciscan treasures, specialty surprise packages, and unique gifts from Catholic pilgrimage sites around the world.

Don't forget to bid on exciting items like these: Four tickets to the Bills vs. Miami game at the new Bills stadium; Bonnies basketball tickets; and special pilgrimage opportunities. This year's auction also offers items that celebrate the heart and heritage of the Mountain, including original artwork by our late founder, Fr. Dan Riley; handcrafted wooden creations by Br. Joe Kotula; Tau crosses blessed by the Mountain friars; and delicious canned goods from the land. Popular Fund-a-Need opportunities will also return! Whether you're bidding for something special, looking for a unique gift, or simply want to support the Mountain, there's plenty to discover. Start spreading the word—and get ready to bid!

Have you ever felt like the new kid on the block and the old kid at the same time? As the newest friar in the resident community at Mt. Irenaeus, having arrived on August 14, I can also trace my time at the Mountain back to 1985 when a friar in Buffalo, Fr. Matt, recommended I spend a week at Mt. Irenaeus and a week at the St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia. I took his advice, and those two weeks changed my life.

In some ways, The Inn and the Mountain could not be more different--one is urban, the other rural; one is nestled under overhead subway tracks, the other on a dirt road; one by its very nature prioritizes the "active" dimension of "active contemplatives," while the other prioritizes the "contemplative." Yet they are both deeply Franciscan, and perhaps for that reason they have been connected over the decades by the friars, sisters and laypeople who find them both places of giving and receiving, of peace and all good. The Mountain and St. Francis Inn both drew me to the point where I decided to sell my car, give away my record collection, and move from Buffalo to the Bronx to join the friars in 1987.

For 32 years I've ministered as a friar and priest in mostly urban parish settings, with the exception being six wonderful years at St. Bonaventure University from 1999-2005. Now I've come to West Clarksville, which has been described as "the middle of nowhere" (which is not necessarily a bad place for a Franciscan to be). My first three weeks here have consisted of unpacking my luggage and boxes, but also unpacking my understanding of what it means to be a Franciscan friar in the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 2026. While my roles at the Mountain, and to a lesser extent on the SBU campus and in the community, are still in the process of being defined, I've already rejoiced in the opportunities to swim in the pond, reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist, eat wonderful meals, laugh, and pray with students, friars, visitors and friends.

As someone who came to the Mountain in "search mode" 41 years ago, I feel privileged to accompany those who visit here in 2026 as they search for meaning, friendship, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be Franciscan, Catholic, Christian, and an ambassador of "peace and all good."

If you haven't met me yet, I look forward to doing so at the Mountain, on campus, or on a "Mountain on the Road" or "Mountain in Your Home" event.

Pax et Bonum!

- **Jud Weiksnar, ofm**



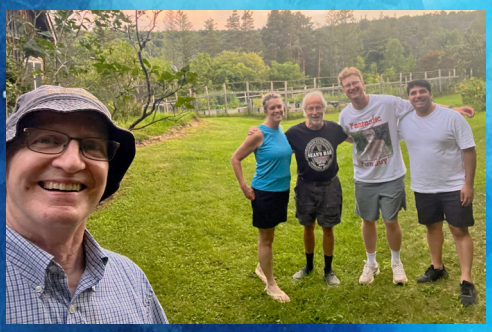
Luigi and Declan enjoying our garden harvest!



An Interfaith dialogue during Pax et Bonum day at the Mountain.



Women's Rugby Team repairing the path to the Chapel.



Some of our summer "crew" enjoying the day!



Parishioners from St. Brigid/St. Columba parish in Buffalo visit with Fr. Jud.



In the summer of 2025 Fr. Stephen Mimnaugh, OFM, VP of Mission Integration at SBU, offered to come to the Mountain to support his brother, Fr. Lou who, at the time, was the sole presider at Mt. Irenaeus. For over a year, Fr. Stephen made the trip almost every other Sunday to celebrate Mass. He found a community eager to join him. With Fr. Jud's arrival, Fr. Stephen has dropped from the regular schedule, but knows he is always welcome. We are incredibly grateful for the gift of his presence through this time.





Bona Buddy Coordinators make the best of a rainy day at the Mountain.

Almost a dozen years ago, Franciscan Institute Publications at St. Bonaventure University issued a Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism.

The book is entitled Build with Living Stones, and in 2024, the Mt. Irenaeus Community invited a group of about 50 to form "pods" of six to eight followers of St. Francis of Assisi to join in reading the book, commit to gathering monthly (virtually) to share on a chapter and to grow in the Franciscan spirit and way of life.

I was in one of those pods, and my life has profoundly changed as a result. My fellow pod members and I echoed one of the readings that, "The first requirement is for the community to identify itself as a group of learners...This group of learners must realize that they are simultaneously teachers and pupils. In other words, the formative Franciscan experience is horizontal rather than vertical, circular rather than hierarchical. Another word for learning within the Franciscan Tradition, then, is listening."

And, listen, we did. We listened to audio files shared for much of the year by the late Fr. Dan Riley, ofm, who talked with us about personal conversion, turning the world "upside down," and approaching each person uniquely, as a child of God.

At the same time, we listened to each other—to the unique perspectives we each brought to share based on reading each of the 14 units and reflecting on our faith, experiences, and vision for incorporating the Franciscan charism into our own lives. We learned so very much in that year, and when it was completed, we could not imagine not continuing a journey together.

The following year was spent reading and reflecting on Light of Assisi: The Life of St. Clare by Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF. We learned about a saint about whom we knew remarkably little, but we reveled in her journey to establish a place for women in the Franciscan world.

Our group was a bit smaller than the original, but not by much. We shared much of ourselves during this time: our joys—engagements, graduations, retirements—as well as our struggles—accidents, sickness and loss of loved ones.

When this book was done, we decided that an in-person gathering had to happen, and last month, we gathered at the Fatima Shrine in Lewiston, New York, for Mass and comradery, followed by lunch and fellowship in Lewiston's lovely downtown.

We have a bond, forged by our love of learning about our faith and the saints instrumental in its Franciscan traditions, and, yes, in 2027, we look forward to gathering together again, via Zoom, to read and share on another Franciscan book, with yet another pilgrim joining us on the journey.

We are blessed to have come together through Build with Living Stones, grateful for Light of Assisi expanding our faith journey, and excited about the road ahead! May Francis and Clare continue to be our guides.

- Mary Freeman



Students enjoying the "Welcome Back BBQ" and swim party.



Late 80's Basketball Alumni on retreat .

A tale of two retreats:
Honoring the past, Preparing for the future



I've been reflecting a lot on two gatherings from the summer that I was part of, noting how different they were from one another, but also how much in common there was as well.

On June 23, we hosted 16 alumni from the SBU Men's Basketball Team who played during the mid to late 1980's. They traveled from Atlanta, Boston, Houston, downstate NY, Western NY, Hamilton, Ontario and beyond. Some had not been back to the Southern Tier, let alone seen each other, since they left campus over 30 years prior. They shared stories, they laughed, they cried, they shared the pains of a challenging time in the program's history. They mourned and remembered a larger-than-life teammate who we lost in Sam Graham. The current men's team, Coach Mac, and staff joined halfway through the day and had a chance to talk with the players from the 80's, who imparted their wisdom from their journey as athletes going out into the world after they left the university setting. I was really struck by these different generations coming together, and the desire to lift one another up, recognizing the brotherhood that had emerged on this day.

Six weeks later, the Men's Rugby Team joined us for their annual visit, this time arriving as 2025 National Collegiate Rugby Division I Champions! Part of the planning meeting had us asking the captains why they come to the Mountain each year. One noted the space itself, that being at the Mountain allows them to have conversations they don't have in other settings. Another said the Chapel time in the evening is where "we shift from being teammates and we become a family." I was blown away by this insight and was privileged to witness it taking place in real time. After a day of helping Br. Joe split firewood, re-do the path from the House of Peace to the Chapel and tending the garden with Br. Kevin, followed by grilled sausages and corn, they took their walk up to the Chapel and shared stories, being vulnerable with each other. These moments are building blocks to deeper relationships, to becoming the family the young man noted during our planning time.

These two gatherings were very different in terms of the age and backgrounds of those who attended, and the reasons they gathered. However, both retreats produced rich experiences and deeper relationships, in part to the common setting of the Mountain. Our space and our culture invite these types of encounters. God's presence was so clear to me throughout both days, God's Grace showing the goodness in each of us and that we are called to love one another. I felt blessed being part of these days, also recognizing gratitude to Natalie and the resident community who facilitate these encounters with students and adults through the entire year.

- Mike Fenn



Coach Mac listens as Rob Lanier reads during evening prayer.



Rugby team circles up before walking to the Chapel.

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The Mountain Fund still needs your support!

Our summer newsletter featured the announcement of our 3Peaks Campaign, an initiative to ensure we have the necessary resources to support our growing ministry for years to come. We noted that there was already over $7 million pledged to the campaign which we are incredibly grateful for. Since the publication of the newsletter, pledges have grown, with over 120 individual commitments to the campaign so far.

With such abundance, you might wonder why we continue to seek support of the Mountain Fund, our annual appeal. The 3Peaks campaign is an endowment, funds stay invested, with only a small percentage drawn each year, so they can support our life and ministry in perpetuity. Most pledges are spread over five years, or given as estate gifts, so it will be many years before the full impact of these gifts is realized.

That's why the Mountain Fund is so important. It remains the most effective way our friends and benefactors support our day-to-day operations such as the resident community's living expenses, utilities, food for retreats, etc. Endowment builds our future, but the Mountain Fund sustains our present.

As always, we are grateful for any gift you are able to provide in support of the Mountain.
If you have any questions, please reach out to Mike at mfenn@sbu.edu.

the Mountain Fund



Daniel A. Hurley ofm
Legacy Society

contact Michelle Marcellin at mmarc@sbu.edu