



## Learning from St. Francis and the poor Christ how to be poor servants

**“washing the feet of those who have lost their way.”**

Reflections from Lawrence Cunningham, introduced by Dan Riley, ofm

**Lawrence Cunningham is a John A. O'Brien Professor of Theology Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame.** We were blessed to have him come to the Mountain a number of years ago. He is no stranger to the Bonaventure campus or other Franciscan places.

Often with humor, but particularly with a sharp historical and theological eye, Lawrence asks some helpful questions.

Our Board of Trustees read Chapter 2 of his book, *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life*. Dr. Cunningham offers us his own reflection on that chapter.

Dr. Cunningham loves the Church and he loves the world. He is a man of faith and of great hope for the human condition; that all women and men of all cultures and traditions, as they follow their own path, might find peace with one another.

Take time and read his passage to see what he means by “the Great Church.” I would say not so much the institution as the historic Church, but said even better, the body of Christ shaping and forming a Gospel response to the world of the day. Dr. Cunningham notes 3 key elements of what I believe he means by “Greatness.” It seems that the unique beauty of the Franciscan journey is our itinerant expression of the Gospel and that we are sent out by the Great Church who would have us share, live and proclaim Good News in all the world. We might say that the doors swing open to our traditions and all of a sudden there are no walls around the Triune God; “The One in whom we live and move and have our being.” For thousands of years, we have tried to name this greatness when it is actually, especially, known in littleness.

This is a particularly ripe and bright time for us to find partners for peace making, not adversaries concerned about property, doctrinal definitions or power. Our Lenten journey calls us to a conversion from oppositional ways of thinking and living to the Grace of celebrating the wholeness and fullness of our saving God in Jesus Christ.



The members of the Board of Trustees deepening their understanding of the Mountain way of life.

# Mt. IRENAEUS

FRANCISCAN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY

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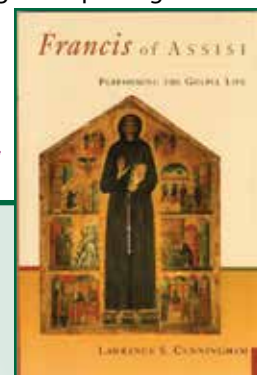


We humbly walk with our sisters and brothers who either have another belief or have broken from or no longer follow the Christian path. The great thing about the Great Church is that, like St. Francis of Assisi, its greatness is seen in little gestures. Watch Holy Thursday evening for our Great Lord who gets down to wash the feet of wayfarers and those, possibly like you and I, who have lost their way.

You will find in Lawrence Cunningham's brief paper for us ways to help you think, in a more detailed way, of the three core elements he is inviting us to reflect upon as he uses the image, the "Great Church," which in itself can be intimidating or off-putting:

- (1) *The radical call for the Great Church to be able to act locally and think globally.*
- (2) *To free up its sisters and brothers to engage others as part of a common effort to resist the wicked temptation of perfectionism.*
- (3) *To pray for the faith to authentically believe in the truth of what we have chosen to be and the way we have chosen to live. That all of what we are about is simple, is basic, a call to live the Gospel daily because "all is grace."*

*Peace!*



In more than one place in his writings, St. Francis professes his adherence to the Catholic faith. In the nineteenth chapter of his preliminary draft of the Rule of Life, Francis writes that his brothers are to live and speak in the Catholic manner and that anyone who lives or speaks contrary to the Catholic faith is to be expelled from his fraternity. Similar sentiments are easily found in his Testament and in his Letter to the Entire Order.

Why did Francis insist on fidelity to the Catholic Church? The first answer is that he did not want his new community to be numbered with those who found themselves outside the Church like the Cathars in Southern France or those movements that set themselves in opposition to the institutional Church. His words about Catholicity must be seen in the light of his famous trip to Rome to ask the Pope's blessing on his mission. He desired to be within what the tradition called "The Great Church."

The Great Church is characterized by three elements: a common faith based on Apostolic teaching; the celebration of the fullness of sacramental life; and the unity of all bishops with each other in union with the Bishop of Rome. However, within those three critical elements of Catholicity there exists wide differences on how best to lead the Catholic life, which explains why there is a great tapestry of spirituality made up of missionary, contemplative, eremitical, communal, clerical and lay styles of life in order for Catholics to find a way to follow the One who said "I am the way." The analogy is not perfect but one could say that the Protestant equivalent of the Catholic variety of spiritualities is the denomination.

As many scholars have pointed out, there had been many impulses in the early middle ages before Francis to find the best way to lead what was called the "evangelical life." Some found it in solitude (the Carthusians) while others sought to reform the clergy with the rise of the Canons Regular while still others sought to refashion the old Benedictine life with the movement of the Cistercians and yet others thought the best way to follow the Gospel was by itinerant preaching. Francis' own life story was not inoculated against those impulses. His life and work, though singular in its genius, was not free from all of these reform tendencies.

Every reform movement has within it a prophetic edge in that it arises from a certain dissatisfaction with the present state of things. The very desire to live poor without preferment was a critique of those who lived comfortable within the Church. It is for that reason that the followers of Francis, after his own life, had such ferocious struggles over the very concept of poverty. That struggle involved everything from the place of education within the Order to over the issue of who was to "own" the houses within which they lived to the churches over which they were to

preside. It was over these and other such disagreements that we see the clash of charism and institution.

It is against that somewhat simplified reflection on the part of Franciscan history that I would pose the question of how the Franciscan fraternity (and sorority) lives within the confines of the Great Church. The question is not trivial since today the Great Church (thought of as an institutional reality) is inundated with so many problems. To answer my question would actually require a large volume but given my space and time, I will simply outline some basic theses for reflection.

In the first place, we should follow the example of Francis who professed his faith in the Great Church, drew from its vast spiritual resources, and followed where the Gospel took him. This way of living was and is nicely summed up in a bumper sticker mantra taken from the ecological movement: Act locally and think globally. In other words: try to be the best Franciscan fraternity/sorority one can be in the here and now, but always pray for the entire Church and build it up not as an abstraction, but as the Body of Christ.

Next, resist the wicked temptation of perfectionism. No institution is perfect now nor should it seek to be perfect until God makes it so. One of the great insights of Vatican II was to conceive of the Church as a Pilgrim People. A pilgrim has not yet arrived but knows where he or she is going; a pilgrim is not a wanderer but one who has a destination. Therefore one moves, sometimes easily and at other times with difficulty, towards a goal. It is the pilgrimage itself where we best fulfill our vocation. Freedom from perfectionism inoculates us against totaling up results as if they were an end in itself. We do what we can do and leave the rest in the hands of the Creator and Sustainer of our lives.

Third and finally, pray for the faith to truly and authentically believe in the truth of what we have chosen to be and the way we have chosen to live. The critique (or worse, the indifference) of the world does not count in the eyes of God. I have always loved the fictional priest hero of The Diary of a Country Priest who was judged an incompetent fool but when dying said, "All is grace." Both the author, George Bernanos, and his vast readership know that the portrait was not that of a fool, but a Saint. Grace is everywhere but it is left to us to be its dispenser. As long as we forgive, share, love, and do those ordinary things that humanizes the world we are following in the footsteps of the Poor Man of Assisi. He did those things in an extraordinary fashion, which made him a great Saint. By taking up his challenge we can know those things today and be like him in our own way and even though the world might not recognize it, we are demonstrating that grace is everywhere.

~ Lawrence Cunningham

## NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



... "If the meeting with the Pope happened in late 1209, what we can then deduce is that by the year following, the band of friars had settled permanently at the Portiuncula. The early sources refer to this group simply as a *religio*, - a "religion," - which in the usage of the day, meant those who adopted a certain way of religious observance. How can we describe that *religio*? Quite simply it was a mixed community of lay persons and priests who have dedicated

themselves to a life of poverty, ... a mission of popular preaching, a tendency toward itinerancy but with another impulse toward periods of retirement. . . "

~ **Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life**

As "homework" before our last Board meeting, Fr. Dan suggested that we read Chapter 2 of Mr. Cunningham's book noted in the beginning of this newsletter. The paragraph above is one we found ourselves focused on, as it spoke about the early days of Francis and how his small group of followers organized at the time. We noted how in these early days this *religio* was comprised of both religious and lay people, living out the life and mission so inspired by St. Francis.

In this way, we are inspired to consider the next phase of life at the Mountain, a life when compared to the Church is still in its early days of maturing! We know the Mountain to be a place

that attracts a variety of people, with some similarities to the early days of the Order. We have a dream of a larger community living among the friars that would bring a richness to our life, as well as being significant to the future of this ministry.

You will see further in the newsletter a new program called "August Companions," which invites men and women to live among the friars for a period of time toward the summer's end. Perhaps those who join us for time in August will be inspired to stay for an extended period of time, or will inspire others to consider this life as well. Either way, we think August Companions begins to ground the concept of others living at the Mountain in a practical way.

Related to this, our Board of Trustees recently created a task force to help bring fruition to these new models of living life at the Mountain. This group will help ensure that new models of living hold on to our core practices, as well as ensure we have the resources and processes in place for this new day. I ask you to pray for this group as it helps guide us toward this future life at the Mountain.

~ **Mike Fenn**

Executive Director, Mt. Irenaeus



### Are you interested in Living the Mountain Life and Ministry? Then consider our August Companion Program!

The summer is an incredible time to experience the Mountain. It is also a time when the brothers who live there take a week or two away on vacation, catching their breath before a new school year starts. In order to provide hospitality for our guests during this time, we are seeking men and women interested in living and supporting the life while some of the core community members are away. This ties into our interest of building a larger, richer community with lay people living among the friars as part of the ministry that the Mountain provides to the world.

That is why we are kicking off our August Companions program. This is an invitation for others to live the life of the Mountain for as little as a week or throughout the month of August. While experiencing the silence and simplicity would be the primary aspect of time spent here, it is expected that August Companions would also participate in the activities of the daily life of the Mountain, such as:

- *Cooking meals*
- *Helping in the garden and other outdoor projects,*
- *Welcoming guests*
- *Participating in the prayer life, and at times leading prayer.*

These are all parts of the full life into which we are welcoming others.

Please contact **Br. Kevin Kriso** at [kkriso@sbu.edu](mailto:kkriso@sbu.edu) or **Mike Fenn** at [mfenn@sbu.edu](mailto:mfenn@sbu.edu) if you have any question or are interested in being part of this new and exciting way of experiencing the Mountain!



#### *The Mountain has been home before.*

As a volunteer with Franciscan Volunteer Ministry and later as a staff member at St. Bonaventure, time at the Mountain always felt like a home-coming. Even during my first visit in the fall of 2011, a place that I had only heard about in stories felt like a home. Maybe that homey feeling came from being more comfortable with who I am.

#### *The Mountain still is home.*

When Mike and the friars invited me to join in January for visioning and planning around the Mountain Companion Program, I knew that I was returning to a place that was still home. How many of us have felt that peace and comfort in returning to the Mountain, even after years away. Maybe each time we return, we reconnect with who we are, our best self, fully alive. Living into what St. Irenaeus calls the greatest glory of God (the human person, fully alive).

#### *The Mountain can be home again.*

As the staff and friars move forward with next steps in companioning new members into the Gospel way of life, lived at Mt. Irenaeus, it is an invitation to us all. What joyous news for all of us who have once considered the Mountain home!

~ **Jeff Sved**





## MOVING MOUNTAINS FROM HERE TO THERE

### The Council for Spirit & Life

*If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this Mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20)*

Don't we all want our visits to the Mountain to last, to be wherever we are, to bring others into the experience of life on the Mountain? That is our mission for **The Council for Spirit & Life**, through a Franciscan model of a local church – to bring Mt. Irenaeus to you and others who seek a deepening of faith and fellowship, of contemplation and community in all corners of the globe. We intentionally, in each Branch and aspect of our life, welcome people to an ancient Franciscan model of evangelizing, being and bringing Good News as a simple model of Church reaching out to others.

Fr. Dan, with the encouragement of the Board of Trustees, formed the Council modeling it on the "Tree of Life," an ancient image of Christ, a timeless symbol in many traditions which helps us imagine our wholeness with the Earth and all the cosmos, together each creature is a sister or brother to one another. The Mountain's ministry is to "join with Jesus Christ to make all things new," so to enhance the growth of others and sustain life through the activity of "the tree and its branches." In our early documents we said we are bringing to life "new timbers for a new Church."

Our Council, then, is called to help renew the Church and find new ways of being Christ's body and, with others of other traditions, extend both the personal and communal experience of the Mountain.

Our **Mountain in Your Home Branch** has grown in the number of gatherings – all featuring worship, contemplation, and fellowship - hosted in homes from coast to coast. These gatherings happen throughout the year. In Your Home is seeking more hosts and new locations so the Mountain community experience will continue to grow beyond West Clarksville. You can help identify hosts and plan programs for enriching spiritual gatherings by joining this Branch.

Our **Electronic Media Branch** is growing our online library of articles, readings, and book recommendations. Many of you have expressed interest in these resources, so look for new offerings around Easter week. Those interested in joining can help build and suggest ways to educate and enrich our faith journey, especially in the ways and words of St. Francis, St. Clare and other Franciscan Saints.

Our **Weekends & More Branch** helps suggest and design unique gatherings at the Mountain, particularly evenings in the summer months when a condensed weekend experience is offered. This group is also seeking hosts for a week or more during August, so the Mountain can be cared for and visitors supported while the friars alternate time away. (See center article on page 3.)

Our **Mutual Mentoring & Companionship Branch** is putting pen to paper on how the Mountain helps draw people together. Many who visit the Mountain or participate in gatherings often remark about how quickly and deeply people connect, how friendships form and how meaningful the conversations are – all through the Mountain's way of life. It may be a helpful resource for those seeking to form a spiritual or contemplation-based relationship or to bring that aspect to an important relationship in their lives. More will be shared about the Mentoring and Companionship Branch on our website as it develops.

All of the above, all of the Mountain's life, forms us as St. Francis and St. Clare were formed, as members of Christ's body - each in their own way - to bring Good News to the world. Beyond spiritual practices that will benefit us, the Mountain, and in particular the Council, are expressions of the Gospel's hunger to be a simple model of Church for others.

See how you, too, can experience the moving of a mountain; please prayerfully consider joining the Council, selecting the Branch that beckons to you. Each Branch gathers its volunteers on a call usually 3-4 times a year and features a Mountain-like experience of prayer and contemplation as part of its planning dialogue. To join or learn more, please contact us at [mmarc@sbu.edu](mailto:mmarc@sbu.edu) or 716/375-2096.

~ **Mari Snyder**, Council for Spirit & Life

#### Fr. Dan Further Reflects:

*The name Council comes from the Native American model of the inclusion of members of a tribe and community in the growth and well-being of that body. Our Council reflects the body of Christ, the asymmetry of the Tree of Life. It has within it rich diversity as do forests of trees which branch out, each in their own way and at their own pace. We each are called to be servants with our "Teacher and Lord," as Francis called Jesus Christ. We walk beside each other and many others who possibly walk another way of life.*



Health Care students at the Mountain preparing a healthy meal!



An Amish friend offers us advice on the new garden fence.



Walsh HS seniors find a new spot in our Chapel – sometimes this helps to see things more clearly.

# EVENTS FOR 2019

**April 6, 2019**

## Community Service and Reflection Day

For those interested in helping spruce up the Mountain for spring, meet us at the Mountain at 10am for indoor and outdoor work, all ages and experiences welcome!!

## Summer Evenings of Re-Creation

Celebrating the Mountain's responding to the call of Jesus to "Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole of creation."

Wednesday Evenings

June 26 • July 3, 10, 17, 24

5:15 pm Evening Prayer followed by quiet time on the land

6:30 pm Dish to pass supper

7:30 pm Eucharist with discussion of theme

Feel free to come to all or part of any evening and to come early to spend time on the land. For any questions about the evenings, call the friars at 585-973-2470.



# HOLY WEEK PRAYER OPPORTUNITIES

## HOLY THURSDAY

**April 18, 2019**

**6:30 pm**

Dish to pass supper

**8:00 pm**

Liturgy of the Lord's Supper

## GOOD FRIDAY

**April 19, 2019**

**Noontime**

Simple soup and salad lunch

**3:00 pm**

Liturgy of the Passion – followed by silence on the land and in the Chapel

## HOLY SATURDAY

**April 20, 2019**

**11:00 am**

Morning Prayer

**9:00 pm**

Easter Vigil

## EASTER SUNDAY

**April 21, 2019**

**11:00 am**

Easter Sunday Mass – followed by dish to pass brunch







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**Help us as you can, join us when we come to where you are.**

## OUR 2018-19 MOUNTAIN FUND IS WINDING DOWN!

As you may know, our annual appeal, also known as The Mountain Fund, is the most critical aspect of our budget each and every year. While we receive funding from St. Bonaventure University, we must secure about 80% of our annual budget each year.

All gifts to our Mountain Fund go toward our operating expenses which are approximately \$500,000 per year. Some of the areas your gift supports are: *overnight and evenings away for students, staff and faculty; transportation to the Mountain from campus; food for our guests; utilities for the Mountain buildings (this includes the House of Peace, Chapel and cabins); leadership formation for the Church and deepening people's spiritual lives.*

To make a gift, please visit our website at [www.mountainonline.org](http://www.mountainonline.org) or mail your gift to Mt. Irenaeus Mountain Fund, PO Box 100, West Clarksville, NY 14786.

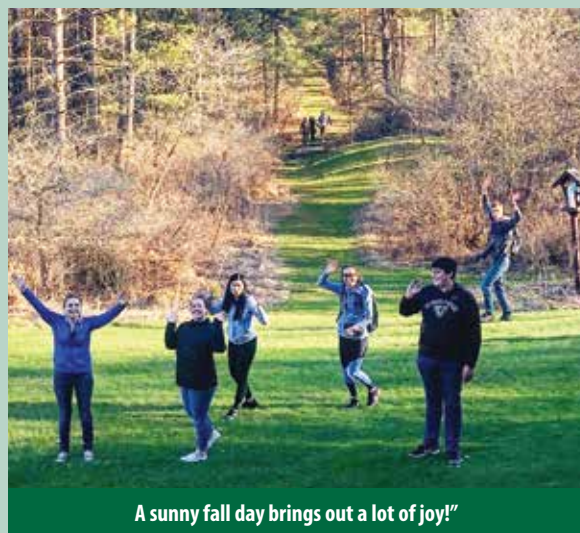
Thank you for all your great generosity to the Mountain over the years. If you would like further information please do not hesitate to contact us. Peace!

### **Jackie Lanzillo**

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**A sunny fall day brings out a lot of joy!"**