

“Eucharist, then, in the simplest of form was central to us. It let us know we were truly one.”

Recently we lost one of our very first community members, **Kevin Sweeney**, who joined me along with **Fr. Dan Hurley** and **Chris Domes** (now president of Neumann University in Pennsylvania) for our first summer on the Mountain (1985). Kevin and Chris had just graduated from St. Bonaventure University and had chosen to join me and Dan Hurley in the adventure of opening the Mountain Community; living into the experience and learning about the place, responding to our advisor’s desire that we would truly begin after years of discussion and initial confirmation of mission.

In early June of 1985, two pickup trucks of used furniture were loaded up by Kevin, Chris and the two Dans from the basement of the old friary on campus at Bona’s, now known as Doyle Hall. We outfitted our little two-bedroom, one story, home; our “fixer-upper home” here on the Mountain. Odds and ends came from various places and people. The Skehan family were finishing up their time at Camp Skwim.

Already here and on the land was a simple summer place for Marge and Al Ernst. They were the previous owners and had built this little house from odds and ends. It was just what we needed to begin.

Eucharist, then, in the simplest of form was central to us. It let us know we were truly one. The Eucharist is a prophetic and healing event today when it feels like we could settle into tribes, tribal attitudes and separations by politics, race or religion.

Kevin, Chris, Dennis Culhane and **Harry Monaco, ofm**, (who had been a student with them and entered the friars sometime afterwards) were a close group of friends. Each of them, for me, an example of inclusion. **Dianne Kuzia Hills**, now the Chair of our Board, was part of that circle, some of whom spent time at the Warming House caring for the poor in the area.

Remembering them now, I recall efforts here at Bona’s as early as the 1960s to reach out and respond to issues of what we then called “segregation.” **Tony Bannon** and friends of ours in our class, look back at that as a time of great naïveté. We see painful racism has been in our Nation and among people who have lived here, many of them with a heritage long before the rest of us. The



Bona students help the friars plant a new tree.

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students of the 80's that I just reflected on were great openers of life for others besides being great at including others. It almost seemed like with the blood that was poured out on our streets, once again baptized us into Christ's own dying and rising and the pouring forth of his blood from his side.

Will we truly be "born again" by the blood that has been poured out by our black sisters and brothers in our cities, and by others too of other color who have endured pain, suffering, and indeed death? It is such a dire time. Yet these tragic deaths cry out for the wonderful possibility of new life and end up becoming a tribute to all of us who struggle with our lives to make sense of our own mistakes and sometimes our confused directions to try to step forward ourselves and with others.

That summer with Chris and Kevin, we were always seeking peace and feeling the energy, indeed the electricity, here in this little backwoods place on a hill in Allegany County. We still chuckle when we think of Dan Hurley telling us, "nobody knows we are here!" Even during this time of illnesses, we have been having people join us for part of a day.

We were beginning a way of life that would eventually welcome more people to a path of union and communion. It was reflective of retreats from St. Bonaventure University and other places and in particular our early Franciscan life. We were longing for a place of peace that would heal the brokenness of our world, so apparent to us in the late '70s into the 1980's. It grew out of a Franciscan yearning for deeper prayer and spaciousness in nature and the enchantment young graduates had in the retreats we were offering informal and yet also deep, life-giving, but basically very simple in nature.



Now, as we are in such a different time, I think of the passing of Kevin, his goodness and the many others who have lived this life with us for now more than 35 years. I still wonder about what we were doing when we settled here that first summer, the experience and the experiment that was most important to us.

I sensed Kevin's concerns for meaning itself, the place of faith and religion in the world that seemed broken. He was a gentle man who sniffed out hypocrisy quickly and struggled with the differences that we let continue in races and genders, other places where people were either placed aside or not yet brought in to relationship with us.

This is a time when a few simple values call for our further resolve and commitment. These values, that which would be our hearts' desire, need to be lifted up, cleaned up, burnished, polished and placed before us so that their light will truly shine and lead us through the darkness that we are in. We need contemplation and considered action, follow through and follow up in all of our families and institutions in our Nation and in our churches.

As we have stepped back during this time of social distancing because of COVID, guests have been here infrequently. They have joined us at Mass again, but first by letting us know they will be coming. All of this was so that we could have the appropriate space around each other for health and well-being. This spring and summer was so different than all of our other years. I was blessed to join other friends from the East with our friends from the West Coast when **Kathy and Steve Gilmore** initiated a Mountain Zoom evening, a wonderful experience of faith sharing, music and Scriptures. This was truly a Franciscan way of reaching out and using what's available to us to share the Good News in a bleak time.

Mike Camoin brought new life with others to the Franciscan Sojourners. They have met with great regularity. And I've had a chance to be among them. There's a certain individuality (Franciscans call it "haecceitas," "this-ness") in each one of our expressions of Conversatio/Lectio and each in its own way, has helped open up a welcoming when people have felt unwelcomed in other places or were unable to feel welcomed elsewhere.

Often, over the last few months, I would be sitting, strapped in the driver's seat of my Subaru parked on the road between my cabin, La Paz, and our Chapel. There I was in a car in the woods on a Zoom meeting, a time of reflection and consideration, for a retreat for our Council for Spirit and Life. We would "create within ourselves a place where God might dwell," accomplishing in some way a sense of home electronically with one another. Reaching out coast-to-coast our hearts and hopes have been tried and stretched, sometimes tired and uncertain, as yours may have been as well.

We will be taking the rest of our lives to consider the impact of these recent



months. We have two optics, two lenses, that we might use – or take off – so that we might have a better look through to what life is like around us and seek the help that we might need to see more clearly, “to begin again.” The Mountain began and continues with the simple one line Mission Statement that we would “join with Jesus Christ to make all things new.” What a huge task that seems now unless we also begin with the ancient notion of one step at a time, one day at a time, one moment at a time. We will be reviewing within ourselves and with our loved ones our world that we have known, our college life, our careers and so much else.

This is not a dream or a scheme; there has been an outpouring and a sustained awareness that we cannot now turn away from or back off. We are blessed to have great examples, heroic women and men throughout these times and in the latter part of the last century, through the early civil rights movements, who continue leadership in our Government, such as **John Conyers**. These people are examples of courage, valor and truly heroic leadership. What we have around us still, however, are the wages of slavery that are born again and illnesses that our Nation is bearing now, racial and viral, these ask us to stop and reflect, see what it is that we are to do. What is it that we might do with one another?

You might remember that when Francis was before the Crucifix, stirred by the fact that God had given them life and was calling him with mercy into a greater life, Francis simply said, “Lord, what would you have me do?” Still breaking the bonds of slavery this many centuries later, many of us, white and others, have other things that have enslaved us that also need to be broken and can be. We cannot break them through abruptness, but through gentleness and paths of peace, peaceful resistance, untiring efforts, that will show us all the way.

We become more aware of the gifts we have been given and we begin to help each other see those gifts. There is a great need to become the community we have always wanted to be. We know it now; it does not happen overnight, but it needs to

come about and we are the ones to begin to work on it. It is on our watch. The gifts our heart, our will and our generosity would have us think about ways of helping and making a difference that would be long-lasting. It may not be anything dramatic and I don’t mean to imply that it need be. We do have a popular notion that reaching to another’s life to help them and make a difference is something that takes on the size of a movie screen rather than the intimacy of a few words and a simple visit with someone.

Always there is an opportunity in the midst of times of crisis and difficulty. It’s not only Confucius or others of Chinese wisdom that would point to this. Christ invites us to carry a Cross each day, not out of some artificial notion of penance, but because the very dying of self, letting go of some things, brings us to new life, to new possibilities and a hope to see life lived, finally, in a better way.

There is in this time seeds for a new time. Yes, blood has been spilled, poured out - may it sprout forth in justice and pour down over the mountains as God’s mercy for others. There are in this time the fledgling dreams and the hope for changes in one’s life that surface and move around within us. One of the blessings of this time is more time for reflection and consideration, when people have been able to step back from their work, or because they are away from their work, furloughed, working from home or out of work, that they take a hold of this pause as a time when the deeper truths of life might take a hold of them. Enriched by all the considerations of things we begin to realize how rich life is. It almost seems blasphemous to say this. It almost seems too early in all of this to talk about any of the blessings that are real.

But we know from our Franciscan tradition that we find not only in the end, but in the midst of everything God’s presence, God’s goodness and God’s gifts that would help us not only sustain ourselves and move forward but also find new life with one another.

Peace!
— Ignace



Giving Thanks for Our Dear Friend, Marge Musial.

Marge enjoyed music, especially the music we would use for prayer or Mass here at the Mountain. Having a greater collection in her mind, she often drew from our collection those that struck her heart and she would ask us to play them or she would prompt them for an Evening Prayer. Marge brought a certain lyricism to our life, even as she brought us her spirit of Christian labor. Yes, Marge worked very hard here. She loved to recall that on her second or third visit she helped clear the site for our Chapel. Arriving here to see a few of us moving small trees we had just cut from the site, she dove in to help us pull them down the hill to a large pile below.

We lost Marge a while ago, or we might say, she has traveled on, singing her own songs and bearing with her the music of the Mountain that she helped to sing out here. She was (to say it simply) one of the stronger voices when singing parts of Mass or hymns. You always knew Marge had arrived when a song began and her faithful voice rose up among the gathering.

And yes, she was a strong voice in our mission, in our direction here. A particularly generous benefactor, she also gave of her heart and, again, of her labor over time to the Mountain as it was growing. Marge came here near our very beginning, arriving a little over 34 years ago. She was a truly faithful member of the community, but more importantly, a faithful daughter of God. She was an especially strong, challenging and questioning woman who was a great example of faith for those around her.

A few of us from the Mountain were able to make it to the service for Marge and came back with wonderful stories that seemed to typify a celebration of liturgy that she would have loved and, indeed, she was at the heart of it, because God was its heart. God was at her very heart and so this unique and significant woman in our life, and the lives of many others, was, by her own spirit, able to lift people up during that service.

Some of us are old enough to remember Rogers and Hammerstein's "The Sound of Music." One song in particular in that movie comes to mind when I think of Marge - when the Mother Superior sings about Maria and says, "How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?" There's something very rich and true about that as it was about Marge - outstanding, out-singing, out serving both beside others and for others. Marge continued to sing her own song, her own kind of music for the world and is filling out God's choir right now. We miss her a great deal here and our only comfort is that she is bringing delight to the Heavenly Hosts who needed this very sort of "moonbeam" at this time.



Like blueberries in the summer and snowfall during our winter board meetings, Marge Musial was a reliable fixture at Mt. Irenaeus since our earliest days. I can't recall the first time I met her, but I have memories of her in the original house, quietly doing dishes over the sink with a reflective smile on her face. Marge was a quiet spirit but also one to engage young and old in conversation, looking for connections with everyone she met.

Marge was always eager to help others. When she learned I was moving to Buffalo she suggested I join her parish where there was a Franciscan presence. Marge was there for my daughters' baptisms! Julie and I eventually settled in the suburbs, and I know the

churches Marge worshiped at either merged or closed at least 3 times in the past 25 years. Yet she never seemed to get discouraged, as her faith was a cornerstone of her life. At one point in the midst of another church migration, she shared that she considered the Mountain her Church, the constant sanctuary she needed in her life.

The years passed and the Mountain evolved, but Marge was always there. She was at our larger celebrations, the Easter Triduum and finally our first Living Stones weekend, where we honored her and many others for the generosity of their time, treasure and talents. She was an extremely generous friend and donor --- living in a Gospel manner, never

trumpeting her donations or asking for praise.

One of my last memories of her, once more has her in front of the sink, this time in the House of Peace, cleaning after dinner on a weekend where we honored her. We insisted she relax, but it was no use. She was in a station she often chose -- serving and helping others.

I think the very last time I saw her was on a bench in the labyrinth, where her name was hung in honor and now in memory. She would often find quiet places of silence and solitude. I think Marge especially appreciated these intangible gifts that the Mountain offers. May we all come to recognize these gifts as deeply as Marge did. ~ Mike Fenn



Sometimes problems look so big that we don't even know where to begin. We may think, "What's the use in trying? I am just one person. I can't make much of a difference."

A booklet we share with student leaders and others called **Come and See** states:

"Making a new beginning is essential to ourselves and the world we live in. New beginnings are the grounds, the very fertilizer of new relationships, the opportunity to work in new ways and find our giftedness for the direction in which life calls us, as we begin to make a contribution for others. The Mountain is committed to the renewal of the Church and the world."

This pandemic time has helped us to remember why Mt. Irenaeus started in the first place and to be creative about how to continue with our mission of making contributions to others and renewal of Church and the world.

Most people probably know the story of Stone Soup. In it a traveler comes into a village hoping to find something to eat. The cagey villagers tell him, "No, sorry, there's no food here." The traveler then tells the people he could make a delicious soup for everyone out of a special stone he is carrying in his pocket. By now everyone's curiosity is aroused. The traveler laments though that he does need a big pot and some water to put the stone in and some wood to make a fire to heat the soup. These things appear. After a while the traveler tastes the "soup" and says, "This soup is delicious but alas, a little salt would bring it to perfection but I am sure no one in this poor village has any salt." Someone ventures, "I can get a little salt" and goes out to get some. The salt goes into the soup. As the traveler keeps sampling the soup he sighs, "A little onion would really help this along." Someone runs home and gets some onion. And so it goes. "If there was just a little meat, some beans, some potatoes, some flour, some vegetables..." Before long a really delicious aroma is coming from the pot and everyone is given a big bowl of soup. The people marveled at the magic stone that produced such good, hearty soup.

The problems of the world and Church are huge. However, a little of this, a little of that, some creativity, some relationship building can work magic on moving those problems. Join us in doing your part. Love is stronger than hate or selfishness. Strive to love.

~ Br. Kevin Kriso

SUMMER RETREAT WEEKEND FOR THE COUNCIL FOR SPIRIT AND LIFE

The Council for Spirit and Life prayerfully supports and further enhances the mission of Mt. Irenaeus – that is “to join with Jesus Christ to make all things new!” We rely on the imagery of the Tree of Life as a way of expression for the Council – with each branch growing individually and asymmetrically but always in rhythm with one another. Four branches make up our Council – Mountain in Your Home, Mountain and Beyond, Initiation and Education, and Electronic Media. Each year we gather for a summer weekend of retreat and renewal – a blessed way to reconnect and revitalize the mission of the Council as well as to continually ask each other “what does God call us to do next?” We had hoped to gather in person again this summer in late July however as the date approached it became clear that numerous obstacles would prevent that. Not to be deterred, we quickly decided to offer a Zoom version of our annual weekend and what a wonderful response we had!

We gathered on the evening of Friday, July 31st and began our weekend “together” with the very ancient practice of Lectio Divina – a practice that allows us to savor our communal silence, hear/read the word of God, listen quietly to what might arise in our own hearts and then have an opportunity to share with one another our reflections. Friday night we chose to read Luke 12:22-32 – a very timely Gospel rich in words reminding us worry and anxiety are in direct contrast to our faith. “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” Our discussion allowed us in this time of very real unrest and turmoil an opportunity to focus on our belief that God is with us and will never leave us. He walks with us ALWAYS. Led by Fr Dan, we also reflected on how this Gospel intimately integrates and impacts our mission of the Council.

We joined again together the next day, continuing our practice of Lectio Divina, choosing for Saturday the Gospel of Luke 11:1-13. A group reflection provided the opportunity to focus on our daily ability to pray the words God gave us as well as to recognize we need only to ask for help and God will be there to provide for us. “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find it; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Perhaps we do not humble ourselves and ask for God’s grace. Perhaps the answer is not always the answer we are hoping it will be! But God is always there to answer our cry for help. Through the practice of Lectio Divina, we were then able to move into a Christ-centered discussion about our desire to become more active in our mission for the Council for Spirit and Life. We chose to focus our discussion on new and innovative ways we might reach out to bring the experience of the Mountain to others far and wide even when we can’t join together in person. Our weekend together left all feeling connected, energized and excited about continuing to support each other in exploring very active ways in which our Council can bring Christ “into the marketplace!”

The Council is always growing and expanding. Perhaps you feel a desire to learn more about the Council for Spirit and Life. Perhaps you feel a calling to join us! Please feel free to contact us here at the Mountain if you do – we welcome all! **Pax et Bonum! ~ Karen Pulaski**

The pandemic has been a drastic adjustment for everyone. It has changed so much of our daily lives. And yet, through the Wednesday Evenings of Re-Creation, both of us were comforted that the changes in life have not altered the experiences that reflect our relationship with God.

The masks were an odd addition. Not having dinner in the House of Peace took some getting used to. Keeping 6-feet apart and not greeting one another with a hug was absolutely foreign. Any one of which we would think could ruin a Wednesday evening at the Mountain. But Fr. Dan’s laugh and Fr. Lou’s hospitality were as evident as ever. Br. Joe’s down-to-earth approach to prayer, and Br. Kevin’s sense of community brought the life and vitality of the Mountain to those gathered there. Yet beyond that, were the additions to the Mountain that were unique to 2020: the Mountain Companions and the friars making their solemn vows. The Mountain truly is alive!

✦ The excitement of being able to go to the Mountain was inevitably mixed with new emotions (including anxiety and trepidation) around COVID-19. Yet, we trusted and were not disappointed! The Mountain’s consistency was exactly what we needed during this time when everything seemed to be shifting and changing. It may have looked different, but the “mountain top” experience was exactly what we have come to expect and cherish.

✦ The silence of the Mountain, and the love of the friars, and the peace of the grounds reaffirmed a truth we have all come to realize: the Mountain’s messages of “Be Still!” “Listen!” “Laugh!” “Go!” ring as strong as ever. Our challenge until the next time we visit the Mountain is to authentically live out that message in our daily lives, not just revisit memories of the wonderful summer evenings at the Mountain.

✦ **~ Don Smith and Kristen Leschhorn**

When COVID closed our church doors in late winter, three of us gathered using Zoom, starting March 21st. We continued weekly, inviting others to our Franciscan Sojourners Circle, starting here in our valley. We followed the Mountain’s model of Lectio Divina, reading the Gospel, exchanging reflections, making petitions and closing with the prayer of St. Francis.

In this simple manner, we gathered, sometimes more than once a week. It was a dark uncertain time, yet word spread and others found us, from Boston to Buffalo, Hornell, New Hampshire, Missouri, Nebraska, and Georgia. By Easter, a dozen of us huddled on Zoom as we read how the disciples gathered locked inside a room. While churches broadcast services, many expressed gratitude for the ability to gather online, share, interact and experience the Spirit of Christ entering our hearts and quiet homes. As we offered petitions, we witnessed healings. Our ministry grew with guidance and support from the Mountain’s Council for Spirit and Life.

Moderating Zoom is now more familiar, yet back then, there were occasional challenges of connectivity and technical issues. Given the social isolation many were enduring there were temptations to use our time to meet social needs, yet we chose discipline to extend this Franciscan manner of prayer through new technology.

By mid-June we took time to reflect and determine how best to continue. Growing our faith is perhaps the biggest gain noted by others in our respective valleys. I found others who had studied the Gospel and the lives of Saints Francis and Clare, to be tremendous contributors. While we meet less frequently, we’ve since added music, meditation and even the comfort of silence you might experience inside Holy Peace Chapel. There truly is Light that can overcome darkness. Combining Zoom with the Mountain’s recipe for gathering is helping us reconnect, remember and experience renewal.

While our Franciscan Sojourners Circle continues to meet regularly, folks now join us from Arizona and California. Others might wish to start their own gatherings in coordination with the Mountain’s Council for Spirit and Life. Many would be interested in supporting your efforts, particularly those that might take place during alternate dates and varying time zones. If you are interested in this opportunity you can find out more information by contacting the Mountain at 716-375-2096 or mmarc@sbu.edu.

All are welcomed. **~ Mike Camoin**

(We would also like to acknowledge Edward Downes, Jacqui Bollinger, David Amico and Ken McGuinness, who, along with others, have shared a great deal of wisdom during these Zoom gatherings with Mike.)

Franciscan Sojourners
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SAVE THE DATE

For your consideration, we have listed below two opportunities to support the Mountain:

Annual Mountain Online Auction - November 6 - November 15, 2020

As we head into the holiday season, there is a wonderful opportunity to support Mt. Irenaeus and do some holiday shopping! Our **Mountain Auction** will feature more than 60 unique items including artwork and photography by Fr. Dan Riley, beautiful Tau crosses created by Br. Joe Kotula, and delicious canned veggies and jams grown and made by Br. Kevin Kriso. There will also be Bona gear, autographed sports memorabilia, and much more!

You can help by placing a bid, as well as spreading the word about the auction to your friends and family to help us drive excitement around this important event. Please watch for more information as we get closer to the date.

Giving Tuesday - December 1, 2020

Over the past several years we have become involved in the **Day of Giving** that takes place on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. It has become an important time for us to ask friends to help support our way of life. If you see our post on Facebook, or receive an email about the event, please share or forward along to others who you think would have an interest.

Thanks as always for your wonderful support!

Pax et Bonum.

Jacqueline Lanzillo

Advancement Chair, Board Member

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We are a 501c3 that relies on private donations. It's now easy to make an annual, honor or memorial gift through our Mountain website (www.mountainonline.org). Just click the donate button.

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING



Daniel A. Hurley ofm
Legacy Society

Contact Mary Schlosser at
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