



**“Let us begin now,
for up till now,
we have done very little.”**
(St. Francis of Assisi)

When we first dreamed of “the Mountain,” it did not have a name. It was what an inspired dream is; a response to the needs and hopes of a good number of people. We were looking for rest and reconciliation at that time. It had the metaphor, the longing for a mountain of some sort, some place, a place of peace and refuge from difficult times and a place of discovery and self-knowledge – all of that seemed important to us but we also know that it needed to have some distance from our usual, everyday lives. This and more were often held as private longings in all of us. When we opened up in conversation what was really stirring us we realized we were longing for the everlasting and the ever wonderful, beautiful who we dared call God. Then as now, it is amazing to believe that this God has chosen to be our intimate and, indeed, dwells within us as Francis and other holy women and men would remind us.

It seems that the nature of being a person is to search for happiness, wholeness, holiness and a home. We find something of each one in the other. We sometimes make these journeys in longing and in looking with companions while also taking some solitude time or a side trip by ourselves. Some of us in the 70’s and 80’s who arrived at Bona’s knew that there was still more for which we were looking. Though there was political unrest (question of authority, protests over a variety of concerns), along with other conflicts at the time, there also was a simple, joyful longing for peace and a re-communion, a re-joining with others in some simple way. Early on, we learned that what might become “the Mountain,” is not first programmatic, but a holy place where people who are seeking holiness gather. The Mountain is first about relationships and coming to the experience and belief that our God does not stay separate from us, for the Mountain is not only about rest or separate creation, it is about “*making all things new in Jesus Christ.*”

This longing is true for all of us in one way or another, manifest in the pattern of our lives. Humans seek relationships with other persons, but also with the land and other creatures. Even when we wander, we walk more deeply



SBU Alumni gather at the Mountain during the 80’s reunion weekend.

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with those we are with and that which we are coming to see around us. A chat becomes a wonder-filled conversation. A pilgrim that, as an itinerant and Christian, looks for a location – a holy spot, a holy well, a tree, bread to break with company – all of this making sense with a God who is the “beginning and end of all things in Christ.” And so, we come with a state of positive curiosity about the possibilities of finding home and God’s presence along with each other in the reign of the living God wherever we might be. Jesus promised this to his followers, even though it seems elusive. *“The Kingdom of God is among you. The reign of God is at hand.”*

Pope Paul VI, speaking to friars almost 50 years ago, invited us to see ourselves as itinerants or pilgrims, but not, as he said, “gypsies.” Picking up, and unfortunately using that name in a derogatory way, the Pope, nonetheless, was trying to help us out of a type of meandering or wandering, a misunderstanding of our mobility. Our movement was to go out to others, not just to depart. It was to enter into other people’s lives with purpose, not only curiosity. This movement would have us be more self-searching, self-serving and self-seeking. These are the relationships that many of us now are critical of as we look at the world of today and possibly look at ourselves and others near us.

You know the story or we can share the rest of it with you, but it is important to know and remember that:

The Mountain became a place of peacemaking and a place of longing, a place of arrival and discovering something that we were searching for, and a place of a deep journey back to the union and communion we had, and have, with our living God from the beginning of Creation in Christ. It was our choice that, with hope, we would step off again into our daily life and onto a new life together.

Mt. Irenaeus became a place for embracing the possibility that each of us are “bear-ers of Good News,” women and men who bring peace with us, the peace given to us on the Mountain – thus, the name Irenaeus. Though it was the name of the librarian at Bonaventure at the time, it also is the name of a great Saint in the church, St. Irenaeus. Within the name of both our beloved librarian and this early pastor is the notion of “Irenae,” which is to say peace, peaceful or peacemaker.

What we are talking about is the experience of movement and the excitement of being “on the road” together, journeying as women and men of the Good News of the Gospel, bearing it from whatever religious tradition we might walk. You might be familiar with other traditions as well where their wisdom and holy teachers are peripatetic in their model, drawing people to a way of journey; to go on a walk with them in a garden, to come to the deep reflection of relationship and unity. We at the Mountain find ourselves wanting to listen to Christ who calls us to come follow him and to walk with him, not only for ourselves, but also for others.

As with some people who seek solitude today, early Franciscan hermits may have departed from society so they could reconsider some of the values or the structures of the social institutions that had been their life.

Francis was all about renewal and not condemnation, so his early itinerancy, the pilgrim within Francis was always moving towards the good and the rising up of alternatives for people who might want to live a better, happier and fuller life, not just for themselves, but for others as well. We see this in people before Francis and his early followers. These itinerants, these wanderers, these pilgrims, were full of joy because they were on a journey of discovery, exploration and explication; they were explaining and making clear what they were beginning to hear.

This is a wonderful journey and this is what it means to be a Franciscan on the road. We follow this model at the Mountain when we prayerfully prepare to travel to places, and when we head out with each other believing we are sent and bearing Good News, as best we can, to people in other sites, settings and cities. We know that we are all called to some new depth for a new transformation that will somehow impact others. We feel stirred to, in receiving this fire of new life, bring this light and fire to the Church and society of our day.

Now that we have discovered a Mountain, in fact now over 35 years ago, there is still discovery and a journeying going on. It is deep within each of us and it is among us and between us if we have the willingness to open to each other. It is helping each other hear our life’s longings and move ahead to seek it out together, to be itinerants of meaning, seeking the Good News.



The SBU Swimming and Diving Team joined us for their annual retreat.



Fr. Dan preaches at the 80's weekend Mass.

Francis wrote a beautiful "Rule" or way of life for his brothers and in it he speaks to this early movement as a Rule, as a way of being, living, where Franciscan friars (and now we would say Franciscan sisters and brothers together) would believe, **"Wherever they are and meet one another, show that they are members of the same family.** Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for their brother or sister according to the Spirit!"

Often quoted in Franciscan circles, this gives meaning both to our living in a place and the way in which we would wander or travel to meet each other on the way or in other places and times. We all are, in one way or another, on the road to joy and this is a particular path that we understand to be the Gospel way of life.

As we consider being Pilgrims, itinerants with one another, women and men who at first feel like we are wandering and maybe even lost – we find that our journey has already begun deep within us as God has entered our lives and our very hearts and is the compass and the map for our way home. "God is all God's creature's home, we sing in at least one of our great old songs.

And so, we journey to where we are and beyond where we are each day, our journey is a holy blessing both *"within and without."* (St. Francis of Assisi)

Peace!
signs for



NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR From "August" to "Seasonal" Companions

Around this time last year, we introduced the idea of "August Companions." This was aptly titled as an opportunity to invite others to the Mountain way of life, at a time when resident friars took some vacation, making it challenging for us to have guests join us during a beautiful time of the year. August Companions invited friends to experience a deeper life here, while allowing more people to take retreat. Four Companions came in to experience this way of life, two of them committed to the entire month. Those two were Jeanie Scarzafava, a longtime friend of the Mountain, and Alyson Magnusson, a recent SBU graduate who extended her stay through the beginning of October before beginning her time with the US Army.

Recently our first Winter Companion joined us at the Mountain. Ryan Schlosser is taking the semester

off from college to hike the Appalachian Trail. He decided to spend a month with us early in the New Year waiting for the weather to warm up. Ryan has visited the Mountain most of his young life, and easily joined the community, immersing himself in all aspects of what it means to live at the Mountain. The community grows richer with each Companion, and Ryan was truly no exception.

This brings us back to the Companion Program, which is obviously growing into something larger than just one month can contain! Whether for a week, a month or even longer, if you have an interest in a deeper experience of life at the Mountain, please reach out to any of us involved.

Peace.

~ Mike Fenn - Executive Director, Mt. Irenaeus

Stories from our first Winter Companion

The first morning of my four week long Mountain Companionship, Br. Kevin showed me how to use the coffee pot in the House of Peace. I'd been to the Mountain numerous times before, but only for short stays, never long enough to warrant being taught how to make coffee. "Give a college kid a cup of coffee and you'll keep them awake for a morning but teach them to make coffee and they can make coffee for Br. Kevin," he remarked. Kevin is the king of dry witted humor. Yeah, humor.

I don't think there is a "right" way to do anything. I don't like doing things the wrong way either. If you give me a set of instructions and tell me I have to follow them, I'll probably try to dice apart the words and find a way to do it differently. Sometimes this makes me painful to be around, but all of the time it brings me to unique places in life.

I used to come to the Mountain often as a kid, brought up by my mom for Holy Week or other special occasions. I enjoyed my time then, but I wasn't exactly the best behaved. The Mountain is a quiet place. Games of hide-and-seek, tag, jumping over couches, and wrestling are not exactly on the menu here. However, as a kid these were all incredibly fun and exactly what I did. Thankfully, no one seemed to hold it against me years later.

Now I'm twenty and I've calmed down, some. It's a cold night and the friars and I are going out to dinner. Kevin turns the key in the ignition. I squeeze into the back seat of the Subaru alongside Br. Joe. Heated seats, even in the back? Nice. The warming seat slowly draws the West Clarksville January cold out from my back and legs. Fr. Dan rides shotgun. Kevin shifts to reverse. What will I order for dinner? We're headed to Moonwinks restaurant. Going out to eat has made me nervous for the past year or so. I feel guilty having someone else wait on me. A nice restaurant chair feels like pins and needles. Dan asks me if I ever thought I would be living at the Mountain with the "crazy old men who pray all the time", my brain flashes back through the many stages of life that have already passed me by, or so it feels. Preoccupation with the future normally clouds my ability to think about the past. Without exception, only conscious effort can rope my brain in from the future to the present moment. Dan's question triggers me to pull the rope back from the future, tie a lasso, toss it into the past and pull the entangled mess of memory to the present. Kevin's foot lifts from the break and we begin to roll backwards, leaving tire treads in the freshly fallen snow. "Definitely not," pause for effect, "I was supposed to be throwing touchdown passes in the NFL by now." Dan, Kevin, and Joe's laughs bounce around the interior of the car. Thank God I can make these guys laugh.

Okay, so I knew I was never going to be an NFL player, but a few months ago being a Mountain Companion seemed to be about as likely a possibility. That was before I decided to take the spring semester of my junior year off from school to attempt an Appalachian Trail thru-hike. Did I successfully hike the whole thing? I have no idea, I leave tomorrow. Hopefully. Wish me luck. While the actual hike has not yet begun, the first month of the semester off allocated me the time to be a Mountain Companion. What a wild, weird, and wonderful experience it was.

What's a Mountain Companion? My grandma thought it was a dog. Thankfully she was wrong. A Mountain Companionship is not a job, it's a life. For four weeks, I followed the lead of the friars to help ensure the Mountain was exactly what it is - a place for people to experience happiness and goodness. Shoveling, cooking, stacking wood, attending meetings on campus, reading during masses, welcoming groups and visitors, and yelling slightly too loud at Bona basketball games were all parts of my daily life along with reading, engineering a camping stove, hiking, yoga, writing, running, or whatever else I wanted to do in my free time.

The last morning of my Mountain Companionship, the conversation following Fr. Lou's Sunday homily centered around the idea of giving love to each other. I realized I had gotten a lot of love from the Mountain in my time. Every time I had been there I left with a renewed sense of peace and a deeper appreciation for the people around me. Short visits left me with a lot of self-satisfaction. However, after spending a month as a Mountain Companion, I not only felt the familiar boost of being at the Mountain, but I also felt I had learned the skills to give the Mountain love to other people near and far.

In a slightly forced metaphor, I spoke up after Lou's homily to relate my time as a Mountain Companion to making coffee. In the past I had gotten a cup of coffee from the Mountain - a quick positivity boost that lasts for a few days but eventually fades away. However, in the last four weeks I had learned how to brew a pot of coffee - put in a little effort to create positivity and love to share with those around me while still personally benefitting from the goodness.

~ Ryan Schlosser



IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Dear Friends,

Most of this newsletter was written prior to the outbreak that has swept across the globe. Still, we decided to continue with the message. The Mountain story is one of hope and faith. We will get through these challenging times together, as a community that prays and cares for one another. We look forward to the day when we can again welcome you to join us on the Mountain to share in our manner of life and ministry.

Originally, this space was to share our Holy Week schedule, but those public celebrations will likely be canceled this year. Please visit mountainonline.org to stay up to date on our calendar.

While physically we are not opening our doors to guests right now, our way of life is not, and never has been, closed to others. The Mountain is about making all things new through Christ, a task we can do in our homes.

In our care for people immediate to us you might, in your prayer, continue to pray for others who are struggling with their lives and possibly also with this illness. As we sometimes say at the Mountain, to enter our Chapel, to enter our prayer, is to bring the whole world with you. We pray with you, for you and the whole world right now.

Please stay connected with us through Facebook, Instagram and our website.



EVENTS FOR 2020

Summer Evenings of Re-Creation

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

WEDNESDAY EVENINGS — JULY 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

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.



Weekends for Transformation and Refreshment:

JULY 9 – 12, JULY 30 – AUGUST 2

Come and share the lives of Francis and Claire. These two young people without expecting it of themselves but desiring to find God in the direction of their life help transform the church and world for their day – in fact until today they continue to impact many of us. St. Francis would say, "Come try our way of life."

Through these weekends, we will have a chance for prayer and reflection, the enjoyment of each other's company, the creation of meals with one another, and contemplative times. If you have any interest or questions please call Fr. Dan Riley at 716-375-2096.



Honoring Michelle and 25 years with the Mountain!

From the beginning, we realized that our treasures are people not property. And so the Franciscan joy of Mt. Irenaeus has been the rich garden of persons who have sustained our life here.

Michelle Marcellin, over 25 years ago now, joined us and helped to shape a new position that even through today has grown and shifted to, as Francis would say, "places and climates."

Steady in our own little storms, she has helped form our basic practices and more importantly has shared her own Franciscan heart with our trustees and others in leadership.

We give thanks now especially as we celebrate these rich bountiful years with her



Michelle and her children.



Michelle with her dad.

and look forward to her continued place as one of the women in the Mountain's life, and one who gives the Mountain life. Along with the entire Mountain family, we are very grateful for this quiet, but wonderfully thoughtful woman who helps the rest of us care for our responsibilities and carried the Mountain in her heart.

God, from all time you formed us in your own image, each differently gifted but given gifts so we can give them away. We thank you for Michelle and her years of service, for what she has done she has given of herself and modeled not only Christian practice but your own generous practice. As her whole Mountain family, we hold her in prayer now and always with the blessing of Francis and Clare.



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 Happy & Blessed Easter From The Mountain Community!

MT. IRENAEUS ADVANCEMENT UPDATE MANY GIFTS, MANY BLESSINGS

Our fiscal year is nearing an end, and we are so appreciative of all the support we have received so far. The Mountain Fund continues to be the most critical way to help sustain our way of life, as it makes up about half of the \$500,000 we need to raise each year. These gifts go toward the cost of supporting our guests, including St. Bonaventure students enjoying an evening or a weekend away from campus. It helps pay for the food they eat, heating the Chapel in the wintertime, and supporting students going on the road with us, becoming leaders at an important time in our Church. It supports our Mountain Companion Ministry, an important program we have inviting others to consider this life.

We thank you for all you can do to support this way of life. If you are interested in sharing a gift at this time, please visit our website – www.mountainonline.org.

The picture to the right are just some of the new windows that were installed in our cabins this winter. If you donated, bid on, or happened to win any of the items in our auction, you helped support this project! Half of the proceeds from our annual online auction goes towards capital projects such as the upkeep of facilities. This year we raised over \$20,000. Once again, we thank you!

Jackie Lanzillo
Volunteer Mountain Development
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New windows are not only beautiful, but energy saving as well.

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING



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Contact Mary Schlosser at
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