

“The Mountain is not only on the Mountain.”

The sweet smell of fresh cut grass comes to me as I sit here on this porch. In the past, this grass, called Indian grass, was woven into decorated moccasins and other necessary and gift items. Beautiful in its aroma and flexibility, it makes me feel at home here today with memories of family vacations in Canada.

Here, the Mountain is home, home for so many. I sit looking out over a garden that has gotten a lot of attention this year. Now, more than other seasons, I have been able to take time in planting some new perennials and occasionally an annual around them and weed, yes, stay up with the weeding!

Real as this garden is, I relish the work I call “micro-hermit-moments.” The attention of our hearts have been with the world beyond here, our deep concern for those who have been ill, those who have lost their lives, and a virus that seemed out of control and might still be in some places. Also, the emergence, again, of what had been here all along, the racism that is part of our country’s divided character. This has emerged and is stirring us to conversation, concerns and, indeed, to change. You can hear it in the confusion of our national leaders who are not certain what tone to strike or words to use, whether to step back from or step into some of the issues that just will not go away until we all change our hearts.

All of this, the wonderful garden around me and plants that emerged that I thought had been swept away or covered up by winter plowing, everything that is showing itself now both beauty and pain, wounds, the suffering of illness, asks for our attention. It asks for clear and loving eyes. The Mountain, even as I am challenged with my eyes, I know is a place where you and I **come to see**. We come to grow in our ability to see and treasure that which we do see as truly beautiful and worthy of our reverence. The awesome reality of what is around us is so fundamental to prayer. We often quote the simple line, “Gratitude is the heart of prayer.” To stand here is to be full of thanks on this **July** day when the sky is so blue and



Our first public Mass since March.

Mt. IRENAEUS

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bright, colors are at your feet, and the hope of a new world is truly in our hearts even though there is suffering with so many people in so many places.



The Mountain this season, in all seasons, but especially this year, hears the great call to “be attentive” – be attentive, be awake, be alert, open to all of our senses! This has been a call to all religious people and people of spiritual sensibilities to look around us. We see the world and the needs of others with them. Within all of this, we sense the Creator, the loving, living God still active in our midst.

Here on the Mountain this season, even while more people have been taken by death than we would have ever thought possible by this illness, we have found ourselves “moving in” for a period of time.

Not since our first summer on the Mountain, in 1985, have we had such a privileged quiet time here. At that time **Dan Hurley, ofm, Kevin Sweeney, Chris Domes** and I, encamped upon the Mountain with one small dwelling and a great big dream of welcoming others. Dan Hurley was fond of teasing me about whether “they” would find us or not – they did eventually “find us!” And people are finding us now as well. Though we have not been able to welcome guests up the road and into the house or Chapel, they have been in our hearts, our phone calls, in email and conference calls, and especially this year in the incredibly new (for us) technology of Zoom.

Zoom has opened up not only some of our work meetings, but also our prayer times. Sponsored by some of the Mountain ministers who live as far away as San Diego and as near as Albany, and others as well, small groups of people have been able to gather electronically and, through the advantage of this technology, see each other, hear each other and enter each other’s lives in a Mountain sort of way. Opening to the Word of God and each other’s company, having introduced one another, welcoming new people to the circle, we have gathered around God’s Word to hear what it would be saying in these difficult, sick and dark times.

Back in 1985, and even now, “to be attentive” was to hear the call to open beyond the immediate and the measurable. To know that even when it seems things are slim or few, there is bounty and it is God’s promise and we are called to share it. God seemed to be “prodding us” to begin this place of prayer and peaceful re-creation for others and now seems to be urging us to renew ourselves in preparation for a new time for the Mountain.

The Mountain began as a place for healing, fostering relationships and discovery. It has always been a place where people can comment and gently reveal, as they wish, their own identity and descriptions of who they are and things that might be going on in their lives. It has been a place where self-disclosure would happen as one felt safe. That is still the case when so much seems to be disclosed, ripped open to us, that needs our common prayer, our common hands of healing and outreach beyond this place, from the peace we find here to the peace that is needed elsewhere.

We come here searching for the “one thing that matters” and we realize that is at the heart of this truth, that we have One who is our Creator God, who has given us everything. We live in a world where many have very little. It is almost simpler for us to turn to those realities of lack of food, home or shelter, which badly need attention. Some of the Mountain’s journey has been to find God here in the depth and resilience of hearts that would simply love and lend silence not just here, but with those who have no words for their pain or their joy elsewhere.

You and I are getting ready to reenter a world that we stepped aside from for a while, or still have one foot in a safer place while we risk entering again into the larger place. We also have a great need for



**Br. Joe comforts a dazed bird after he hit a window.
The bird fully recovered!**



A moment of quiet and contemplation in our Chapel.

reorientation to life itself and this really has been the primary purpose of the Mountain.

Recently in the Gospel, interestingly enough, Jesus is telling us the beautiful, simple parable that no one lights a candle and then puts it under a bushel basket, but places it in the middle of the house so that all might be able to see. This is for you and me today, to realize the possibilities of who we can be for others and this has always been the mission of the Mountain.

With multiple offers by friends and members of our extended community, we began to reach out to others with the vitality of "Mountain in Your Home" experiences as well as our "Mountain on the Road" and now "Mountain Zoom" experiences. Though all of our life will not and could not be contained through electronic media, there is so much in this for us to try, test and possibly integrate into our life over time and we are finding our way there through the leadership of extended members of this Mountain community.

I think of **Br. Joe Kotula's** phrase that has now become common language here: **"The Mountain is not only on the Mountain."** It seems to me that that is a mission call to all of us and not just a strategic plan for those of us who live here. It is a wonderful invitation in a time when we have had to step back from life and others have lost their lives – when we have acknowledged that some have been denied their ability to live life fully and completely – that we see the life that we have now. Yahweh, who Moses encountered blazing as a bush on the mountain and now a flame in our hearts, continues to be a God intimate to us. May we share the beauty of God's promise and the meaning of Yahweh. *"I am who I am, I shall be with you always as who I am, shall I be with you."*

*Peace!
Kevin*



Bless us O' Lord for all good gifts.

Practically everyone in the U.S. has had to make profound changes in their daily routines since early spring of this year. For many people many of the changes have led to great financial, emotional and physical hardships. We at Mt. Irenaeus have been more fortunate than many. The last guests came to the Mountain in early March. We had to get used to increased reliance on technology to stay in contact with people while living in a rural area with cell service and internet that are sketchy at the best of times. Still there were several hidden blessings in the lockdown. We friars have gotten to know each other much better. We told stories about ourselves, from our childhoods to our early days as friars that we had not shared before. We had time to slow down and pray more and shared these insights with each other. We have had time to reach out to family members and old friends.



We have had more time to consider and discuss the painful state of the world and our place in it. Who could have anticipated the needs that have come to the surface in the past few months and the broad-based energy that we need to do something about it! We have come to realize that people are demonstrating and asking all of us to understand that the promises made at the founding of the USA have not been fulfilled for everyone. We need to understand that their lives matter as much as everyone else's. We friars have found we do need to say that Black Lives Matter now because hundreds of years of slavery, Jim Crow laws, prejudice, mass incarceration, and exclusion have said otherwise. We have spent a lot of time reflecting on how God is being manifest in this movement. People are speaking out, sharing their pain and coming to each other's aid. God is in this. We have experienced new motivation and energy in living out our Catholic Franciscan and Christian call to help bring about a world as God would probably like it to be. If some of our sisters and brothers are living each day in fear, what can we literally do about it? What would Jesus have us do? What is Jesus asking us to let go of so that everyone has an equal chance? Some might think this is politics. But it really is Gospel, Good News for all.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we knew the world would never go back to "normal." Maybe that is okay if we can help make the world "better" than what was normal. Let us continue to make the world better and to listen more deeply.

~ Kevin Kriso, ofm

NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

After four years in my role with the Mountain, I have come to enjoy a rhythm to my workweek. It typically starts by driving down from Buffalo on Monday, working on campus and then enjoying the evening at the Mountain. I would arrive before dinner, and then after cleaning up from the meal, join the brothers for conversation and evening prayer. The next morning we share prayer or liturgy, and then I head back to campus for the day in the office.

Like many of you, my pattern of work changed dramatically back in March, which began four months of being away from both St. Bonaventure's campus and the Mountain with the exception of a brief visit to assist the guys with setting up the modern necessity of a Zoom account. Luckily, many aspects of my role as administrator can be done from home. Yet I came to greatly miss the usual communal prayer life that in some ways I had come to take for granted while being able to live at the Mountain during the week.

Thankfully, many of the practices of the Mountain are easily brought into our homes. The centering prayer from Psalm 41, "Be Still and Know That I Am God" is a common mantra for me as I take time away from the business of the day. Another practice I took on was quietly reflecting on the upcoming Sunday Gospel, similar to the Mountain practice of *Lectio Divina* each Tuesday morning.

I may have previously shared that I am also progressing through an online Master's program in Pastoral Studies through Catholic Theological Union. As I entered deeper into a life of Ministry through a vocation with the Mountain, I thought developing a solid grounding in the studies of a ministerial professional would be beneficial. I know my role is to lead the business of the Mountain, but the Mountain has never been about silos. We are an integrated way of life that calls on me to grow. I imagine the Holy Spirit is in play with all of this as well!

This May, I took an online course in Spirituality that was wonderful. It was a hybrid course that included a traditional academic curriculum of reading assignments and papers, but also practices of prayer that has helped me adjust to the physical absence of the Mountain in my life. I learned new ways of praying, including *Visio Divina* and the Examen that I have made part of my common practice at home.

As of this writing, we are slowly beginning to open the Mountain, and I gradually begin to re-enter the life again. I am so grateful to drive up the hill, be greeted by the community, and pray in the Chapel. These few months have affirmed for me something I have learned from Fr. Dan -- that "God is an infinite circle, whose center is everywhere." I am blessed with the presence of the Mountain in my life, and this experience has helped me realize in a deeper way God's presence no matter where I am.

~ Mike Fenn



**"THE GREATEST GOOD IS WHAT
WE DO FOR ONE ANOTHER."**

~ Mother Teresa



MOUNTAIN FUND BREAKS RECORD — EXCEEDS GOAL!

Thank you — your generous hearts have once again made a difference! Your outpouring of support — especially during these challenging times — has allowed us to not only reach -- but surpass -- our Mountain Fund Goal — bringing in a record breaking \$263,000!

As this year's annual campaign comes to a close, on behalf of the Mountain friars and community, we thank you and over 700 other friends of the Mountain who have generously provided the needed funds to support our \$550,000 annual operating budget and share our mission of ***"joining with Jesus Christ to make all things new."***

As benefactors, please know your gifts make a difference—changing countless lives! Your sustained kindness of treasure, time and talent allows us to bring the Mountain message and experience of peace, contemplation and working together to thousands of students, visitors and friends throughout the country each year.

As the year unfolds and it is safe to do so, we invite you to visit the Mountain and take part in a Mountain event such as a Mountain in Your Home or Mountain Zoom experience to witness first-hand the impact of your generosity. **Please be sure to visit our website at www.MountainOnline.org for more information on praying together, programming and visits. It also has valuable links to our social media pages such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Podcasts.**

As always, we thank you in advance for your continued 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.

THANK YOU Marv Stocker, our Mountain Fund Chair, for your dedicated, enthusiastic support in leading this campaign and to all our wonderful Phonathon volunteers who helped make our goal a reality.



Marv & Donna Stocker

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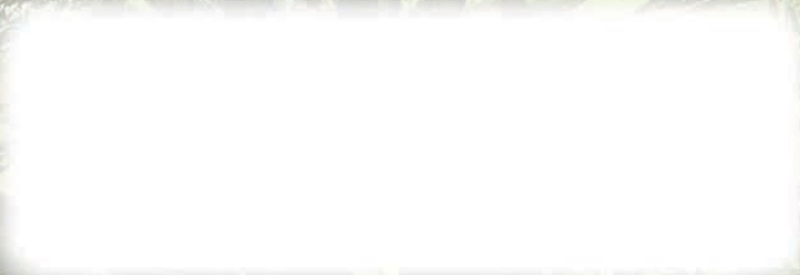
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Help us as you can, join us when we come to where you are.

Holy Week at Mt. Irenaeus during shutdown.

What a different time for all of us! This difficulty was highlighted for me during this past Holy Week here at the Mountain. Normally we have 8-10 guests from Thursday to Sunday of that week. This year there were just we 4 friars. As part of the community, the guests have helped plan and execute liturgies and prayer times, helped with meal preparation and clean up, and have had plenty of personal time.

What I did find positive about this year was that the decrease in work involving guest care gave me and the other friars more time for quiet and reflection. This was especially felt during times in Chapel.

Any good thing like that always seems to have another side. In this case, the other side was missing people who have been with us regularly during these days. Most especially the women whose presence and voices as readers, song leaders, prayer leaders or sharers of thoughts during the homily always adds so much.

Yet – the Chapel was filled with your presence very much by your absence, strange as that may sound. With thoughts of you went many prayers for you. Those thoughts and prayers continue each day for all of you who are part of this Mountain community.

Peace and love,

~ Lou, ofm

