

# 2021 Mt. Irenaeus Strategic Plan Draft

## Introduction:

Mt. Irenaeus evolved from a vision, one borne through our founder, Fr. Dan Riley. Some of his classmates remember him speaking of a place for students to step away while he was attending St. Bonaventure University in the early 60's. This vision came to fruition over the collaboration of many other friends, men and women (including the Sisters of the Ritiro), who listened to this vision and took ownership alongside Fr. Dan.

Over the decades, thousands of Bona students and others have “Climbed the Mountain,” to enter into its silence, to find a community that welcomes all, to show them that the Mountain is their home. We hear from students and others that they enter into “a feeling of calm, and God’s peace when they visit.”

Its impact on the SBU community has been significant. Through social media, podcasts, newsletters and other means, we look to share the message to all those no matter where they are. Along with our virtual outreach, Fr. Dan and others continue our “on the road” ministry bringing our Mountain of style prayer to friends in their own communities.

None of this would take place without the core community of Franciscan Friars who have lived into an intentional life of contemplation. Through this life, the brothers are able to offer their unique outreach to the world, a welcoming community that invites us into an expression of Franciscan contemplation.

Like all organizations, the Mountain faces challenges that we need to address. A primary question is Who will live out the Life and Ministry of the Mountain in the future, how will they live here and what will they do?

To help begin to take this and other questions on, we began a strategic planning process last year, one that had us dive deep into what the Mountain means in people’s lives, and their own vision of its future. We individually interviewed 40 friends – including SBU alumni, Franciscan friars, board members, and neighbors. We conducted student focus groups to get a sense of their understanding of the Mountain. We also conducted a general survey, with over 150 responses from friends.

This research led us to a weekend in September, 2021, where we dreamed about the future of the Mountain.

## In summary we developed the following strategic priorities:

- **Reach out to worldwide and US Franciscan leadership about developing the life and formation here.**

- **Seek others and develop a diverse community to live at the Mountain**
- **Ensure that the Mountain and our offerings to SBU help foster a transformational student experience.**
- **Through further development of our outreach programs, expand the footprint of the Mountain life and Ministry**
- **Develop an Advancement Plan to support these initiatives.**

The following pages provide more detail as to how we seek to meet these initiatives. We are confident that we can see a new vision, building solidly upon our earliest vision! One that is bold and exciting, and that we hope will be embraced and supported by those who believe in this life and ministry. There's no better time to reflect on the words in our Mission, and our commitment to join with Jesus Christ "Making all things new!"

### **Strategic Initiative #1: Reach out to worldwide and US Franciscan leadership about developing the life and formation here.**

The Mountain has gifts – physical, cultural, theological – that provide a platform to other Franciscans to express their talents, knowledge and passion with others. We need to reach out to the Franciscan world in a more direct way to invite them in. By inviting others, we grow our own offerings to the world, and deepen our connection organizationally to the larger community, leading to a way of sustaining the life and ministry.

We are also called to be leaders in Franciscan contemplation, to respond to the invitation from others, called out to be companions for the whole Franciscan family. We need to act on this calling for the betterment of the larger church.

Strategies to meet this initiative:

- Develop an expert group on the subject of Franciscan contemplation, helping us become a learning ground for others, into a deeper understanding and formation into the life.
- Build relationships through outreach to the larger Franciscan community. Garner a greater understanding of their interests in life and ministry, and where the Mountain may be a vessel to help express them. Offer all our gifts to those searching for Franciscan contemplation in their lives.
- Identify and nurture relationships with friars who share an interest in our way of life, with the possibility of future ministry with us. Understand and break down resistance to friars' interest in living here.
- Develop specific partnerships to help with this initiative, including:

- With the guidance of friends like Kathleen Moffatt, begin to establish relationships with the Franciscan Federation and its membership.
- Visit Holy Name Provincial leadership to share the larger strategic plan, including the potential investment into a hermitage for the larger province.
- Work more closely with SBU friars to bring our collective gifts together as an offering to the larger community.
- Invite Franciscan leadership onto the Mountain's board.
- Meet with Richard Rohr and his organization to share best practices in organizational development and growth.
- Connect with other influential friars about aspirations and see where they may help and we might (i.e. Dan Horan, Bill Short).

**What does success look like?** The Mountain has become a hub for professed Franciscan men and women interested in a deeper immersion and understanding of Franciscan Contemplation. They are entering the life and ministry in a variety of ways: Some have come to lead a gathering of guests through a guided retreat, others are in for sabbatical, primarily residing in a hermitage, and finally some have decided to enter into community, attracted to express their way of evangelization, going out to the world, out of the Mountain's way of prayer, community, and contemplation.

## **Strategic Initiative #2: Seek others and develop a diverse community at the Mountain**

We have always been a community of men and women, lay and religious. We want to take the deeper steps of inviting others into living this life in a deeper way, as part of the physical Mountain community.

Strategies to meet this initiative:

- Working closely with the resident community, expand the responsibility of our personnel committee to include all areas of recruitment, application, acceptance and transition into the Mountain community,
- Identify and speak to other communities who live their mission through mixed Franciscan communities (i.e. St. Francis Inn, Center for Action and Contemplation) to see what we can learn from them.
- Identify the community we aspire for three years from now. Seek a vision for an understanding of the following:
  - How many people live here?
  - Are there multiple communities that live here (Friars/Religious Women/Lay Men and Women)
  - Where do they live?
  - What does a master plan look like that supports this? Are we in need of more land and new structures that allow for this larger community and room for guests?

- We need a way to ensure that the mission and the way of life is consistent and being expressed in all who are live here. Four key elements we have been focused on are:
  - Person of prayer, both personal and communal
  - Fraternitas
  - Contemplation
  - Evangelization/outreach

**What does success look like?** Mt. Irenaeus has developed into a Village of others living and expressing the life in different ways. The mission has remained the same. We now have others helping offer hospitality, welcoming in groups and individual retreatants, caring for the property, leading and developing our prayer life and outreach to the larger community. These responsibilities are now shared among others living beside the friars. We developed and are now building off a Master plan to accommodate others living among the brothers.

**Strategic Initiative #3: Ensure that the Mountain and our offerings to SBU help foster a transformational student experience.**

For over 30 years, thousands of students have made the trip up to the Mountain, with many of them becoming deeply involved through their college years and beyond. We look to continue this relationship, while recognizing the shifts in student demographics and attitudes toward religion over the years.

Strategies to meet this initiative:

- Continue seeking to understand today's students, through relationship building and frank conversations, receive feedback of their Mountain experience through surveys and periodic focus groups.
- Foster partnerships on campus, expanding our outreach to the student population through channels including University Ministries and beyond.
- Look for new ways to connect with students directly, inviting them to get more deeply involved (inviting directly to clubs, internships, scholarships)
- Develop more consistent messages and solutions to raise student awareness of ability to access the Mountain (i.e. Regularly scheduled transportation to and from the Mountain).
- Form stronger connections organizationally, with the President, other senior leadership, and our respective boards.
- Beyond St. Bonaventure, develop ways to reach out consistently to other local universities, or college aged students.

**What does success look like?** More students are regularly visiting the mountain through organized visits, as well as coming up on their own. We now have a regularly

scheduled van that students are aware of, going back and forth from the campus to the Mountain during the week. We've remained focused on a qualitative experience, not worrying about how many students come up the hill. Students enjoy all the Mountain has to offer, and are a significant part of the leadership of gathering that take place through the school year.

#### **Strategic Initiative #4: Expand the Footprint of the Mountain**

For future growth it also will be necessary to raise awareness of Mt. Irenaeus beyond our current base of friends. We can do this by building a stronger connection with those who know us but aren't deeply involved, offering greater outreach to St. Bonaventure's alumni. We also have the ability to target those who have an interest in Franciscan spirituality yet are unaware of Mt. Irenaeus.

We also know the Mountain isn't just on the Mountain! Areas of growth for us is digitally and our on the road ministry. We need to continue supporting these areas.

Strategies to meet this initiative:

- Further develop our on the road ministry, starting with more visits, but ultimately developing local leadership to help each community nurture their own communities guided by a Mountain model.
- Deeply review our communication materials to ensure that our messaging is clear to understand for those who may be interested in this life and ministry. We need to make it very clear what it is we offer to the world.
- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan that reaches out to target audience beyond the SBU community. While our growth goals should remain modest, the awareness of Mt. Irenaeus to those who are likely interested in what we have to offer is very low.
- Alongside the marketing plan, develop a content plan that provides more ways of sharing the gospel message lived out through the Mountain's life and ministry.

**What does success look like?** We have new people visiting both our physical location as well as our digital offerings. On the road ministries as well as local communities are alive and vibrant. Some of these new friends are interested in joining residency at the Mountain.

#### **Strategic initiative #5: Create a design and development committee**

This group would help begin to visually shape the future of the Mountain in terms of the location and layout of new structures to support the above initiatives. Naturally this group would work closely with what is recommended from the preceding initiatives.

### **Strategic Initiative #6: Create a comprehensive advancement plan**

While we currently have a very healthy balance sheet and our friends support the “present” ministry of the Mountain, it has been more difficult to find friends who will support the future of the Mountain. This strategic planning project was the means to develop an exciting, vibrant, future vision that gets friends excited about our future. It’s now time to reach out and ask for their help.

Strategies to meet this initiative:

- Hire an Advancement director to oversee all elements of finding funds to continue our mission.

### **How to execute the Strategic Plan:**

To successfully implement this plan, it will require help from many. We need full commitment from the core community, staff, board, and other friends who have shared a desire to help.

A model we to consider is to ask for volunteers to “champion” each of the initiatives, beside a small group of other board members, friars, staff, friends and experts. Dan, Kevin and Mike would float between the groups. The role of champion isn’t meant to put the entire burden on one person. These individuals would keep the initiative moving forward, calling a group together to make progress, and reporting back into the board.