



**“There is a Light  
that will overcome the darkness.  
There is no darkness  
that will overcome the light!”**

There have been times when I would wander off the path, head into the woods and all of a sudden realize I did not know quite where I was! With a bit of wandering, patience, some exploration, grace and good luck, I would find myself back to a familiar path. But I would enter the path in a new way, remembering the stories of having been here before, but realizing it will never quite be the same again for me. In thinking about the Mountain and its commitment to renewing itself and finding new directions, I often think of T.S. Eliot's quote from "Little Gidding:"

**“We shall not cease from exploration and the end of our exploring  
will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time....”**

Yes! To know the place for the first time, not to return and repeat, but to do as St. Francis urged his young brothers, to "begin again."

**Thomas Merton**, who inspired me before I was a friar, had a friend who brought him to the Olean area, **Robert Lax**. Bob and his family have become good friends of ours and we have shared many stories. One of Bob's poems that is most revealing begins with a similar passage:

**“Sometimes we go on a search  
and do not know what we are looking for,  
until we come again to the beginning...”**



Volunteers making sure the Mountain is heated plenty well for the winter by cutting and stacking firewood.

**Mt. IRENAEUS**

**FRANCISCAN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY**

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It is striking to me that ancient and regular prayer in Christian churches, often at the beginning and the end of prayer, takes us into the Glory, the incredible liveliness and beauty of God: **"Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."**

Glory means "beauty" – that which shines like the sun, it is "all in all."

**Francis had within himself the very beginning awareness and experience of God** as Creator. It filled his whole life with joy and hope for the downtrodden and confused world that he grew up, lived within and drew others into so that they might begin a new way of life. A life similar to the way in which we have attempted to do at Mt. Irenaeus. This "this-ness" is the light, the dignity of each person and creature shining now.

This reflects in simple terms, the history and life of the Mountain. We were given a grace-filled insight, far more than just a dream, in our world and for our world. As one who was there from the beginning, who was blessed with this inspiration and dream, this grace that I shared with others early on, I have found it a real vocation as have my brothers who live here, and many others who come and go from here. It is not only a place, activities or retreats, but somehow it truly is "a way of life," what we call **"the Mountain manner of life and ministry."**

**Dr. Carl Wagner**, an esteemed professor of psychology and Chair of that department at St. Bonaventure and his wife, Gay, and family members of our University Parish, asked me after Mass one Sunday, "Dan, what is it that you hope to do with your life?" (I was 38 at the time.) "What is your dream and will you bring us along?" I turned to Carl and said, "Carl, I want to find a mountain!" Carl simply looked back and said, "Riley, quantify!"

**The Mountain has been guided by and shared by others** as a profoundly practical and very specific expression of open-hearted



SBU Resident Assistants Team Retreat at the Mountain.

Gospel living for over 35 years. It came from many hearts longing and recognizing a real call to conversion in our own lives and to be change-agents for the world we are in and what is now called "organized religion." Moved by faith, we wanted to commune with others and all of creation. We dared to be open to the wisdom of many and to turn to God in simple ways for inspiration. With daily prayer and communal practices deepening our fraternal life the brothers join in prayer and life here daily, welcoming others to join us. Early on women helped found and were part of our life. Holly Schubert lived with us for two years. We continue to forge and find new ways to do what was our first inspiration, what we came upon "from the beginning."

**The Franciscan tradition believes that all of the created order** not only came forth from God, but is still part of the ongoing creation of God within the whole cosmos, indeed, coming forth from the "Cosmic Christ." St. Bonaventure tells us that each creature is a "vestige" and St. Irenaeus taught us that God, as artist, leaves his fingerprint in or on each of us. This fills the world with God's light and Spirit, somewhat like the gold and diamond images that sparkle in Thomas Merton's writing. You and I stand in the midst of a community that is not only polishing diamonds or cleaning gold, but realizes we are God's own great shining incarnate persons that we are with the rest of creation. We want to renew this insight and create in new ways our commitment and our practices, the practical implications of our





Women's Soccer Team at the Mountain for a day before their season started.



Freshmen students during their Orientation.



Getting in one of the last harvests for the season.

original dream, which wants to be birthed again, anew.

You might remember, if you have been at one of our "On the Road" experiences, the song, "Streams of Living Water" – "Streams of living water will flow from within us. God will wipe away all the tears from her eyes." It is one of the great promising tunes we take on the road, along with "There is a Light that will overcome the darkness. There is no darkness that will overcome the Light!"

**We, in the very beginning, were a gathering of young and older men and women.** Some of us were friars and Franciscan Sisters along with young students who with great excitement and energy and the willingness to roll up their sleeves. There were also faculty members, area families and professionals, former alums who have been an incredible gift to me and others in their friendship, planning and the resourcefulness for us over this time.

Something new does not discount the old, it not only includes it, but receives it as the core and heart of its new beginning, it returns to its beginning, "as if for the first time." It is our one line Mission Statement. It is our work we are doing now, gathering up and learning in strategic planning and looking for the details that ask us to go forward.

**My friend, we are looking for you and others who want to join in and take advantage of the life we received as a gift,** but also extend the gift and work on it and give the opportunity you have to make a greater gift for others. The line is simple, "To join with Jesus Christ to make all things new!" Or, as the Book of Revelations simply says, "Lo, I make all things new!"

**May we pray for each other** and please pray for "the Mountain" as it begins to move ahead and find new expressions of itself; as we look for women and men to join us in life and prayer; as we hope communities might come along beside us and within us; that we would always be as we were first blessed to be from a long time before our years, but in the beginning of God's own heart, "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

*Peace!*  
*Mike Kelley*

Over the weekend of September 18th I was fortunate to be included in a Strategic Planning session at Mt. Irenaeus, help to plan "what the Mountain will look like in the future." My initial thought was, how could I contribute in a meaningful way?

One of the Mountain images that is important to me is the wagon wheel on the wall in the House of Peace, each individual spoke having a purpose, adding to the strength of the wheel. The wheel only functions with all the spokes in place.

The idea of working in a group of 30 people, most of whom I did not know, or know well, can be intimidating. But it wasn't. The essence of the Mountain, "contemplation and the communal experience" was the order of the weekend. The authentic exchange of ideas about strengths, opportunities, and direction, though difficult at times, was also full of joy. By the end of the day, it left me with a sense of peace and hope, faith that when we work together for a single purpose, great things will happen. This planning process is the seed for the next generation of Mountain life.

"The Glory of God is a human person fully alive" (St. Irenaeus), I was fortunate to experience that over the weekend.

~ Mike Kelley



About a year and a half ago we recognized it was time for us to begin a strategic planning cycle to help direct the future of the Mountain. We wanted to take a different approach this time as we have gone through different iterations over the years. We felt it was a critical time to be deliberative with this cycle and gain an understanding of the perspectives of our friends about Mountain life. We hired Anthony Billoni, a creative problem solving consultant, to take us through the process. He interviewed 40 friends – Board members, friars, major donors and others about the Mountain. We conducted focus groups with students on campus to gain their feedback as well. We also conducted a survey that had over 150 responses. In total we spoke to over 200 people to get a true sense of where the Mountain is in people's lives right now.

This led us to a brainstorming session that took place in mid-September. The umbrella questions we asked were: Who will live out the life and ministry of the Mountain in the future? How will they live here? What will they do?

From that weekend we arrived at 6 major themes as to where we need to focus our efforts for the future of the Mountain:

- *Reach out to worldwide and US Franciscan leadership about developing the life and formation at the Mountain.*
- *Seek others and develop a diverse community to live at the Mountain.*
- *Ensure co-ministry with St. Bonaventure to help foster a transformational student experience.*
- *Expand the footprint of the Mountain beyond the Mountain.*
- *Design and develop a physical master plan to visualize the future of the Mountain.*
- *Create a comprehensive advancement plan.*

While the results were very exciting, there were not many surprises. Fr. Dan, throughout the process, mentioned how we have been speaking about many of these issues for some time. What we know, from past exercises, is that that success will come not from a few of us trying to make this happen, but many friends who care to see this life and ministry continue to grow and evolve.

For those that participated in the interviews or the surveys, as well as participated in the weekend, we thank you. If you have an interest in helping us with any of the subjects above, please reach out to me or any of the brothers!

~ Mike Fenn

## REFLECTIONS ON A WEEKEND OF BRAINSTORMING AND DREAMING AT MT. IRENAEUS

In mid-September, the friars and Mountain community gathered with board members, friends and students for a weekend of brainstorming and dreaming about the future of Mt. Irenaeus. I was honored to participate.

The Mountain way of life and ministry is centered in God and deeply rooted in the Franciscan tradition – committed to prayer, joyful service, community, contemplation and respect for God's earth and for God's creatures. All are welcome and loved.

There is something very essential, holy and authentic about life with the friars at the Mountain. Truly, when you come to Mt. Irenaeus, God takes over. Each of us have our own stories of the Mountain and the friars – Fr. Dan, Fr. Lou, Br. Kevin and Br. Joe -- and their impact on us.

But how can this essential life and mission lived at and outward from Mt. Irenaeus be sustained for generations to come? In mid-September, we gathered to dream about the future of the Mountain. Facilitator Tony Billoni capably led the group as small teams brainstormed and looked at strengths, opportunities, and aspirations for Mt. Irenaeus. There were literally hundreds of "stickies" (post-its) for each category, and some very lively discussions along the way.

I would like to give you a sense of this extraordinary weekend. It was full of prayer and reflection for each activity, starting on Friday in the Chapel, through Saturday's dedication of a lovely painted wooden sign for Holy Peace Chapel, and ending with Sunday Mass. We also laughed and told stories and thoroughly enjoyed our shared meals, thanks to friend and Hilltop Restaurant owner Mike Sullivan of Elmira, who created culinary masterpieces. We celebrated Fr. Dan's 50th anniversary of his Ordination, held a bonfire

under a full moon, and came together in deep fellowship. But the focus and work of the weekend was how to "make all things new" for the Mountain, joining with Jesus Christ.

As you would expect, the friars, Mike Fenn and the Board of Trustees are reviewing the output from the brainstorming sessions and will chart a strategic path forward. But at a high level, we had good discussions about sustainability, closer coordination with St. Bonaventure University and students, and what role the Mountain could play with the larger Franciscan Provinces across the U.S., such as in contemplative studies. Adding committed core resources to the Mountain is an area of consideration, as well as ministerial outreach, both digital and in person.

For me personally, the weekend was transformational. Fr. Dan had "brought the Mountain" to me and my family when my husband Tom died 3 years ago. It meant a lot to me to be at Mt. Irenaeus, to work on sustaining this very special place and very special mission. The Mountain meets a yearning for a more meaningful way to experience life. It is truly a "portal to God." As I sat in the sun with Fr. Lou, toured the garden that Br. Kevin so capably tends, listened to Br. Joe share his heartfelt thoughts, heard Fr. Dan's enthusiasm, and worked with different groups to dream of the future of the Mountain, I felt God's peace.

~ Kathy Colucci





We gathered at our Mountain on a glorious weekend in September for prayer, reflection, planning, and strategizing. 35 dreamers from near and far. We shared stories and memories and expressed our hopes for the future. Joining each other around the table, in the sunshine, on the porch, around the campfire, in the Chapel—as we have done in years past, as we will do for years to come. Reconnecting with friends and establishing new connections is a gift I have come to expect with each visit to the Mountain. This fall weekend was no exception. I am grateful that our lives are woven together.

**Cyprian Consiglio's** "Circle Song" encapsulates what my husband Doug and I experienced during this planning and reflection weekend. "We dance the circles of our years...Again, again we come and go- changed, changing..." As our world and communities change, the Mountain changes too. We invite you to join the Mountain as we pray and discern the path ahead. We join together to rejoice in the re-creation, "making all things new."

~ Lisa Jo Patten Looney



## Rise up, you Dreamers and Troubadours

**of the endless Journey! Your Dream begins. -St. Francis**







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## MT. IRENAEUS ADVANCEMENT UPDATE

This newsletter has been full of messages about the future of the Mountain, yet life is rich and vibrant today as well! This year we have been able to invite students up once again, and a great variety of sports teams, clubs, classes, and individuals have come up for an evening or an overnight.

**Our Mountain Fund is the primary way we cover the costs of transportation, food, and paying our monthly bills, to allow us to offer this experience to the St. Bonaventure Community and the world.** Thank you for any gift you can provide!

Our Mountain Fund also helps support our digital outreach, including podcasts Fr. Dan creates alongside **Greg Licamele**. **They have recently begun a podcast series on St. Clare and her life, ways and wisdom.** If you are interested in learning more about this founding Saint, go to our website, or download through Google or Apple Podcasts.

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