

The Common Life at Mt. Irenaeus

We invite you to join a contemplative fraternity in mission that strives to be a new expression of an ancient Franciscan way of life for the reign of God. The mission of Mt. Irenaeus is to live a Gospel manner of Life and Ministry through prayer, fraternitas, simplicity, contemplation, personal on-going conversion, hospitality and evangelization; to “join with Jesus Christ and our sisters and brothers to make all things (including ourselves) new.” This is a transformative life that requires openness to on-going formation/ conversion and spiritual growth.

Each of us embrace and commit ourselves to many aspects of Mountain life and live the life in common. The following is the life that is Common to all members of the Mountain Community and the lenses we use to determine our activities and choices:

PRAYER:

At Mt. Irenaeus we are called to be persons of prayer, both personal and communal. Each of us is on a daily walk with the Creator God. We encourage and support one another in daily personal prayer time, and spiritual reading. We find retreats empower, enlighten and give new energy to our lives so we encourage each other to take two retreats per year.

Our common community prayer is open to all people. We have Morning Prayer four times per week, community Eucharist about three to four days a week, and evening prayer three to four times per week. We are comfortable moving around our horarium and not living a schedule-driven life. On Tuesdays we use Lectio Divina to pray the upcoming Sunday’s gospel. Lectio is a head, heart and personal exercise. The Franciscan Rule states: “The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ...” The Gospel is our way of life and our identity. Therefore, we take time with the Gospel so it will inspire us, lead us, transform and convert us.

CONTEMPLATION:

Each member of the Mt. Irenaeus Community is called to be a contemplative. We also live the contemplative life together. Franciscan Contemplation is being present in the world with a deeper look and listening ear for the Divine Presence and God’s voice in everything and everyone. At times we are called into solitude, to find a place apart, to be present and connected to the “Right Now” and to consciously reflect on life. We learn to listen and in doing so find a new creation by moving from attitudes of scarcity and fear to abundance and love. We find we are already One and are sisters and brothers to all the earth. Contemplation forms us into the image and likeness of God.

We have semi-annual community retreats and periodic days of reflection with our Mountain Campus Team, Board of Trustees, Partners in Ministry and Leadership that focus on metanoia and transformation. We also have a two-day mid-year review in December or January after the close of the Fall SBU semester.

As part of our ongoing formation activities we read and discuss Franciscan and Church documents. We work our way through the Franciscan Rule and Constitutions and St. Francis’ Testament by reading and discussing portions of them. Our Chapters and community life are a major part of our formation.

We offer a five day “Contemplative Days” retreat each summer and invite the friars of the US, Allegany Franciscan sister ritiro community, Franciscan Seculars and other Franciscans to pray, contemplate and discuss our own experiences as contemplatives and readings from Franciscan Contemplative writers. We attend the Franciscan Federation Conferences. We also host times of retreat for the US-6 and Weekends of Transformation for the larger Mountain Community.

We have spent a good deal of time talking about the use of “screens” (television, computers and phones). We do not “prohibit” their use but are clear about guarding our culture that values silence, solitude, simplicity and service. We try to limit our use of screens so they do not become our main source of entertainment or focus of attention. Overuse of screens can lead to individual isolation wherein people retire to their rooms to watch their shows on their television or computer.

FRATERNITAS:

An inclusive Latin word that names men and women pursuing life together, a style of life in which people experience and live out the Good News. Conversatio is a cornerstone of fraternitas.

Transformation happens in the dynamics of human relationships and with all of God’s creation.

Fraternitas gives us the opportunity to be a family.

Mt. Irenaeus life has always been more than just friars. Franciscan ritiro sisters, university faculty and students have all been part of the community from the very beginning. All of these people felt the call to opt out of systems that would see us as workers first. Our first wish is to grow as disciples. We support each other’s personal and spiritual growth and the growth in fraternity. The second movement of our life is to live in the world as disciples.

The role of fraternity is primarily for conversion and ongoing formation. It is also our primary ministry. Our life is to live the Gospel through fraternity and to be transformed by the life. The fraternity is a God given community with strong bonds of affiliation and affection that mirrors the community of our triune God. In the Fraternity we find love and meaning, strength and courage, and hopefully the desire to be better people. Fraternity calls us to pray together and encourages us to have our own personal prayer lives. Fraternity inspires us to go out from ourselves, to walk with and encounter people as brothers and sister and to share the love we have received. It gives us the desire to share the Good News with all Creation. Fraternity can teach us everything and by contemplatively considering everything we integrate and find meaning in our lives.

There is also a penitential aspect of fraternity. In addition to joy and affiliation, we experience kenosis through fraternal life. We have to empty ourselves, our attachments and our egos to become teachable and allow God to fill us. Without self-emptying, fraternity can become self-serving. Kenosis can be as small as waiting patiently for everyone to arrive before beginning, letting go of the need to have the last word, to encountering everyone as they are, not as we’d like them to be. When we do this, we can see the Christ in everyone as did Francis of Assisi.

Common meals are practically every night and at breakfast and with student groups or any others present. House Chapters: Nearly every week we have a Chapter for planning and review on Monday, lectio on Tuesday and the friars have a fraternal chapter on Friday.

On Mondays we have prayerful planning and review chapter. A calendar is a theological document because it prioritizes how we are spending the time God has given us. Using the Remember, Reflect and Respond Emmaus Methodology we review the past week, not only as a practice to “do better” but also to discern how God is speaking to us through the events of our lives. We become meaning makers who weave and integrate the stories from the week into “The Story.” As Thomas Merton noted in his essay, “Learning to Live,” “... whatever you do, every act, however small, can teach you everything- provided you see whom it is that is acting.” We ask, “What has this week taught us? How is God speaking to us?” Since the Holy Spirit is active in the process, the stories teach us what to do next. Clare gives similar instructions “to gaze, consider, contemplate and imitate (act).”

We then plan for whatever is coming in the next week, take on assignments such as cooking, presiding or leading prayer and helping out with projects. What times will these be? Who will be on the road? Do we have groups or individuals coming in? Do they have any special needs?

Every Friday the friars have a Fraternal House Chapter. They do fraternal reflection/ discussion/ personal sharing and support of each other in good health care, seeking out times of solitude and other needs. We should always be growing closer to God and answering the question, “How am I growing closer to God?”

In addition to Mountain Companions, most summers we have two to four college-age Summer Companions who live in and co-minister with us. The St. Irenaeus Franciscan Secular Fraternity work closely with us in hospitality and JPIC issues. We have a mainly lay board of trustees with student participation and a lay executive director.

Vacations and “free days” are understood not as a cessation of work but as time for individual growth, rest, relaxation, and re-creation. We support each other to live a life of growth and encourage each other to re-create in ways that are good for the individual and the fraternity. We also take leisure time where it “just us” to get out of the house and talk about “non-work” things. We are also committed to dynamic discussions on the state of the world and Church- Conversatio- to stay current, active and alive to what is going on and ask what is our Gospel response to be. What’s next? We find that these times can be enlightening as we learn new things from each other. These times give us hope in a Living God so as to not get dragged down by negative events in the world.

Birthdays are celebrated by going out to dinner as a community. Anniversaries and Jubilees are celebrated with a mass of thanksgiving that is open to the public with a dish to pass supper afterward. Transitions are celebrated at a Sunday mass with a dish to pass brunch after. Other celebrations include anniversaries of the founding of the Mountain- 25 years, 30 years, etc., dedication of new buildings on the Mountain, or a Franciscan Secular profession.

Thanksgiving is celebrated by an 11am mass and fraternal meal. Christmas is celebrated by a public “midnight” mass at 8pm and Feast Day mass at 11am. We have a festive community meal on Christmas night. The Triduum and Easter are planned and celebrated with a community of people who live into the week with us. On Easter night we have a festive meal with the resident community. The Transitus and Feast of St. Francis themselves are usually celebrated with a liturgy on the SBU campus. During “Francis Week” we usually have a Franciscan themed overnight or evening at the Mountain. We also note feast

days in our Morning and Evening Prayers. The Feast of St. Irenaeus, St. Clare and St. Bonaventure are remembered in prayer at the Mountain and we join in celebrations on the SBU campus.

Just as a calendar is a theological document because it reflects our values by how we prioritize our time, a budget is also a theological document. Budgets show our values by how we use resources. Our Holy Peace Friary budget is prepared by Lou McCormick, ofm in March of each year. Lou also prepares our Bi-Annual Reports and Annual Report. There is a separate budget for Mt. Irenaeus Ministry prepared by our business manager and Finance Committee for the Mountain Board of Trustees. We are committed to discussion of budgets and reports to have shared ownership of our finances.

EVANGELIZATION/ MISSION Our life is something we give away. We want people to experience a sense of belonging and new sets of learning modeled by Saints Francis and Clare; “the evangelical life,” the joy and hard work of extending the “Good News” ourselves to others. In a polarized world, we search out how to be authentically together.

Mt. Irenaeus is an education site to help form students and others become mature leaders. Wisdom and experience are combined with academics to foster integration, transformation, and depth of meaning. We share a manner of life and ministry at Mt. Irenaeus finding and naming from the beginning, our life as “educative,” active, dynamic, credible and formative for ourselves and others who seek out this way of life, and wish to live the Gospel in the manner of Francis and Clare of Assisi. The **Fundamentals of Mt. Irenaeus Life and Ministry** states that we invite people to join us both here and “on the road” in a contemplatively active and an actively contemplative manner of life and ministry.

We live in and among young people at least four days per week. As a place of contemplation and reflection we ask students and others to consider “vocation” in the largest sense. We are open to all people who seek us out. Once a year we host the Franciscan Volunteer Ministers for a four-day contemplative retreat. We strategize with the Saint Bonaventure University Ministry team to reach out to students. We carry HNP, Franciscan Secular, Allegany Sisters, Franciscan Volunteer and Franciscan Mission Service vocation literature in our foyer. We meet with SBU students to reflect on their ministry and hone ministerial skills for whatever state of life they will lead.

We try to live a simple life for the Reign of God. We are careful about the use of water, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and plastic. We leave large swaths of our land as a home for plants and animals and to help with carbon sequestration. We recycle and also compost food scraps and vegetable refuse. We arrange time for community members to go to Franciscan JPIC events, work closely with SBU students and others to promote sustainability, and attend service trips with SBU students. After these we include a reflective process so that the lessons learned will go deep. We engage with SBU on issues of race, immigration and sexual identity. We post or repost JPIC information in our foyer, on Facebook, Instagram, pod casts and by preaching justice and peace. We are thinking of ways to reach marginalized (rural poor and racial/ religious minorities) people through pedagogies of inclusion. We attend rallies and demonstrations to raise our voices in calls for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.