



“You know, you have a special gift and it is the gift of incompleteness.”

Not long after we finished the construction of Holy Peace Chapel, I was walking with a Campus Minister from Villa Nova University around the Mountain. It was evening and we had shared prayer and reflection in the Chapel with Franciscan Volunteers. As we climbed up the knoll and around the bend, we paused as I continued to share our beginnings and our history. She looked at me and with a smile said, “You know, you have a special gift and it is the gift of incompleteness.”

I wonder if you have ever had anyone identify a particular gift of yours that is meant to be given away – or make way for others! I was caught off guard, however I found myself delighted by what Barbara said. At one point that would have seemed more like a judgment or a criticism. But, for me at that time it was a wonderful acknowledgment that, from our very beginning, we have always needed others to fill out and complete the dream that many of us have shared. In fact, we always need others dreaming along with us and beside us, animating our Gospel life as the **Incarnate One** would have us. Living the Reign of God is hearing and listening to God’s dream, and ours, and as we dream God’s dream we put it into action.

I believe this is a gift of the Mountain. We are all incomplete on our own. We all need the gifts of others that complete us and together we lend hope to the world. Students and others were quick to catch on to this dream and pitch in along with each other. Early on I shared this dream with students and friars from all parts of our Province, Franciscan sisters and particularly the women of the Ritiro at the Allegany Motherhouse. Other sisters who were in Campus Ministry at Bona’s, the ones we call the Stella Niagara Franciscans, were especially helpful, not only considering it and praying about it, but also continuing to take students on retreat as we began to get the courage to move towards looking for a place we would eventually call Mt. Irenaeus.

Today, in reflecting with you, I can feel what this Campus Minister was saying to me. She was speaking to the heart of the Mountain experience.



The Mountain friars along with Martin Spear, our Mountain Companion 2012-13, are preparing the bounty from our garden.

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She noted a richness of others that comes along with the natural poverty of our own selves. All

at once, with a gift named, I was given the gift to make sure that we found more persons to bring to fullness our hopes for Mt. Irenaeus. Many offered the gifts that God has given each of us. Many of the prayers that come from Francis talk about this, in one way or another, that God would bring things to their fullness, to completion. St. Bonaventure, our University's patron and great Franciscan teacher, offers us an image of God as our living, acting, loving God, as *"fountain fullness,"* the One who is love and is always pouring Himself out in us, for us and through us for the world. The Mountain, by way of mission and dream, arose at a time when people were feeling incomplete and judged themselves as not enough, not capable of what might be needed. There was strain with our institutions that, at times, seemed to resist the gifts and freedoms of those who wanted to become engaged and also confusion on the part of people who wished to bring change. There was a certain brokenness and alienation among many of us in our country and in the world beginning in the late 1960's that is reflective, in many ways, of the early life and world of St. Francis of Assisi.



Unable to accomplish fullness ourselves, for God is our fullness (!), we none the less, from our own complete selves, have been able to build up a place that celebrates the fullness, the richness, the outpouring God that, as Christians, we believe to be the Incarnate One in Christ. The Mountain, by way of mission and dream, arose from a strained time and has always longed to offer the healing peace of Jesus Christ so needed in this, our time.

Different images or metaphors suggest for us what we reach for in understanding this sense of completeness or wholeness. You may have read here about the wagon wheel found in our barn. It suggests the largeness of life and is archetypal with many other religious traditions with the metaphor of a mandala, or as named by our natives in the southwest, a "southern cross." The wagon wheel is formed a bit like the native image and hangs over our fireplace. With it has been a slogan on our t-shirts that, *"each of us is a spoke, together we are the wheel."* The fullness of the wheel comes from the singularity, the uniqueness and indeed the need for each other's gifts as we form community here.

You will see pictures here of some of our first students involved in ministry as well as **Fr. Dan Hurley**, a founder along with me, **Br. Joe** and **Fr. Lou**. **Br. Kevin Kriso** joined us for a summer in 1992 and we were blessed to have him return over ten years ago and is now our Guardian. Also here in pictures is **Fr. Bob Struzynski** and **Fr. John Coughlin**, both of whom lived with us for a number of years and contributed their own particular giftedness to the fullness of Mountain life at that time.

Our numbers have been – and are being – filled out, more and more, with students and ministers from other places who are involved with us through our Council for Spirit and Life. As we have grown, though, in no way do we think of ourselves as complete; we are not! The fullness of our life here, the complete number of those who might live and serve here with us, taking on other roles and responsibilities at the Mountain and *"on the road,"* clearly is many more. We are, and you will read it here, looking for others to join us.

Today, sensing their own giftedness, sharing the same desire and need of our mission, we have others who would help us celebrate and live the same hope. My hope is that others will *"catch the bug,"* feel the desire and need to get involved with the planning and the pursuit of the Mountain as a dream, not only to be dreamed, but to be done, to be lived for others.

Our mission and our Gospel manner of life and ministry ask us to be thoughtful regarding friends who might become part of our community either as Companions or people who might work beside us. People who would come among us, learn about us and join in Gospel living beside us – living the joy of the Gospel and the hope our world needs today from our Franciscan roots and tradition.

The practices of our life are simple, poor, and as we live out in the country we do not mean to settle problems or offer solutions for elsewhere. We are not here to reconstruct organizations or give them their own solutions. But, our life of creativity offers us opportunities to try out other ways of living, gathering and getting things done! Ours is a personal and simple way, individually and communally, to follow in the footprints of Jesus Christ. We pursue this Franciscan vision counting on and praying for the peace that Christ has promised us. As Bonaventure said, *"in the way of that peace which surpasses all understanding."*

We gather here as women and men walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as Francis did, each day finding new expressions of an ancient way. Come and join us and walk with us in the footsteps of Christ as well.

Peace!
1999-2001



The Mountain summer community in 1991; the friars, Mike Fenn and Kate Trosch.



The friars with Mountain Companion Holly Schubert. (1999-2001)



Two of our "founding fathers," Dan Riley, ofm and Dan Hurley, ofm, enjoy a cup of coffee after brunch (2001).

NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As we began planning for this newsletter, I recall that we were all excited to start sharing our collective thoughts about the future life we are preparing for at the Mountain. We have been making plans for some time, and it feels like we are on the cusp of something new. The Mountain has

always been a place where laity have played a big part in the life, and that will become more important as time goes by.

A major part of my role is to ensure that as we find others to live amongst us, we are in a comfortable position to do so by means of space and financial resources. Thus we are considering acquiring adjacent properties that include residential space where a friar, or perhaps a small community of lay people may reside. This also has us looking to create a master plan that would have us look at all our land and facilities to see how we might best use our resources to welcome other communities to live amongst the resident friars.

Along with the consideration of physical space, comes the financial needs related to sustaining our place with the

addition of others living amongst us. Our balance sheet is healthy, however we will need additional funding to cover the incremental costs that would naturally come from a larger community.

We are organizing a weekend in January, inviting friends of ours who live or have lived in larger intentional Franciscan communities of religious and laity, younger and older, to help us in our planning as we look to take this bold step. We hope to learn from their stories and experiences of community living, and see what might help us as we invite others into our Mountain way of Life and Ministry.

We always ask for your prayers as we consider these major shifts in the way we live this manner of life for the world, inviting others to join us. There may be other ways that you might consider helping, whether you're able to contribute with treasure or talent. Once more I would ask if you would consider this life perhaps for yourself as a new way of living a truly Franciscan experience.

As always if you are moved to consider this or have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to me. Blessings, and know that we continue to pray for you each and every day at the Mountain.

~ **Mike Fenn**, Executive Director, Mt. Irenaeus



MOUNTAIN REFLECTIONS



From the Mountain to the Valley and Back.

Many years ago while attending a Secular Franciscan meeting in Jamestown, New York I met two friars who by their simple invitation changed my life forever. Bro Joe Kotula and Fr. Dan Riley were attending the same SFO meeting and asked me if I would like to "come and see" what the Mountain was all about.

Nestled in the beautiful hills of Western New York, Mt. Irenaeus at that time (around 1989) was a very rustic cabin in the woods; peace and tranquility was so apparent that I began spending more time with the brothers who lived there and visitors like myself. The everyday tasks and prayer times were open to anyone who wanted to join them. It was like being with family. Sharing in work, prayer and conversation helped me to understand the beauty, depth and attraction of St Francis of Assisi that had been taking hold of me ever since I read a book on his life.

One evening as I was helping with dinner dishes at the Mountain I felt a deep calling of the spirit to follow the life of Francis more radically by giving up my secure job that I had been working at for 18 years and trust in God's providence while helping those in need. I spoke that thought out loud to Fr. Dan and he just simply turned to me and gave me a phone number to call. He had known that Fr. Michael Duffy was recruiting for the Franciscan Volunteer Ministry program for 1990. When I applied for the FVM program I had to travel to Philadelphia to interview. Being from a small town in Western Pennsylvania, I was taken aback when I arrived in the Kensington neighborhood where the St. Francis Inn soup kitchen was located. I had never been to a large city before and this ministry was in one of the most devastated areas had ever seen. Despite this, as I stepped from my car I felt a profound peace, the same peace I had experienced at the Mountain. I had come home!

Throughout the 28 years I have lived and worked at St Francis Inn, the Mountain has been the special place I return to in order to recommit to my spiritual journey, especially in times of profound soul searching. Both the Inn and the Mountain support those of us who need the rhythm of work and contemplation. There are not many places that allow a lay person to live and share a faith life and community with professed religious and with a diversity of ages and life styles. Community can be difficult but oh so rewarding. Ministry, prayer and community combine to create a truly Franciscan environment, which I have found both in the seclusion of the Mountain and the chaos of the inner city.

Where the spirit of St. Francis dwells there is a special bond that exists. We are all brothers and sisters living the Gospel together. The invitation is there: "Come and See."

~ **Barb Salapek**

At the end of August I had the opportunity to spend a week at Mt. Irenaeus with two goals in mind, give back to the place that has provided me so much and to re-introduce myself to the life that we are invited to participate in up on the Mountain. Each day would begin with Morning Prayer. I enjoyed how Morning Prayer sent me into the day; energized, focused and with a feeling of purpose. I spent the days working on the garden fence, protecting an integral part of the life on the Mountain, a space that supplies nourishment, but also is a living example of what St. Francis believed and taught. The relationship between Mother Earth and us is just as important as any relationship in our lives. It is a straight line from God to you. Be cognizant of the relationship and approach it with respect and it will be bountiful!

I broke away from the physical work each day around 5:00 pm, showered and joined the brotherhood of friars for a drink and conversation. This was very enjoyable, not only because of the satisfaction that a good day of work was behind me, but relationships that are built through "real" conversation are a blessing of its own. The friars focus on "conversatio," what I see as the art of being "present" during a conversation. Truly actively listening to others and sharing of yourself. Each night we would gather in the enclosed porch of the House of Peace with the cool breeze flowing through the space and just "be" with each other. That was followed up with someone preparing dinner (much of dinner came from the land) and the breaking of bread each night. After the group would share the responsibility of cleaning up we would gather for nightly prayer/meditation. I truly enjoyed participating in the daily scriptures and psalms. I felt focused through the day on God's hopes for me (us) that day. When Evening Prayer was complete each of us would return to our cabins or rooms for the night. The quiet of the Mountain surrounds you all day. I really enjoyed how nightly prayer focused you in on all that God provides. I would sit down at the pond and just listen to God's work; the frogs singing, birds flying around from tree to tree, bass splashing out of the water, the deer walking through the pines cracking sticks underneath their hooves. A symphony of creation, something you can only enjoy if you are present. Each night sky that week started with an amazing orange moon with Mars, Saturn and Jupiter all in a line with the moon. I sat in silence on the back porch of Juniper for hours, just being. Being in the moment of what God provided in front of me and being thankful for the opportunity to experience His creations at such a heightened level.

I drove away from the Mountain Friday night so energized; so fulfilled. With the help of Br. Joe, Br. Kevin, Mike Fenn and several other volunteers, I completed the physical task of creating protection for the garden - mission accomplished. Yet, as I drove north towards Buffalo I realized spending a week at Mt. Irenaeus, being immersed in the life and the community that lives there strengthened my relationship with God and my faith (#re-creation). At a time when faith can be (maybe is) shaken with the very human mistakes made within the institution of the Catholic religion, spending time at the Mountain reassures you that GOD is Good, all you have to do is be present and see the good that He places around you.

~ Paul Aroune, Board of Trustees

"I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now...Come further up, come further in!"

- C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*

Everyone, nowadays, seems to be searching. Searching for something that will infuse their lives with meaning, occupy their free time, warm their hearts, relieve their stress. Perhaps more often than not, people try to fill these voids with the empty promises of late nights, empty bottles, and short lived relationships. But Mt. Irenaeus offers a change to all of that. The Mountain's powerful personal draw is rooted in its rich community. It is a place that welcomes all people to sit for a meal that was prepared by hand with both love and laughter. It opens up conversations that dig deeper than the surface. Most importantly, it makes people feel like they have come home.

In my time at the Mountain, I've learned to look forward to the familiarity of swinging open the screen door and getting a hello from Father Lou and the friends that have already begun to gather around the kitchen table and fireplace. This is followed perhaps by some time on the land. Walking among the tall trees and the gentle breeze, one begins to remember the peace that exists in the world- the peace which can be so easy to forget when we live our lives in constant motion. The sunlight glistens off the pond as evening light soaks the valley below, and for a moment you sit and simply allow the fresh air to fill your lungs. Heading back inside, the drifting smells of dinner fill the room as food and laughter alike are shared with one another. Afterwards, many hands come together and dinner is cleared away. Soon we gather in the driveway and enjoy a few moments of reflection as we climb our way toward the Chapel. Here we find the deepest aspect of community, where we allow one another to share in our joys and trials alike. Some of the most powerful stories I've ever heard, filled with tears and smiles and the journeys of life, have flowed from that Chapel, and myself and others always seem to return for more.

This shows how the Mountain keeps pulling people back to itself. It invites us to a place where our walls don't have to stand quite so high. It tells us that it's okay to slow down, to breathe, and to remember who we are. It lets us lean on one another and share conversations so intimate that anywhere else we may shy away from them. For many of us, this vulnerability is difficult. But the Mountain continually reminds us to be still through all of it. We share our space in the Chapel equally exposed, learning to sit with ourselves and to sit with others, and through this time we grow. It prepares us to go back down the mountain and to pick up where we left off in our busy lives. Only this time we share a deeper connection with those around us, each time becoming better at slowing ourselves down, taking a pause, and returning to peace. The Mountain has invited all of us home, to a place of welcome and comfort. It draws us further up and further up to a place- a peace- that we didn't even realize we were searching for.

~ Kyler Mangulis, SBU 2021



John Coughlin, ofm, one of the resident friars of the Mountain (2011-14) chats with students from the Medical Health Professionals group.

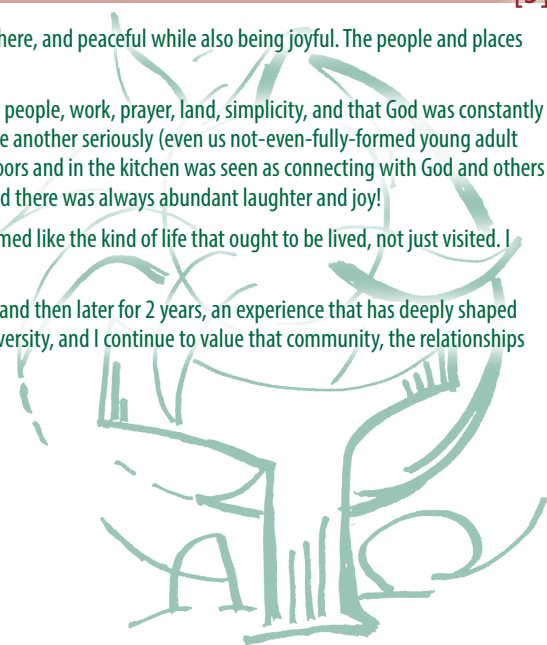
I remember getting a glimpse of life at Mt. Irenaeus as a freshman at St. Bonaventure. It was beautiful there, and peaceful while also being joyful. The people and places there seemed to exist in harmony with the land. It was also welcoming, and I wanted to see more.

As I spent a little more time at Mt. Irenaeus, I found that life was lived there in a way that gives honor to people, work, prayer, land, simplicity, and that God was constantly at the center of it all. I appreciated that life there was reflective, attentive, slowed down. People took one another seriously (even us not-even-fully-formed young adult college students), giving space for everyone's thoughts, experiences, and searching. Physical work outdoors and in the kitchen was seen as connecting with God and others through caring for the land and what we have been given, not as "chores" or simply tasks to be done. And there was always abundant laughter and joy!

It was something that I wanted to immerse in, not observe. Visiting was ok but I wanted to live it. It seemed like the kind of life that ought to be lived, not just visited. I wanted to experience it, live it, be shaped by it.

I am immensely grateful for my time at Mt. Irenaeus. I got to live that life as a companion for a summer and then later for 2 years, an experience that has deeply shaped my life and outlook. Living there I learned that the community expands far beyond St. Bonaventure University, and I continue to value that community, the relationships formed there, and especially my brothers.

~ Holly Schubert, Former Mountain Companion



All of our major life choices should require a period of discernment. Important things should be treated in an important way. My own discernment to come and live at Mt. Irenaeus started and unfolded over several years.

Some questions are: Where does God want me to go? How is God speaking to me through other people? Are they helping me clarify what it is I am hearing or feeling or yearning for? Advice itself is not always helpful but it can be.

Another question would be: "What might happen to the people I currently live and work with if I make a big life change?" On the other side of the equation: "Have the new people I would be living and working with discerned about having me!"

Coming to the Mountain ten years ago meant saying goodbye to a lot of people and saying hello to others. My absence from my former life and ministry affected people, but when I look at the situation with humility, I realize that they will get along without me- even if they did leave the chicken in the oven at the first post- Br. Kevin Pre-Cana weekend. Likewise, the new people I am with need to make adjustments to me, and so will I. The hope is that in the end, things work out for the better.

For ten years I have lived happily at the Mountain and enjoyed the friars I lived with and the people I worked with. In January I received a phone call from our Franciscan headquarters asking me if I was willing to consider taking on a new position in another state. The air suddenly left the room! I was told, however, that there was going to be a lengthy discernment process involving many people. I agreed to go through the process all the while knowing the cost to others and to me if I left the Mountain, even for another important life and ministry.

Ultimately, this new position was offered to another friar- to my relief. However, if I have learned anything in the last ten years at the Mountain, it is to listen, consider, pray and discuss any decisions, big or small. God speaks to us in a myriad of ways.

Maybe you are feeling called to a new direction in life. Honor it by taking some time with it. Consider, pray, listen and talk about it. Maybe you are wondering if you are being called as a layperson, religious or friar to Mt. Irenaeus. Maybe the current Mt. Irenaeus community is also feeling a call for you.

~ Br. Kevin Kriso



Members of the freshman class visit the Mountain for a day of friendship, bonding and good food!



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Fr. Bob Struzynski tells students about the size of the fish he saw in our pond! (2009)

We are blessed to hear the Mountain stories shared in this newsletter as well as countless others shared by our Mountain friends. These stories are the inspiration of our fundraising efforts to ensure that the Mountain carries on as a place "to come and see." Living the message of peace, contemplation, and working together, has changed countless lives. Because of the ongoing generosity of our donors, we are excited to continue this into the future!

For your consideration, we have listed below two opportunities to support the Mountain:

The Daniel P. Riley, ofm Mountain Sustainability Campaign Sustaining our Future for Generations to Come

The Daniel P. Riley, ofm Mountain Sustainability Campaign goal is \$3 million and supports all that we are and all that we wish to grow into. The areas that will be funded through this campaign are: Endowment for our Future; Supporting the Franciscan Community; Facility Improvements; and Land Acquisition. Thank you to our donors that have helped us raise over \$650,000 towards our goal! If you would like to hear more about this campaign or consider a gift, please contact us.

The Annual Mountain Auction - Will take place November 9 – 18, 2018

Last year we raised more than \$22,000 through our auction to help support the Gospel manner of life and ministry at Mt. Irenaeus. You can help support the Mountain by bidding on our items on eBay and spreading the word about the auction to your friends and family! Please watch for more information coming soon about the wonderful items and packages that will be up for auction. Peace!

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