

**Giardini, Mary D.**

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**From:** Mt. Irenaeus <peace@mountainonline.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 17, 2025 9:10 PM  
**To:** Giardini, Mary D.  
**Subject:** "Making All Things New!" - July 2025 - A Chipper Finch, Weekend Reflection, Friars Visit the Mountain and more!



**Making All Things New**

**JULY 2025**



**[Br. Kevin speaks to us](#) about the appeal of the Franciscan way of life and how that resonates with so many, including the students at St. Bonaventure University.**

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## **A Chipper Finch, 'Free to Roam in God's Kingdom'** ~Maeve Specht

When I was seven years old, I set my very first goal in life – to hold a bird. Almost every weekend, I would go to my grandparents', whom I called Nana and Pa, and sit on their deck with my outstretched palms filled with birdseed. Much to my dismay, no birds came. Frustrated, I asked my Nana why the birds wouldn't come. "I'm not sure, honey," answered my Nana, "Fr. Dan knows how. Ask him on your next trip to the Mountain."

But each time I went to the Mountain, I would forget to ask or we ran out of time. I turned 8, then 9, 10, and 11. I grew older. Little did I realize, Fr. Dan was getting older, too. Then it happened. My mother cried. Everyone who ever had the blessing of meeting him cried. I couldn't believe it. The man who baptized me, who I'd dreamed would officiate my wedding, the man who was convinced I was "going places," was gone. Obviously, the last thing on my mind during my grieving was holding birds.

However, we still went on a trip to the Mountain that fall to visit the Brothers. As I was sitting on the bench at Naomi's Knoll, I thought of Fr. Dan and my dream of holding a bird. Suddenly, I heard it. The chipper tweet of a finch. I thought, "What the heck, might as well just hold out my hand." Although I didn't have birdseed, the finch flew near me. Then nearer. Then finally, for



*Pictured, from left, in the front row are: Lou McCormick, OFM, Kevin Kriso, OFM, Joe Kotula, OFM, Hajime Okuhara, OFM, Mark Soehner, OFM, and Ignatius Harding, OFM. In the back, from left, are: Stephen DeWitt, OFM, John Joseph Gonchar, OFM, Max Langenderfer, OFM, Kenneth Beetz, OFM, Jud Weiksner, OFM, and Stephen Pavignano, OFM. (Photo by Mt. Irenaeus)*

## **Friar Contemplative Days** ~ Br. Kevin

Our Friar Contemplative Days gathering from June 23 to 27 at Mt. Irenaeus was a Franciscan retreat in the best sense of the word. Nine brothers from around the country joined the three brothers who live at Mt. Irenaeus and took a deep dive into our experiences of Franciscan spirituality and contemplation. Many friars think that contemplation is just for monks, but we Franciscans have a beautiful history of contemplation that combines activity and fraternal life with contemplation. Our time of faith sharing was not only very rich, but it also was an experience of who we say we are—lesser brothers who are committed to each other and find our identity in fraternity.

As we friars work for renewal in our Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, it will be very important for all of us to continue to grow deeper mutual relations with each other and encourage and inspire each other. As a matter of fact, this is also something that our world desperately needs. In the past few decades our world has become all about making deals and transactions. The ideals of friendships among people and nations have

the briefest yet most fulfilling moment of my life, the finch rested on my left index finger.

To this day, I can still feel its sharp yet gentle feet on my finger. As tears streamed down my face, I thought, "He isn't gone. Not really. He's simply a chipper finch, free to roam in God's kingdom."



been lost. However, our Franciscan way is to deepen relationships with everyone, and our contemplation eases the way for us to become brothers and sisters and friends. In the long run, friendship and care for each other is the only road to peace, security and the well being of all people.

Adam and Audney, SBU students who are with us for the summer and Mari who is with us for the year participated in the retreat as well, except for the friars' personal sharing and reflection. In the final analysis, the Franciscan "Way" of understanding and including all people and all creation as being vital and important may be the only way out of the political stalemate we find ourselves in as we move beyond transactional relationships and into true friendships.

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## **It's a Small World: Contemplating Creation**

**A Reflection from the July Gathering,  
"Before God, Everything Is," hosted  
by The Council for Spirit and Life  
~Greg Licamele**

This week, Pope Leo celebrated the first Care for Creation Mass, which is now officially part of the Roman Missal. The headline of one article read: "Pope at First Care for Creation Mass: Ecological Crisis Requires Contemplative Gaze."



Pope Leo recalled St. Francis of Assisi's focus on God's love for all of creation, which gives everything life. "Only a contemplative gaze can change our relationship with created things and lead us out of the ecological crisis caused by the rupture of relationships—with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth," he said.

For years now, Dan Riley, Dan Hurley, Joe, Lou, Kevin, Karen, Mari and many others have called us together as "sisters and brothers" in this sacred space of the chapel and across these holy grounds.

But I had never really considered a more radical definition of "sisters and brothers" until I walked these grounds as a student at Bonaventure. For more than 40 years, there's been a lineage of people who have gathered on this land (including ourselves tonight) as sisters and brothers surrounded by ... sisters and brothers in creation.

As we hear in St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun, there are all kinds of sisters and brothers of the earth:

- Brother Sun
- Sister Moon
- Brother Fire
- Sister Water

We're all called as sisters and brothers — united with creation — to contemplate all that's around us. To be one. To care for each other no matter our size, color, purpose or sound.

I'm reading a book right now called, "Superbloom: How Technologies of Connection Tear Us Apart." It's written by Nicholas Carr, who wrote a seminal book many years ago about how the Internet was invisibly changing our brains, making them more shallow, in general, as wide adoption of the Internet emerged.

In this new book, Carr describes how algorithms and social media are fundamentally shaping our society in ways never imagined. As communications become more mechanized and efficient, it breeds confusion more than understanding; strife more than harmony.

In the early pages of the book, Carr traces the lineage of communication, painting scenes of the various stages we all know about from history (printing press, radio, etc.). I was struck, though, by how he included the story of creation as a form of communication and relationship. Carr writes:

"The cosmos, the opening verses of the Bible tell us, was spoken into being: 'God said, 'let there be light;' and there was light. The original act of creation was an act of communication. Five days later, after God had spoken into being the sky and the stars, the land and the sea, trees and fish and mammals and bugs, we humans were in our turn spoken into being, with a special, sacred dispensation: 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.'"

To me, one way we can contemplate creation is through communication. How we convey ourselves. How we share our emotions. How we emit nonverbal cues. How we treat the brothers and sisters we named on this land.

Do we look at a flower through a positive lens of communication and creation? Do we note its specifics and stand in awe that this flower even emerged from a seed that laid dormant over the cold, harsh winter? Or do we ignore that flower and its story like we might not always listen to fellow humans?

To me, we see each other better when we see creation around us. When we take time to contemplate God's goodness — and fragility — not only on land like here at the Mountain or in a field near our homes, but also when we see that intrinsic goodness within all of us.

To get into the title of our weekend, *Before Everything, God Is*, we are invited to look at creation in a new way. To see it with vigilance, with contemplation, with care, with empathy.

Before all creation, Christ was with God, creating the world from the formless and into all creation. Before everything, God is.

When we do, we will see that the imprints of God are found in creation.



As a family, we've been to Disney World a few times. I'm sure most of you have heard of the ride or the song, "It's a Small World." It's more than 60 years old and it celebrates our unity across cultures, peoples and geography. It instantly became my favorite ride at Disney World because of the deep message and the felt sense of life together in this world — lessons I really first experienced here at the Mountain.

One of the two brothers who wrote the song passed away last year, but his final wish was to add a closing verse. So last week, 60 years later, the final verse of the song was added publicly.

And to me, it integrates and speaks to contemplation of creation:

*Mother earth unites us in heart and mind  
And the love we give makes us humankind  
Through our vast wondrous land  
When we stand hand in hand  
It's a small world after all.*

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## **The Joy of Witnessing First Experiences of the Mountain**

**~Fr. Jud Weiksner**

I was interested not so much in the content of the retreat, as in the dynamic—being at Mt. Irenaeus, and taking friars there (J.J. Gonchar and Kenny Beetz) who had never been there before. I've been a frequent visitor to the Mountain since 1985, when I was discerning whether to apply to join the friars. Since my transition from legacy Holy Name Province to Cincinnati has been so difficult, it brought me great joy to see J.J. (93 years old) and Kenny (80 years old) react to being at the Mountain for the first time. I might have been one of the only, if not the only, friar on the retreat who had already met everyone else. But being with friars as they discovered one of the gems of our Province was a real treat.



Similarly, on the way back to Cincinnati I planned to take J.J. and Kenny to Sprague's Maple Farms for lunch. I started going to Sprague's when they first opened and I was assigned to St. Bonaventure, and wanted them to experience it, as I consider it to be one of the best dining experiences I've found anywhere in the country. It turns out that Br. Kevin Kriso, the two summer companions, and four other friars decided to join us there. Part of Route 305 was closed for construction, so we experienced driving on the dirt-road portion of Coon Hollow Road, which was not included in the description advertising the Friars' Contemplative Week at the Mountain, yet added to the great anticipation of arriving at this pancake mecca. It was a great experience of fraternity and dining, and a wonderful way to say good-bye after a great week at the Mountain.

### **This summer our Mountain Companions are learning many practical skills along with offering hospitality and leading prayer!**

We had an older bridge at the Mountain near the pond that needed some repair. Br. Joe and Denny Riley, with the help of our Summer Companions Audney Burnside and Adam Watson, decided to rebuild this bridge. Here we have Audney testing the sturdiness of their construction.



Truly a terrific accomplishment that will allow others to experience the Mountain!



The 2025-2026 Orientation Team joined us at the

[Click on Audney's image to watch her cross the bridge.](#)

Mountain for an evening away in July!



### **Support the Mountain Auction**

**Save the Date:  
November 7– 15**

Join us for the annual Online Auction beginning on November 7! Unique and inspirational items that capture our Franciscan heritage will highlight the auction along with Mountain handcrafted gifts, many created by our beloved Mountain friars.

We will feature artwork and photography from Fr. Dan Riley, who left us beautiful pieces that will help us continue the work of the Mountain community. You'll also have a chance to bid on treasures from Assisi, SBU gifts and apparel, exciting travel packages and many other surprises!

Your past generosity has made a significant impact in sustaining Mt. Irenaeus for all to experience. Thank you for your continued support and our mission to join with Christ to "make all things new."



**"And I know I'm not alone. How blessed we all are to have known him."**

### **Franciscan Way interviews Executive Director, Mike Fenn**

In December of 2024, *Franciscan Way*, a communication publication of the U.S. Friars that promotes Franciscan ministries across the country, interviewed Executive Director, Mike Fenn, on the legacy of Fr. Dan, and the forward vision of Mt. Irenaeus. All are invited to take some time to **read the interview [here](#).**





**An Invitation: Wednesday  
Evenings of Re-Creation  
~Mike Kelley**

The conversation continues at Mt. Irenaeus, a discussion centered on the Sermon on the Mount with a focus on the Beatitudes.

On July 2, that evening's facilitators set the tone for the five Wednesdays with "The idea that Jesus went up to the Mountain, taught and amazed the crowds, inspiring them to live what they heard..." That is the goal of Mountain life, as I've come to know it. We gather at Mt. Irenaeus, listen to the Word, listen to one another, become astonished, and take what we've learned back to the world around us. In particular, this is the gift of "Wednesdays of Re-Creation." The theme for the evening was the Beatitudes as our GPS, instructions to develop a closer relationship with God.



During our July 9 colloquy, the theme continued with a reflection "Our faith is a journey too - One of ongoing growth, with Jesus's love as the constant. The Beatitudes we talk about tonight...Blessed are the merciful and blessed are the pure of heart are not only good ideas, they are a call to action as we travel this faith journey".

It is not a coincidence that, as Rev. Dr. Bruce Epperly tells us, the visions of Francis and Clare centered on the Beatitudes, with their message of peace and simplicity, and sent them on a journey to be God's companions in healing the world, and transforming the church. Francis saw the Beatitudes as inclusive, for Christians and non-Christians, humans and non-humans. We are invited to be a part of that.

The Council of Spirit and Life, Weekends and More Branch, will host additional conversations on the Beatitudes on July 23, and July 30 at 5:00 PM at Mt. Irenaeus.

**All are welcome. All belong.**

You can find directions on the Mountain website [www.mountainonline.org](http://www.mountainonline.org)

**July 23** will be: Blessed are Those who are Persecuted because of Righteousness, for Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

**July 30** will conclude with: Blessed are the Meek, for They will Inherit the Earth, and Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness, for They shall be Filled.

The Evenings will begin about 5:15 with Meditation, Prayer, Conversation and Reflective Time on the land.

There will be a dish to pass meal in the House of Peace (more conversation), followed by Mass in the Chapel. At this time July 23 will have a Communion Service.



Please consider joining us! All are Welcome, All Belong.

## Peace and All Good.

Contact Mike Kelley 716-474-5013 with any questions.



For the summer season, Mt. Irenaeus has **opened up our marketplace** of clothes, hats and other accessories!

Many pieces in the selection come with a choice of logos and a **variety of colors and sizes.**

Portions of the proceeds of every item purchased supports the daily life and ministry lived at Mt. Irenaeus.

To ensure all items will be shipped before the end of summer, the store will only be open until the evening of **Sunday, July 23.**

### Upcoming Events:

**Schedule and ways to participate can also be found online [HERE](#).**

**Every Sunday - Mass is at 11 am with a dish-to-pass brunch following Mass.**

**All are Welcome - All Belong!**

#### July:

July 20 - Student Event

July 23 - Wednesday Evening of Re-Creation

July 30 - Wednesday Evening of Re-Creation

#### August:

Aug 20 - Student Event at the Mountain

Aug 22 - Student Event at the Mountain



## September:

Sept 1 - Mountain Offices Closed,  
please call the House of Peace at 585-  
973-2470

Sept 5 - Student Event at the Mountain

Sept 6 - Student Event at the Mountain

**Sept 8-9 - 40 Hours of Giving  
Appeal - More info to come!**

Sept 12-13 - Mt. Irenaeus Board  
Meeting

Sept 14-17 - Friars on Retreat

Sept 20 - Student Event at the  
Mountain

Sept 27 - 11 am - SBU Family Weekend  
Open House at the Mountain



## October:

Oct 3 - Transitus

Oct 4 - Feast of St. Francis

Oct 11 - Closed Adult Event at the  
Mountain

Oct 17 - Student Event at the Mountain

Oct 18 - 9 am- 4 pm - Mountain  
Workday

Oct 18-20 - FAN Conference in DC

Oct 24 - Student Event at the Mountain

## November:

**Nov 7-16 - Mountain Online  
Auction!**

Nov 7-8 - Mountain Board Meeting

Nov 14-16 - Intercollegiate Weekend at  
the Mountain

Nov 23 - Mountain Thanksgiving  
Dinner for Students

Nov 26-28 - Mountain Offices Closed,  
please call the House of Peace at 585-  
973-2470

## December:

Dec 2 - SBU Tree Lighting on Campus

Dec 3 - Advent Recharge Event on  
Campus

Dec 5 - Student Event at the Mountain





Dec 7 - St. Nick Late Night Delivery  
Event on Campus  
Dec 10 - Advent Recharge Event on  
Campus  
Dec 13 - Student Event at the Mountain  
Dec 14 - Christmas at Bona's and  
Blessing of the Brains - on Campus  
Dec 20 - Student Event at the  
Mountain  
Dec 23-Jan 2 - Mountain Offices  
Closed, please call the House of Peace  
at 585-973-2470



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