

**Giardini, Mary D.**

---

**Subject:**

"Making All Things New!" - January 2026 - New Year Resolutions; Meet Declan Donahue; Visitors at the Mountain and SAVE THE DATE!



**Making All Things New**

**January 2026**



**This year we revived an old tradition at the Mountain - praying out the old year and praying in the new one! Twenty people stayed overnight at the Mountain for New Year's Eve and they shared a new community New Year's resolution. Listen to Br. Kevin's message in the video above to hear of their time together.**

## A Cabin Dream and Widening our Circle

~ Karen Pulaski, *Director of Adult Faith Formation*

Fostering relationships, building a sense of community, and sharing our Franciscan charism through a holy invitation – this was the vision held by many conversations I was lucky enough to have over several Sunday afternoons while planning and dreaming with Fr. Dan Riley. How could we create an experience of heart that would help to “widen the circle” and allow us to gather a diverse group of people into a journey that could provide the breadth, the time and the intimate space for deep connections to occur? Out of this dreaming was born our offering of **Journeying Together: Formation into the Franciscan Charism**. We hoped that through this experience we could offer opportunities to deepen the relationship with one’s self, others and Christ by following ancient traditions of learning about the Gospels and the Franciscan charism; and that this would in turn help prepare us to “go out to all the world” to become agents of transformation by sharing the Good Word.

We decided we would try to do this by using an online format through Zoom that would offer a way to invite people who could not physically get to the Mountain but wanted to travel with us. We created a model built around small, intimate groups of people that would allow participants the chance to nurture and support one another through prayer, personal reflection and the sharing of their stories. This was supported by the use of a wonderful resource (book) called *Build with Living Stones*. These small groups gathered monthly, guided by the units in the resource, for a 14-month commitment. Each small group was assigned 2 facilitators who helped to invite folks in and “set the table.” We envisioned no single leader or teacher but rather strived to create a model where everyone was both teacher and student.

Our first round included our board of trustees, committee members and members of our Council for Spirit and Life and had almost 60 participants - feedback was incredibly positive, so much so that each of the small groups continue to meet regularly using other Franciscan resources. They have now been gathering for more than 2 years!

We were then asked to partner with the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe (the Province of our US friars). This past September, we began our second offering that now spans from coast to coast across the country with folks from more than 22 states. 80 people registered for the online experience of which 22 people stepped up to become facilitators, and we are also piloting small groups participating in person within parishes. We hope to offer this journey again in the future – maybe you will join us! It’s important to remember that the primary reason we gather is for the development of community and meaningful relationship with one another as we grow in our faith – and that each participant has a voice by bringing their own stories and experiences to the circle. This is at the heart of what this journey is about ... a journey that began with two friends, sitting in a cabin at the Mountain, sharing a cup of coffee and a dream.



the hill, he noticed Br. Joe working on a project and Declan immediately felt a call to help Joe out! After Declan's visit came to an end, it was clear that there was a lot of enthusiasm from the resident community for Declan to join us. We offered him a place in the resident community and two days after Mari Snyder completed her year commitment, he joined us as a full time Companion.

[Declan's video \(above\)](#) shares his gratitude of having a chance to live in community with us at a time of exploration for himself. We are grateful for the energy he brings to the community and the commitment he has made to share the life with us.



## **New Years Eve at the Mountain**

~ Denny Riley

On New Years Eve, Fr. Lou, Br. Kevin, and Br. Joe welcomed everyone who managed the trek to Mt. Irenaeus. Cars came up the snow-covered dirt road well before the sun was down, in a race with the weather report of an arctic cold front with snow squalls and gusty winds. The stone fireplace in the House of Peace beckoned with a gentle roar of relaxation and reflection, and the joy of old friends, and new ones too.

We held hands in a circle and told our names and where we're from. Fr. Lou gave us a blessing, then we settled down to a potluck dinner with a roasted ham as the centerpiece. All the food was good, every bit of it, yet it was almost overlooked as we talked and laughed,

It had been a while. I hadn't been back to Mt. Irenaeus for several years. The craziness of life and all its demands and clamoring had gotten in the way. That would be a valid reason and makes sense, but having been to the Mountain many times over the years, maybe that was just an excuse for not making the time to return.

My wife Carla and I met Eddie Downes ('83) and his partner Dr. Eileen Reilly at a Bona's game last Saturday and we stayed overnight. Eddie suggested we go to Mass at 11:00 am on Sunday at the Mountain. I had some misgivings because it was in the opposite direction of us going home and snow was coming but decided for some reason - maybe the Spirit at work? - to head up to the Mountain for Mass anyway.

We left Bona's and finally arrived at the Mountain after driving through some worrisome weather. Upon entering Holy Peace Chapel, we immediately felt welcomed and a true sense of peace in being back again. Last Sunday was the celebration of the baptism of Jesus and during the homily, Fr. Lou talked about how through baptism, we are now in union with Christ through mutuality. Our relationship with Christ becomes personal and reciprocal. Br. Joe shared that to have true faith we need to use our imagination- we need to imagine something before we believe it. In praying for a creative imagination, we can picture in our minds what Christ may be asking us or calling us to be in our lives and communities.

Br. Kevin shared how the Mountain brings good people together but we need to go out amongst our communities to find and meet other good people. There are other good

catching up with old friends and finding coincidences with new ones.

After the tables were cleared, the dishes washed, and leftovers put in the fridge, we walked up the winding path to the Chapel. We sat in meditation for a good length of time, then Br. Kevin began a discussion about love. We divided into groups of four to further the discussion with everyone having a chance to talk. When we came back together what each group concluded was strikingly similar. Love is God yet God is Love. Every one of us, in fact everything, carries within a speck of God's love.

Unlit candles were on the altar. We sat in silence. If someone felt like it, they went to the altar and lit a candle and told us the intent. Some intentions were for people, some for concepts.

When we were done in the Chapel, we went out the door into a silent snowfall. Walking down the path through the woods to the House of Peace was beautiful. When midnight struck, we were raucous by comparison.

people Christ is calling us to encounter and in getting to know those others, our imagination gets stretched and our faith gets challenged to deepen.

After Mass, a brunch to share is offered in the community house. As if on cue, we got to meet some of those good people that Br. Kevin invited us to be open to in our lives. Meeting such faith-filled and good people at the Mountain helped me realize what I loved and will always love about Mt. Irenaeus. It's what Fr. Dan Riley and Fr. Dan Hurley envisioned many years ago when I was still a student at Bonas - a place to visit in nature that represents the Franciscan Spirit - living out the Gospel with a community of believers. As St. Francis said, "start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible." We can only do that by using our imagination in our faith journey, as Br. Joe asked us to do that day.

For many legitimate reasons, we aren't all able to visit the Mountain. For those who have been there before - I ask you to make a plan to do so again. For those who have never made it there - I ask you to take a chance in visiting. Regardless of circumstance, we can all take the Spirit of what Mt. Irenaeus calls us to in our daily lives - to bring the Good News of the Gospel to your lives and your community back home.

Pax et Bonum

"TAKE HEART;  
GET UP, HE IS CALLING YOU."

---

## Symposium on Economy for People and Planet ~ February 5, 2026

Br. Jimmy Kernan, a member of the Mountain's board, is pleased to inform you that Laudato Si' Center for Integral Ecology at **Siena University**, Siena School of Business, and Spirit of '68 Committee will offer a special 1-day symposium on February 5, 2026 entitled: "*Reimagining Economy for People and Planet.*"

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, informed by Franciscan spirituality, and guided by the hopes and dreams of young people for a world more inclusive, just, and equitable, one that respects the natural world, will be discussed. Special speakers include Franciscan Bishop John Stowe (Diocese of Lexington, KY), Franciscan brother Ryan Thornton (University of California), Kirsten Moy (economist at the Aspen Institute), and Amy Domini (founder of Domini Impact Investment Fund).

The Laudato Si' Center for Integral Ecology at Siena University, created in 2023, seeks to promote Pope Francis' and Pope Leo's holistic, faith-informed vision of the interconnectedness of all of life.

Details and registration (in person or online) are found at: <https://www.siena.edu/centers-institutes/laudato-si/symposiums-on-integral-ecology>

**REIMAGINING ECONOMY:  
FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET**  
FEBRUARY 5, 2026 AT SIENA UNIVERSITY

**AMY DOMINI**  
A leading voice for socially responsible economic development

**JOHN STOWE, OFM, CONV**  
Bishop of Lexington, Kentucky

**RYAN THORNTON, OFM**  
A scholar on Franciscan Poverty and Franciscan Economic Thought in XIII-XIV Century

**KIRSTEN S. MOY**  
A Senior Fellow with the Aspen Institute

**SIENA SPRING 2026 INTEGRAL ECOLOGY SYMPOSIUM**  
"LARDI'S CRY, HUMANITY'S CALL" SYMPOSIUM SERIES

Open exposition in the afternoon will focus on job opportunities, examples of societal impact and integral community development, climate justice movement, exposition of key challenges of climate change and space for students to explore solutions.

SIENA UNIVERSITY  
Spirit of '68  
SIENA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

©S Siena University, Siena, NY 12159



## **Younger Alumni and Friends Gather on Zoom**

~ Christopher Novak, SBU '08

Throughout the recent Advent season, the Young Alumni Group and friends carried on our tradition of Mountain-style evenings on Zoom. Beginning in 2020, our circle has continued to expand by inviting all those who are interested in spending time in community for prayer, meditation, and conversation.

During the December and January series of evenings, we focused on the theme of “There is a Light.” In our conversations, we found ways to seek the light while also serving as a light for others. Participants called in from areas such as New York, Chicago, Michigan, Texas, and Virginia (among several other places). In carrying on the mission of the Mountain, we have been able to bring the Mountain to the valley, and in this case, the virtual valley.

In planning for these evenings, we consider upcoming Gospel readings and look inward to acknowledge our experiences and insights to share with one another. We’ve learned (and continue to learn) that there are many out there who are searching for the light, and we hope to find ways to continue to invite those to expand our circle. In the six years since we’ve begun these evenings, each conversation is as unique as each snowflake that falls on the Chapel at Mt. Irenaeus. We feel blessed for these opportunities to carry on the Franciscan traditions of community and mutual respect. Similar to a physical visit to the Mountain, I always leave these evenings re-energized and prepared to share my insights with others in my daily life.

As we look ahead, the leadership team will soon begin planning for the our



## **Library Renovations**

~ Shannon Holfoth and Br. Joe Kotula

Guests to Mt. Irenaeus’s Holy Peace Chapel will notice some changes to the lower-level library.

Br. Joe Kotula is leading a renovation of the space to make it a more inviting, open area for gathering and discourse.

The project started with a needed tear-out of the ceiling. From there, like many improvement projects, it morphed into a series of small improvements.

“It kind of became one thing after another,” said Br. Joe. “It came about because of repairs to the ceiling, and then we asked, ‘And then what? And then what?’”

First, Chris and Colleen Gyr, retired librarians and friends of the Mountain, spent countless hours organizing the books in the library that had accumulated over the years. Some books will be given away or sold, while the remaining volumes are now placed on some rearranged shelving that allows more space and movement throughout the room.

next Mountain evening series which will occur throughout the upcoming Lenten season. Dates will be announced soon. Our evenings are typically scheduled during week nights from 8:30 to 10 PM, eastern time. We're eager to have you join us!

---



Following the ceiling tear out, Br. Joe and a Mountain neighbor replaced the fluorescent lights with new more efficient LED lighting. From there, new vinyl plank flooring was installed.

Around the same time, the Mountain received a donation of furniture from a closed friary, which went into the lower level of the House of Peace. So, with the help of the St. Bonaventure men's swim team, the resident community moved some of the original furniture from the lower level of the Main House to the Chapel library.

Br. Joe envisions using the library as an extra space for social discourse, in addition to the downstairs area of the House of Peace.

“This becomes another space that can be used for spontaneous gatherings or for when we break into small groups in the Chapel, or when we need more space for large events,” he explained.

As for what's next, Br. Joe and the resident community will decide on a replacement ceiling and possible painting. While not complete, the library will soon offer a fresh and open space for guests to gather or enjoy some quiet solitude when visiting the Mountain.

---



## Swim Team Visits the Mountain

~ Katie Lyons, SBU '26

Being a Bona's legacy student, I heard about Mt. Irenaeus my whole childhood. Growing up in South Carolina, I had only visited the Mountain once before arriving on campus. This visit involved 7-year-old me wide eyed and laughing as I watched Fr. Dan chase a mouse that was hiding in the altar of the Chapel. My next visit would be almost fifteen years later and although it did not involve a rodent, it was just as memorable. We arrived at the Mountain eager and excited for a day of team bonding.

Our first tasks were to shovel the snow off the deck, transport firewood, and use the snowplow. The team has nearly 60 athletes, so these were

accomplished quite quickly. There might not have been enough shovels, but that did not stop some from using their hands to move snow. Naturally, this led to a team-wide snowball fight. Not being able to get enough of the cold, we ventured down to the pond to watch a few brave souls dig a hole through the ice to jump in the water.

Those who had their fix of the cold, headed back inside. Whether cooking dinner, playing hide-and-seek, or just speaking with teammates, everyone took advantage of the opportunity to engage with each other distraction-free. I braved the cold once more and went sledding for the first time! Before long, dinner was served, enjoyed, and cleaned as we prepared to go to the Chapel for a reflection.

The guiding words for our reflection were identity, gratitude, and opportunity. I was luckily given the chance with two other senior teammates to speak about these, and I chose identity. Too often do people confine themselves to what they think they "should" be. All of us chose to compete for St. Bonaventure; however, we should not view ourselves as merely swimmers or divers. I encouraged my teammates to view things from a different perspective. For most of us, these four years are the last time we will be competing at this level. While it is important to remain dedicated, it is just as important to understand that there is a life outside of the pool. I encouraged my teammates to take risks outside of the pool and to not be afraid to broaden their circle. My other two teammates spoke about expressing gratitude every day and appreciating the people around them.

Our day at the Mountain was filled with adventure, relaxation, and quality time spent with each other; things that unfortunately get pushed aside when life gets too busy. These moments define my Bonaventure experience, and I am incredibly grateful that my teammates were able to enjoy the same. Much has changed in my life since I first visited the Mountain all those years ago, but Mt. Irenaeus has not. And that has made it all so much more special.

---



*Mountain on the Road* *Save the Date!*

**Save the Date and Join Us!**

**March 20**—St. Bridget's Parish, Stamford, CT  
**March 21**—Chaminade High School, Long Island, NY  
**March 22**—TBD, Northern NJ

More details, including time and location will be coming as details are finalized, as will the registration form.  
We hope you can join Br. Joe, Joe Flanagan and the SBU/  
Mountain student ministry team.

---

## Upcoming Events:

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

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

### January:

Jan 23 - Student Event on Campus  
Jan 24 - Student Event at the Mountain  
Jan 25 - OFS meeting at the Mountain after Mass and Brunch - all are welcome to join.  
Jan 31 - Student Event at the Mountain

### February:

Feb 1 - Franciscan Sojourners Zoom - all are welcome! Email us for more information.  
Feb 7 - Mt. Irenaeus Board Meeting  
Feb 18 - Ash Wednesday - Ashes distributed on SBU campus  
Feb 21 - Student Event at the Mountain  
Feb 22 - OFS meeting at the Mountain after Mass and Brunch - all are welcome to join.

Keep watching for the dates for our Young Alumni Lenten Zoom gatherings which should start in February/March.

### March:

Mar 1 - Franciscan Sojourners Zoom - all are welcome! Email us for more information.  
Mar 11 - Meet and Greet with the Franciscan Volunteer Ministries Group  
Mar 17 - Student Event at the Mountain  
Mar 18 - Student Event at the Mountain  
Mar 20 - **SAVE THE DATE - Mountain on the Road** in Stamford, CT  
Mar 21 - **SAVE THE DATE - Mountain on the Road** in Long Island  
Mar 22 - **SAVE THE DATE - Mountain on the Road** in Northern NJ  
Mar 27-29 - Student Event at the Mountain  
Mar 29 - OFS meeting at the Mountain after Mass and Brunch - all are welcome to join.

### April:

Apr 2-6 - Holy Week - Mountain Offices will be closed, please call the House of Peace directly at 585-973-2470



April 2 - Holy Thursday, Mass time TBA  
April 3 - Good Friday, Mass time TBA  
April 4 - Easter Saturday, Easter Vigil at 7 pm  
April 5 - Easter Sunday, Mass at 11 am  
Apr 11 - **SAVE THE DATE** - Mountain  
Workday - Please join us to help ready the  
Mountain for Summer!  
April 17 - Closed Event at the Mountain  
April 18 - Student Event at the Mountain  
April 24-26 - Mt. Irenaeus Board Meeting  
Weekend  
Apr 26 - OFS meeting at the Mountain after  
Mass and Brunch - all are welcome to join.



### May:

May 3 - Franciscan Sojourners Zoom - all are  
welcome! Email us for more information.  
May 8 - Student Event at the Mountain  
May 9 - **SAVE THE DATE - Open Event at  
the Mountain** - More details to come!  
May 17 - SBU Graduation  
May 30 - Summer Companions Arrive  
May 31 - OFS meeting at the Mountain after  
Mass and Brunch - all are welcome to join.



**Interested in learning more about the  
OFS? The Order of Franciscans Secular  
are a group of people who choose to  
follow the path of St. Francis without  
taking Holy Vows. Please call the  
Mountain to learn more about the OFS  
(sometimes known as SFO).**

---





Connect with us on Facebook



Listen to Fr. Dan's Podcasts



Follow us on Instagram



Watch us on YouTube

---

[Unsubscribe](#)  
[Mt. Irenaeus](#)  
[www.mountainonline.org](http://www.mountainonline.org)