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For Immediate Release

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Western New York Religious Brother Marks 25th Anniversary as a Franciscan Friar

WEST CLARKSVILLE, N.Y. — Oct. 15, 2010 — Brother Joseph Kotula, OFM, who commemorates 25 years as a professed Franciscan friar this year, will be honored Oct. 31 at Mt. Irenaeus retreat center in southwestern New York.

The celebration will begin with Eucharist at 11 a.m., followed by a renewal of vows and a dish-to-pass brunch at the House of Peace.

The Pittsburgh, Pa., native oversees the buildings, gardens and property at the 400-acre Franciscan Mountain Retreat for Holy Name Province, based in New York City.

He also likes to connect with students from nearby St. Bonaventure University, the more than 150-year old Franciscan college, when they come to Mt. Irenaeus for retreats.

He finds this hospitality ministry rewarding, especially working with SBU students.

“Young people keep us young,” he said of the friars who also collaborate with Mountain Community Leaders, a St. Bonaventure group that meets once a week to plan the mountain’s programs. “Our input as friars is one of mentoring. We’re building leaders. It’s not them helping us, we collaborate with them — they’re the future of the mountain, the future of the Church.”

“As our vicar of fraternal life, Br. Joe has been very attentive to our life as brothers,” said the Rev. Dan Riley, OFM, director of the Franciscan Mountain Retreat in rural western New York. “His consciousness of deep Franciscan spirituality and of the earth has helped strengthen our connection to all of creation.”

Kotula, who graduated from Washington Theological Union in 1987, said he found the Franciscans when the friars of St. Anthony Shrine welcomed him while he was selling pretzels outside the shrine. He entered the Order of Friars Minor, the formal name for the Franciscan order, in 1982.

“I’ve experienced God working in my life,” said Kotula, who was honored with 14 other friars at a Jubilee Mass on June 24 in New York City. “As a former hitchhiker, I know what it means to have God’s grace. When St. Francis gave everything up, he acquired a certain freedom, which made him dependent on God. His faith journey with God then grew.”

On the anniversary of his profession, Kotula wished that he and his brothers “celebrate the gifts that we’ve been given. Whether it is in joyful or hard times, we can continue to share that gift and grow with it.”

Kotula, who has been based at the 25-year-old Mt. Irenaeus since 1990, said he wants to continue growing in the contemplative aspect of religious life, allowing it to “be whatever it manifests itself as.”

About Holy Name Province

Holy Name Province is one of seven provinces in the United States that belong to the Order of Friars Minor. Holy Name is the largest U.S. province, with ministries in 12 states along the East Coast. Its more than 350 Catholic priests and brothers serve in colleges, parishes, urban ministry centers, and a wide variety of social ministries as well as in missions in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, East Africa, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam.

More than 800 years since its founding by St. Francis of Assisi, the Order continues to minister to the poorest of the poor. Today, St. Francis, whose feast day is Oct. 4, remains one of the most widely-known saints, revered for his affection for nature and care for creation.

Information about Holy Name Province can be found on www.hnp.org.

Interview and photo requests should be directed to Jocelyn Thomas, HNP director of communications, at 646-473-0265 ext. 321 or 732-829-1513 (mobile) or jthomas@hnp.org.

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