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Augustinian Friends— Seeking God Together

Amici

Provincial's Message

Fr Pat Fahey OSA

Christmas

Inexorably, we rush towards Christmas. But what is the reality towards which we move? It is God's love. "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him...may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). The Son of God, Jesus Christ, came as the expression of God's love for us. When we look at him in the Scriptures and in our prayer, we see the love, compassion, mercy, justice and forgiveness of the God we otherwise cannot see.

Coming on earth as one of us, God showed us how good humans are. Made in the image and likeness of God, we are good (Gen 1: 26-27). But God wanted to bring this point home even further. Love demands union with the beloved. So God took a human body and soul in order to be like us in all things, "though without sin" (Heb 4:15). God loved us so much that he became one of us. In Augustine's words: "God became human so that following a human — something you are able to do — you might reach God, which formerly was impossible to you" (Comm Ps 134:5).

All people are good in themselves. At this time in our history we need to remember that. As we celebrate this Christmas we

need to reach out to all people, showing them that they are good, and we ourselves realising our own goodness. May the God who is love, made manifest in Christ Jesus, be with you this Christmas and always.

A memory of the General Chapter

What struck me profoundly was the utter democracy of the Order. The day of the new Prior General's election, Miguel Orcasitas OSA, the outgoing Prior General went up to the President's podium. At that moment, he was the leader of the entire Order. If he wished, he could exercise his authority in every Province. He had just completed 12 years of service, and was now about to finish.

He stepped up to the microphone and said, "Father President, I have completed my mandate as Prior General." With that, he handed the President of the Chapter the seal of his office. The President replied, "I accept your seal of office, and may God bless you for your ministry." Miguel Orcasitas was no longer Prior General. He returned to his place. He was no longer even a Prior. He was one of the ordinary Brothers of the Order. The Chapter immediately began the process to select a successor. A straw vote had been taken which indicated that there were two principal candidates — Alejandro Moral OSA, the Provincial of the Province of Spain, and Robert Prevost OSA, the Provincial of Chicago. There were other candidates. But these were the principal ones.

The secret ballot began. At the end of the first three ballots, there was no clear result. In accordance with the **Constitutions** of the Order, a day's respite was then called. Twenty-four hours later, the vote resumed, and Bob Prevost went into the

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Augustinians OnLine

Stay in touch with the latest news from the Augustinian community through the Province's website: <<http://www.augustinians.org.au>> Details of upcoming events in Augustinian spirituality and in parishes and schools around the country can be found on this easy to use site. Links to local lay Augustinian associations and the international community can also be found on this site.

lead. Alejandro then requested his supporters to vote for Robert, and the fifth ballot resulted in Robert's almost unanimous election.

As I entered the Chapel for Bob's installation, I saw him sitting in prayer just inside the door. I put my hand on his shoulder and said, "We're praying for you." He smiled and said, "Thank you, Pat", and went back to his prayer. After taking the oath of office, he embraced each one of us. Then, with joyful hearts we sang the great hymn of praise and thanksgiving, the "Te Deum", and the simple ceremony concluded. The Order had begun a new phase.

Co-Leaders' Message

Anne Halloway and
Peter Moriarty

Greetings to all Augustinian Friends.

Augustinian Friends' annual Mass and luncheon held at St Kieran's Manly Vale on 18 November was a most enjoyable day and marked the last gathering of Sydney members for this year. Guest speaker, Dr Laurie Woods, Head of School of Theology at Australian Catholic University, presented a talk "The Portrait and Spirituality of Jesus in Luke's Gospel". Dr Woods explored, through the eyes of Luke, the attitudes and personal spirituality of Jesus. Through his most interesting talk he portrayed for us a compassionate and human Jesus. Seven Augustinian Fathers attended with local members, visitors and Friends from St Clare Parish in Western Sydney.

During Mass we formally handed leadership over to Paul Griffiths, transferring to him the beautiful jug, bowl and candle, made for the First National Augustinian Lay Congress this year and to be used in future liturgies. On behalf of the outgoing committee we wish Paul every blessing and assure him of our support as he seeks a new committee and continues to develop the Association. We are encouraged by Paul's enthusiasm and urge you to support him as he brings to fruition some new ideas for Augustinian Friends.

The year has been an eventful one for us both personally and spiritually. The Congress enabled us to meet members in other areas and many have kept in touch regularly with news of their local group activities for us to share with you through Amici. We have a deep sense of gratitude as we leave the position of co-leaders and wish to express sincere thanks to Augustinian Provincial Fr Pat Fahey OSA and Frs Dave Austin, Laurie Mooney, John McCall, and Paul Maloney our Chaplain, for their guidance and support. Special thanks to secretary Margaret Burke and committee members Gerald and Sue Mackey, also Kay Stenner, Grant Mackey, and Sarah-Jane Greenaway for helping with Amici.

In these troubled times we are mindful of those suffering great hardship and fear. May our faith grow stronger in this Christmas season and be expressed through genuine tolerance and compassion.

May the spirit of St Augustine continue to strengthen all members of Augustinian Friends as we care for one another through prayer and friendship.

We wish you and your families a happy and holy Christmas.

Augustinian Friends Gather

Mareeba, Queensland

Gavin and Irene Shanks

On 28 August, our Augustinian Friends group met for a home mass followed by a supper, provided by members, at the home of Graham and Kay Morrow. We met in the covered outside area and Fr Rob Greenup said Mass near a small fountain — a lovely setting. Fr. Rob gave a talk on aspects of the life of St Augustine and St Monica's influence. Fr Rob and Fr Rod Cameron, together with 11 members of the group and Gail Morrow, sat down to supper. Two other members briefly visited later in the evening. The proposed bus trip to Cooktown was discussed and reluctantly had to be called off because only six

people were able to make the trip. We all then settled down to enjoy the social get together.



Augustinian Friends Gathering – Mareeba 17 March

L to R: Fr Greenup OSA; Jeanette Hartley; Joan Hayes; Frank Wagner; Teresa Marinelli; Graham Morrow; Father Cameron OSA, Ralph Madigan; Gennaro Marinelli; Kay Morrow; Imelda Wagner; Leo Vanderson; Jean Alouck

Sth Yarra, Victoria

Margaret Starrs

The feast of St Augustine was celebrated on 26 August at South Yarra, as is usual, with a Mass followed by lunch in the Priory. Many parishioners were able to attend and catch up with people in an informal atmosphere. Our small group of Augustinian Friends continues to meet every two months and work through the study guide. We have found the guide provides a good basis for discussion and new understanding of St Augustine, his life and attractions. We are lucky to have been joined by Megan Atkins who was "discovered" at the Echuca conference earlier this year.

Our final meeting of the year will be at the end of November at which we will continue with the study guide. On 2 December the Friends are organising a parish barbecue, a tradition which lapsed with the cessation of neighbourhood groups. The barbecue will be a great social occasion and a fund raiser for the parish's work for the less well off in the area. We may even use it for a bit of a recruitment drive!

Dunsborough, WA

Margaret Wilcox

In the absence of Fr Paul I thought I'd write this short note to you regarding the few small items I've managed to pursue in honour of Augustine here in the West.

Had I not been an Augustinian Friend, no doubt his feast day would have passed unnoticed in Dunsborough as we don't have a resident priest and therefore no daily Mass. But, with the permission of the parish priest, I arranged a noon communion service on 28 August. In the following photo is the acolyte who presided, the simple floral decorations, my banner, and one of my reproduction paintings of Monica and Augustine.

Notice of the service was given at the previous Sunday's Mass, together with three pages of Augustine's most used quotes. The idea was that instead of a homily during the service, everyone present would be invited to say which quote was the most meaningful to them, and why this was so. A few Augustinian extras were thrown in which, all in all, had a special intimate spiritual quality.

We have only one Augustinian organisation here in the West, St Augustine's Primary School in Rivervale, a suburb of Perth. Because the collection of Augustinian "Words of Wisdom" had proved successful at the feast day service, it occurred to me they could be used for an essay competition. I had in mind St Augustine's Primary School. To this end, when in Perth about a month ago I called on the principal and proposed the idea, giving her the three pages of quotes to consider. With Augustine's birthday on 13 November, I



Dunsborough's celebration of St Augustine's feast day

thought this could be a date to work towards.

As the school did not have a picture of Augustine larger than a post card, I had an enlargement of the one of Monica and Augustine (as in the photograph) mounted and sent to the school. In her reply, the principal said that the Grade 7s had been given the quotes. So, it seems there **will** be an essay competition. I look forward to the outcome.

Our Augustinian study group here has gone into recess — maybe folded altogether! This resulted from parish meetings organised for the only night we all could get together, and parish meetings had precedence! Nevertheless, good seeds have been sown.

The Echuca Congress was a wonderful occasion for me, to be in the company of so many people in pursuit of spiritual identification with each other on our journey to God. My best wishes to everyone.

A Friend's Central Asian Odyssey

Sarah-Jane Greenaway

When I told my friends earlier this year that I was going to Uzbekistan in April, their response was "Where's that?", followed very closely by "Why?" Uzbekistan ("The place of Uzbeks") is one of the former Soviet Central Asian republics, though it is probably better known in the West for its three major cities: Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara. It is the place where East met West on the fabled Silk Route between China and Venice. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Marco Polo, Tamerlane and various Russian Tsars have all rampaged through the place pillaging and plundering its intellectual, spiritual and temporal wealth. Alexander found the area so tough to capture that he had to marry the local princess to secure it; Genghis Kahn was so captivated he did not completely trash the place. Local legend has it that he was so impressed with the 47m tall Kalon Minaret



Carpet workers, Samarkand. The girl in the hat has just been married. Women wear these hats and special jewellery until the birth of their first child. Carpet making is a very skilled job; these girls are highly paid by Uzbek standards

(which yours truly just had to climb!), built in 1127CE, that he left it standing. Not bad!!

The area that is now Uzbekistan has been inhabited since around the 6th century BCE. The Uzbeks are of Turkish ancestry originally, though walking around their cities you can see representatives of every race that has ever conquered the area. The bulk of the population is rural, and is comprised of mainly Uzbeks and Tajiks; there are large numbers of Slavs as a result of Stalin's forced migration policies. The country is poor; the average monthly salary for an Uzbek professional is \$US10; however, no-one is starving. The country's poverty is largely as result of the cotton monoculture that the Soviets forced upon the country, a policy that has all but destroyed its once rich soil. The once mighty Oxus river has been reduced to a dirty puddle, leaving most of the country arid and poisoned. However all is not lost. Uzbekistan is one of the world's largest gold producers. The Fergama Valley in the south is fertile and is the centre of the country's silk industry. Last year the Uzbeks exported silk to China!! Much of the silk goes into making carpets, a tradition that has been resurrected since the fall of the Soviets (carpets once formed the main part of a women's dowry; she made it herself, with the help of her mother and sisters. The carpets that we think of as Turkish carpets originated in this area and not what is now Turkey). The carpets are exported to places like the US and Britain for hard currency. Workers in carpet factories are highly trained and work for good wages (good for Uzbekistan, that is,

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often earning more than doctors and lawyers. The girls who work there are entitled to four years' paid maternity leave, so highly prized are their skills).

Uzbekistan is a Muslim country (92% of the population are Muslim). However, it was not what I expected. Because the people of Central Asia were largely nomadic and given the influences of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism that can still be felt, theirs is not the Islam that we see on the TV. Women do not wear the burqa; a nominal scarf was enough (mind you, given how hot the place gets, a scarf is a sensible precaution in any event!). Women can work, and do not need to be accompanied by a male relative. We women were welcome to enter the mosques, provided we were appropriately dressed and respected the places as places of worship, which one would do any way. That's not to say that life is ideal for women there. One of our guides was considered unusual in the extreme because she had a driver's licence, but I got the feeling that the restrictions that women experienced, which are mild in comparison to their sisters in Afghanistan, were more linked to traditional ethnic mores than to Islam as such.

One feature of Islam, however, that does pervade the society is the importance of hospitality. The people we met were all very hospitable and friendly. They were



Sarah-Jane dancing in Samarkand. We joined with the performers in their dancing at the Registan. The dances, story, costumes, music and instruments were all traditional. No-one could tell us just what the story was about, but it seemed to be a cross between Fiddler on the Roof and Romeo and Juliette. No-one was bothered by a lack of understanding; there was enough colour, movement and sound to make us all marvel. While we watched, we were treated to green tea, bread and a variety of nuts and dried fruit, traditional offerings to guests.

Life Support

Please keep the following Friends and friends of Friends in your prayers:

Fr Ted Tack OSA
John and Jean Tillott
Fr Tom Mescall OSA
Fr Dave Brimson OSA
Baden Keating
Jack Pike
Marcia Rush
Dorothy Brennan
John Mascarenhas

fascinated by the fact that we would travel so far just to visit their country (everyone knew about Australia and Sydney due to the coverage of the Olympics on Uzbek TV. One of their weightlifters won a medal, as we were told on every occasion. Ian Thorpe was a great favourite among the Uzbeks). Every where we went we were given food to eat, green tea and vodka (yes, at the same time; for breakfast too if we so desired. Even Russians acknowledge the superiority of Uzbek vodka), and as much music and dancing as we could stand (yes, there was belly dancing!). The locals were just as curious about us as we were about them. A group of school kids in Samarkand thought we were just hilarious with our shorts, hats, water bottles and hiking sandals, taking photos of everything. On one occasion, a bunch of uni students in Bukhara insisted that we have our photo taken with them on their camera. That's a turn around for the books; the tourists being photographed by the locals. In the middle of the Kyzylkum Desert a family allowed us to have a look at and inside their yurt (the portable homes that nomads in that part of the world live in); they had never seen a bunch of foreign tourists before, but took it all in their stride, though they were a bit dazed by one of our number who was over 6ft tall and about as stout; they'd never seen anyone quite so large.

The Uzbeks were gracious and allowed us to satisfy our curiosity at every turn. They did not have much, but shared what they did have in a spirit of friendship that I've not experienced elsewhere in my travels.