Province of Australia
50th Jubilee of Province Foundation
July 30, 2002

Who could have predicted, in 1838, when James Alypius Goold, O.S.A., arrived in Sydney as the first Augustinian to live and minister in Australia, what would develop from the Augustinian presence – represented by this lone missionary – over 100 years later? After ministering briefly in Sydney, Goold, from the Irish Province of the Order, worked in Campbelltown NSW for 10 years before becoming the first Catholic Bishop of Melbourne (arriving there in 1848).

Even if we look at the following forty or fifty years, we might ask ourselves how it is that the Augustinian presence came to be planted and cultivated here? From 1838 into the 1880's, several Irish Augustinians came to Australia. Although they came with the permission of their superiors, they were pretty much acting as individuals – answering a call to be missionaries in response to a need, but not yet with an Augustinian community response. In this period the Order as such did not make a commitment to Australia. The Augustinians who came in this period lived a style of life similar to diocesan priests. They served in the colonies of Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

Even though those courageous and adventurous Augustinians may not have realized it, they were planting the seeds for the birth of a new Province of the Order of Saint Augustine.

We celebrate this evening the 50th anniversary of the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel of Australia. But in celebrating this anniversary, we need to recognize and appreciate the many long years of missionary labor that led up to the momentous occasion when the Province of Australia was actually formed. The first Irish missionaries came and worked individually – with the missionary spirit and a desire to preach the Good News.

In 1879, Laurence Moran, osa, the first Australian-born Augustinian, professed his vows in Ireland.. Sadly he died in 1881 at San Pio, Genazzano (Italy) at nineteen years of age. But it was almost fifty years after the arrival of Fr. Goold before the Order would come to establish a formal presence in Australia. In 1884, the Irish Province accepted responsibility for the area of far North Queensland, an area that would eventually become the Diocese of Cairns. John Hutchinson, James Murray and William O'Byrne were the first of many Augustinians who ministered in this region. Their ministry was first centered in Cooktown. This was the first commitment of the Order as such to Australia. In 1886, the first Augustinian priory in Australia was founded in the parish of Echuca in Northern Victoria. In the years that follow, the Order established communities in the nearby parishes of Rochester (1889) and Kyabram (1903).

In 1924, James Gregory Fitzgerald from northern New South Wales professed vows. Brother Greg as he became known first met the Augustinians in Genazzano, Italy while on an overseas pilgrimage. Brother Greg joined the Irish Province in 1922. It was 1940 before he returned to Australia. In 1940, Leslie John Seary, O.S.A., was ordained to the priesthood in Rome. Fr. Seary was from Mareeba, and

he became the first Australian to be ordained a priest in the Order. He spent many years of his life as an Augustinian missionary working in Nigeria.

In 1942 Rod Cameron from Cairns traveled to the United States to begin his formation as an Augustinian. Thus began a period of active promotion of Augustinian religious life among Australians. Many others joined the Order in the following years. In 1950, the first Augustinian novitiate was established in Australia. The first novice master was David Brimson and the first two novices were Gerald Dullard and Patrick Fahey.

Finally, in 1952, the Australian Province of the Augustinians was established under the patronage of Mary, Our Mother of Good Counsel. Father Thomas Hunt was elected as the first Prior Provincial, and I believe the first Chapter took place right here in Brisbane. It was that same year that Augustinians assumed pastoral responsibility for St James' Parish, Coorparoo. Together with the parish was the chaplaincy for what became the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane. Augustinians served in this chaplaincy until 2000.

Now, it is one thing to list a series of historical facts that describe, on one level, what the concrete steps were that led up to (whether intentionally or not) any given event: in this case, the founding of the Australian Province. As we all know, there are other levels of history as well. There are the “human stories” – how it is that one or another decision came about; what led to the desire of those first Augustinians to come to Australia; and so on. Furthermore, it is also very important to take time to reflect upon these events from a theological perspective, and with the eyes of faith, in order to discover within them how it is that God manifests himself, how God makes himself known, through the very human realities that bring us together, those same events that when seen at first glance, seem to be mere dates and places in history. God indeed is manifest through our human stories, or activities, our choices.

When Fr. James Goold met a missionary from Australia while standing on the steps of a church in Rome, years before he ever traveled to Australia, could he, or anyone else, ever have predicted what would develop from that chance encounter?

As the early missionaries came, with great zeal for responding to the command of Christ, “Go out to all the world and tell the Good News”, were they conscious of the fact that some day an Augustinian Province would be born on Australian territory?

How did the first Augustinians come here in the first place? There is one version that states that, not unlike many of the first settlers of Australia, some of the early Augustinians who came were sent to get them out of Ireland! They were perhaps the “restless friars” – true Augustinians in that sense of the “restless heart”! Fr. Tom Hunt used to speak of one friar who claimed that he had been sent here because he had kicked the prior’s dog! One wonders if he wished that he had kicked the dog much harder, or perhaps if he had done it much sooner, once he discovered the wonders of this fascinating land!

But there again, in the midst of very human stories, God is revealed; God is working in our lives, through what we do and who we are, as well as through the many different people we meet.

I think it is worth underlining the development that took place as well in the establishment and growth of the Augustinian presence here. First, one missionary came; then, a few other individuals. Gradually, a community was formed, and the "missionary" presence was gradually transformed, and rightly so, into the witness of Augustinian community – which, as we all know, is built by St. Augustine himself on the example of the early Christian community, that we read about in the second reading this evening (Acts 4:32-35). That presence as community becomes, then, the basis out of which we, as Augustinians, live and preach the Good News. It is our charism, our specific gift from the Spirit, that we live and minister as model of Christian community and communion, sharing all things in common, reflecting on God's word, and breaking bread together.

I quote from the document of the Intermediate General Chapter, in 1998: According to our Constitutions (8), "The foundation of Augustinian life is common life," in which all material and spiritual possessions are shared (cf. Reg 4). This common life is, in and of itself, our primary apostolate (Acta OSA XIX, 1974, p. 31), and the strength for our external apostolic activity: "The Augustinian apostolate, therefore, is an exterior activity springing from a deep interior life, and it is at one and the same time personal and communal. The apostolate of the individual receives help from and finds its support in the community. All of us are apostles because all of us pray, work, and mutually help one another" (CC 40)… "The Chapter is convinced that if we Augustinians do not achieve a renewal of community life, based on the New Testament and the spirit of St. Augustine, the rest of our problems (crisis of vocations, crisis of identity, problems of the apostolate, etc.) cannot be solved, and we will not succeed in bringing about a new vitality in our Order" (CGI 1974, Dublin Document, III, 64). A year after the Dublin meeting (1975), Father Theodore E. Tack, then Prior General, echoed these words when he said: "In other words, the community is in itself an apostolate of the first order, our primary apostolate, to the point that no Augustinian community will be apostolically effective as a community in relation to other communities, unless first and foremost it tries to put its own household in order and to make it an exemplary Christian community that endeavors to reflect the love of Christ through unity in charity and friendship."

And so we all recognize that there are great challenges before us. We, as Augustinians, need to respond to the call to live our charism, our vocation to live and serve others in the style of life that St. Augustine proposed for those who wished to join him in the monastery. As we reflect during these days of the Provincial Chapter, we need to recognize that our lives are in need of constant renewal, as Augustinians, we need ongoing conversion, and as Christians we need to return again and again to the source of our life, in Word and Eucharist.

As we celebrate this evening, the 50th anniversary of the Province in Australia, we also need to recognize, and be thankful for, those men who have given their lives to announce the Good News in this Augustinian style of life. Specific mention should be made of so many different accomplishments

- the missionary spirit through the years, and that is something that is still very much alive today, both in Australia and also in Korea, so important as an expression of our Gospel faith;
- the building up of the Augustinian family with the different groups of laity, many of whom accompany us this evening;
- service in education;
- modeling Church community through ministries in parishes;
- sharing our rich Augustinian spirituality with others through retreats, spiritual direction, and other means.

Together, I ask you to join with me, and with the entire Order of St. Augustine, as we congratulate these men here this evening, and so many others, who have given their lives to live the Gospel, to imitate Jesus in service to God's people, and sharing with so many the rich heritage and spirituality that we have received as Sons of Augustine.

Finally, I conclude with the words of the Church to us: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (VC 110).

Congratulations, and may God continue to bless all the Augustinians and the people you serve!