

# Augustinian Friends Prayer Resource Guide

## A Tale of Four Hats: different aspects of my involvement with the Lay Augustinian movement.

### My Gold Hat: Chaplain to "Augustinian Friends".

During the last two weeks of October I helped out in the parish of St. Thomas of Villanova in Mareeba while the parish priest, Fr. Rob Greenup, OSA was on holidays. It was a great opportunity to catch up with quite a few members of *Augustinian Friends*. At one meal that we shared I happened to mention the Letter that I write for this "Prayer Resource". A lady at the table exclaimed "So, you're the Paul we hear from every time! Now at least I can put a face to the name."

Since we are such a far flung Association with our main link being a quarterly News Letter, perhaps it is time that I re-introduce myself and explain where I fit into what is essentially an emerging Lay movement!

It is now over four years since I was appointed Chaplain to the *Friends* and I have grown to understand what a privilege it has been to share our Augustinian Spirituality with so many men and women who are attempting to live their Christian lives, not as monks or nuns – but as laity. **It is for this reason that the colour of my chaplain's hat is gold!**

It has become so clear to me that Augustine wrote his Rule for all people who wish to follow a simple way of living as the "Community of Disciples" that Christ wants us to be. This community is best formed by showing friendship and hospitality towards each other, and so the Augustinian way of life puts a very human face on what could otherwise seem somewhat abstract.

The major project for *Friends* in 2004 will be a second National Congress of the Laity on October 1st. to 4th. at our headquarters in Manly Vale/ Brookvale. This will be a great way of also celebrating the Jubilee of Augustine's birth which took place on the 13th. November 354 A.D.

### My Green Hat: Prior of the Augustinian Spirituality Centre.

Since 1999 I have been a team member of our Spirituality Centre at Greystanes. There we generate programs, workshops, prayer days, parish renewals and retreat weekends all influenced by the life and writings of St. Augustine. This work has helped tremendously in providing material for what goes on under my Gold Hat, (and the other hats I'll also mention). **It is also the reason why this hat is green.**

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#### The Purpose of the Prayer Resource Guide

Each of us is on a journey to  
God like our patron Augustine.

The Friends prayer resource is  
offered to you as a support in  
your day to day prayer and  
will be sent to you 4 times a  
year.

It is centred on the Gospel  
readings for coming Sundays  
and quotes from Augustine. It  
also contains a prayer orientated  
letter from our Chaplain  
and some tips on Lectio Di-  
vina – the traditional Augustinian  
method of scriptural reflec-  
tion and meditation.

At Greystanes we recently ran a workshop over five Tuesday evenings on "Augustine, Sinner and Saint", and the response was very positive. When we asked the participants what was helpful about the course their replies included:-

\* *"It was interesting to find out about Augustine, his life, conversion and what was happening in his time in history. Yet so much of what he had to say has relevance now".*

\* *"The revelation for me was that Augustine was a man who did not give up his humanity when he converted but built his whole realization of Christian Community through the human. We reach God through the human. This was emphasised and was a very strong point of the course".*

\* *"There are many individual things that Augustine wrote that have touched me deeply because of who I am now, or what is happening in my life now. Some as simple as his great belief that living in communities is obviously better than living a hermit's life. That through great friendships and relationships with other people we can become closer to God. At this time when so many people live in their own small apartments and become lost in a large city like Sydney, we need to feel connected more than ever, as people, as a nation . . .*

### **My White Hat: Province Portfolio to develop Augustinian lay networks and ongoing formation**

Last year at the Provincial Chapter held in Brisbane I was given the job of heading a commission of six Augustinian friars who were to work with a committee of four lay representatives in strengthening the ways in which Augustinian Spirituality is shared throughout Australia. This Commission's mandate covers voluntary groups like *Friends, AFA*, and those who have been formally affiliated to the Order. It's work will also affect the way staff, students, parents and alumni are nurtured in our two Augustinian schools, and how parishoners (particularly those on parish councils or formation programs) have opportunities to make the Augustinian charism their own.

One key idea of the Chapter was to create a Lay Secretariate to coordinate the Province's efforts in making Augustine's vision of the Christian life more readily our own. The working committee is to meet before Christmas to prepare the ground for important steps to take place in the New Year. **Maybe that is why I call this hat white?**

### **My Purple Hat: As a Member of the International Commission for the Laity**

Since 1989 Augustinian General Chapters have indicated a strong interest in the place of the laity in the life of the Order. In 1995 a committee from various parts of the world began to grapple with recent flowerings of interest expressed by the laity in living with the Order of St. Augustine. This discussion resulted in the First International Congress of the Laity held in Rome in the summer of 1999.

At the beginning of 2003 a new international Commission was called to Rome made up of members of every continent. I was named as a member of that Commission **which is why the hat appropriate to this honour is purple.** A further meeting took place in November, this time with an equal number of laity involved as advisors to the Commission. So seven friars and seven men and women from Spain, Malta, Italy, Panama, Holland, England and Australia met in the Order's Headquarters in Rome for two days with Fr. Wim Sleddens, Augustinian Assistant General, in the chair.



The main purpose of the meeting was to help the promotion of lay groups attached to and associated with the Order. The range of groups is very wide, from those who follow the Rule as Secular Augustinians, to those who form more loose Associations like the *Friends* that exist in England, Australia and in some other countries. The Order does not want to impose any blueprint on these groups but wants to offer them guidance and help.

The three topics of discussion at the November meeting (which was attended by Anne Halloway from Sydney as well as myself), touched on:-

(1) preparation for a Second International Congress of the Laity which is to be held in Rome in 2006. — A Congress is seen as a key means of expressing the just and proper place of Lay Augustinians within the Order. As the last one did we hope this Congress will inspire and revitalise those who wish to share in the spirituality of Augustine.

(2) to share printed materials that are being prepared in various languages suitable for small discussion groups of laity; and

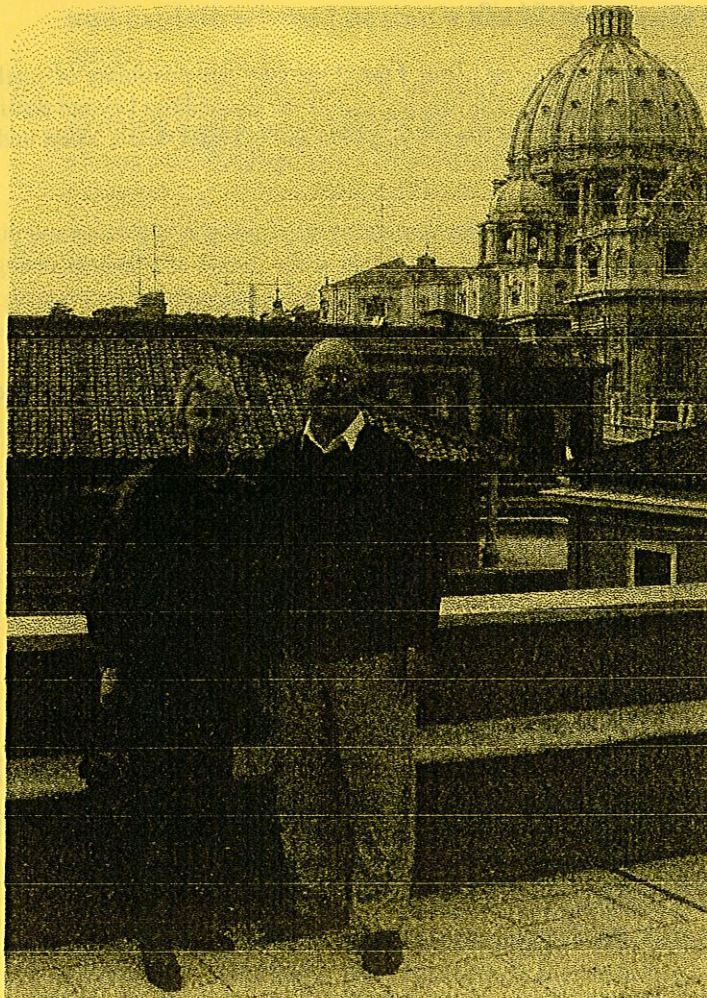
(3) to contribute to a review of the Constitutions of the Order particularly where the place of the laity is involved .

As you can see, my relationship with Augustinian laity has evolved quite radically, and here I stand most happily. This is particularly true of my role as Chaplain to the *Friends of Augustine*, and at the end of this special survey of our journey together I wish to send you my warmest Christmas Greetings with the hope that the New Year will bring you many blessings as we celebrate the jubilee anniversary of Augustine's birth.

*"May Christ bring his gifts to perfection in us, since he did not shrink from making his own our tiny beginnings; and may he make us into children of God, since for our sake he was willing to be made a child of man."* (Sermon 184,3)

With much love,

Paul



Anne Halloway and Fr. Paul Maloney, O.S.A. on rooftop of St. Monica's in Rome

## The Gift of Life – An Advent Reflection

As a parent, the holding in my arms of each of my children at their birth, is the greatest gift I ever received.

The Advent Season, and the celebration of Christmas, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on this wonderful gift that we have all received. This gift of life can be experienced and understood from different perspectives.

Firstly, there is the gift of creating and nurturing life that parents experience.

Secondly, there is the experience of the child itself being nurtured and loved.

Thirdly, there are life giving moments provided by the support of loved ones – gifts we give and receive in various forms.

I think all of us have experienced the gift of life in at least one of these ways.

However, as Christians we have a deeper understanding. We understand that the gift of life comes from our God, Creator of All, the very Source of Life. Further, we understand that through the conception and birth of Christ, God confirmed the unity of creation, the unity of spirit and matter. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." This non-dual understanding is central to all Christian theology.

An even deeper understanding of life is revealed by Christ's Life, Death and Resurrection. Reflecting in this context, we see that love such as his conquers all and transcends physical death.

Actually, if we simply reflect on the death of any of our loved ones we already see this reality. The love we shared with that person remains warming our hearts as we cherish those memories. Perhaps they fade over time, but the bond remains.

In fact, all of the great religions, including Christianity, understand that contemplation of death is, paradoxically, the key to fully understanding the meaning and purpose of our lives.

On a personal level, I was confronted with this reality as a 15 year old boy undergoing open heart surgery. Not an experience I would wish on anyone, but in a strange way a wonderful gift.

On the night before my operation, after my family had gone home, I faced the very real possibility of death. I was fortunate that my family had provided me with an understanding of Christianity and of the possibilities beyond death. But I had to make my own decision about what I believed. We all do. For me there was a God and life after death, albeit understood in a fairly simple and incoherent manner.

However, it was in the intensive care ward where I was to develop a real understanding of the value and purpose of our lives. It is an extreme time. No amount of drugs or oxygen can dull all of the pain or the tumult of a body rejecting the intrusion of major surgery. In this mist of drifting from consciousness to unconsciousness, and at times giving up because the pain was too much, I would glimpse my family at my bedside. More than this, I felt the love and care around me.

It was at this time that I truly understood that this love is all that we have and all that we take with us when we die. If we reflect deeply on the Life of Christ in the Gospels, this is the central message. Love is truly eternal.

The gift of life is an opportunity to express this love – in relationships, in creative endeavour, in all fields, in prayer. Sin is simply wasting a life-giving moment by choosing to act in a destructive way.

This Advent reflection reminds me of the wonderful words of Psalm 131 (130):

*'As a child lies quietly in its mother's arms,  
So my heart is quiet within me.  
Israel, trust in the Lord  
Now and Forever!'*

*Paul Griffiths*

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