



The Augustinian



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*Newly ordained
Fr Van Tu Nguyen OSA
and his mum*

Message From The Provincial



As I write, the Augustinians are preparing for the joyous celebration of the ordination to the priesthood of our confrere Br Nguyễn Văn Tú OSA at St Kieran's Church, Manly Vale on 7th December, 2024. This ordination takes place in the liturgical season of Advent. This is a wonderful season – Hope breaks through wherever we are and draws us to what better.

As Fr Tú embarks on his priestly ministry my prayer for him is that he is joyfully aware of the precious call to be a graced bearer of hope. This call belongs to each of us in Baptism.

The call is graced because it does not originate from us. Our Blessed Mother Mary is full of grace – she welcomes Christ in her person through the abundant loving power of God. The archetypal figure of Advent John the Baptist gratefully embraces his own vocation to diminish as he points only to Christ who must increase.

Hope is profoundly anchored in the realities of the world while at the same time calling us to what is Ultimate. Our sensitivity to the suffering of our world deepens appreciation of how distressing is lack of hope and how significant it is in the life of persons and communities when Hope breaks through.

Advent and Christmas are seasons of commitment to hope. In Christ, God intimately embraces us where we are so as to transform us to where we are called to be.

With all my Augustinian brothers of the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, Australasia I wish each of you and those you care for a blessed, peaceful and happy celebration of Christmas and all that is good in 2025.

Fr Peter Jones OSA
Prior Provincial

Augustinian Spirituality

A Special Flavour in our Life!

The restoration of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris reminds us of both the uplifting beauty of our churches and the fact that the Church is much more, the Body of Christ, alive in the daily lives of its members in different cultural and spiritual ways.

At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus as the centre of our lives, carefully revealed to us by the Father as 'God-with-us', sharing and modelling our humanity at its best. We engage with Jesus in our different life circumstances, often through a particular Christian spirituality that awakens and nurtures the human heart and provides a unique window on the Gospel.

Many find Augustinian Spirituality a familiar and friendly way of walking with the Lord. Each of us does it a little differently but it offers an 'inner warmth' to us in our lifestyle. I'd like to share with you a living example of this 'Augustinian Way'.

I've just finished reading Green Bananas, a book based on conversations between Steve McWilliams, a teacher at Villanova University in Philadelphia USA, and Augustinian Fr Bill Atkinson, a quadriplegic since



he was 19 following a tobogganing accident in 1965. Bill's humour is reflected in the quirky title: *'In my condition, I don't buy green bananas because I may not be alive by the time they ripen!'* - a timely reminder that an essential part of our spirituality is a touch of humour!

After his tragic accident, Bill was unable to feel his body and was totally dependent on his team of carers. Strengthened by grace, he chose to continue his life in the Augustinians and become a priest. Humility was forced upon him as he modelled Augustinian spirituality in his daily life, perhaps expressed best in his response to the question, *'How do you do it?'* He replied, *'Day after day, help of others along the way, valued friends, sisters, brothers, I simply borrowed the strength of others.'*

The words *'community'* and *'family'* come readily to mind - *'Church'* too. Great spiritual wisdom here, no matter what life course we follow - single, marriage, family, religious, priest... Written originally for religious communities, St Augustine's Rule applies to all of our relationships, special and ordinary - affirming us in our faith and prayer, our efforts to love God and one another truthfully - *'one in mind and heart on the way to God'* (Chapter 1).

Augustine modelled his early communities on the Early Christian Community in Acts 4. The family dynamic is inescapable and it is helpful to name the life-giving qualities that commitment to a spirituality brings - interiority, loving faithfully, prayer together, facing our inner restlessness, searching for God, living from the heart, openness to the abiding presence of grace, commitment to truth in all things, and the humility and mutuality that help us live in harmony with each other.

Cultivating our sense of the divine helps us to see more in the world and the people around us. So where are you and I at in our life journey? We may need to pause and take stock. Do you feel at times that you are living with one hand tied behind your back? Perhaps this is a sign that we are too focused on doing things our way, ignoring the Lord and the life-giving qualities that a spirituality brings.

The life of Fr Bill, so very different from yours and mine yet guided by Augustinian values, challenges us. For many, it is simply enough to reflect on our life as it is and recognise the mysterious hand of God in the *'ordinary'* things - especially family life and friendships. Jesus' words addressed to the man he met in the Gospel are also addressed to us - *'You are not far from the kingdom of God!'* (Mark 12:34).

Bill died in 2006 and his Cause for Sainthood is currently being considered in Rome. In June this year, his remains were transferred from the cemetery in Conshohocken Pa to a side altar in St Thomas' Church on the campus of Villanova University - now a place of prayer and pilgrimage.

Grace builds on the daily grind that we all experience - it was so in Bill's remarkable life and it is so in our lives. All things considered, it's not difficult to find in his words a strong faith statement about community - *'I simply borrowed the strength of others!'*

Servant of God, Bill Atkinson, pray for us.

Fr Dave Austin OSA



A Sense of Giving and Caring at St Augustine's College - Sydney

As young Catholics, in an Augustinian school, we are asked to care for those on the margins and develop a strong connection with our community. At St Augustine's College we do this in many meaningful ways. The following extracts are from senior students Connor Nicolaou and Will Farrar.



Women and Children First (W&CF) shelter in Dee Why is a non-profit, community-based service dedicated to supporting women and children escaping domestic violence. Its mission is to ensure that women, children, and families feel safe, secure, connected and have the opportunity to thrive. Each Wednesday, myself, Cooper Thomson and other class mates, participate in the Homework Club. We help the children with after-school work and tasks, spend quality time with them, and offer friendship and support. While we engage with the children, their mothers attend workshops with other women facing similar challenges. This arrangement allows these women to connect, share their stories, and support one another, knowing their children are nearby, safe, and well cared for. The Homework Club has become a source of joy for the kids, allowing them to engage with older students and experience positive social interactions. Reflecting on his time at the shelter,

one of my class mates commented, "My experience at W&CF has given me a firsthand look at the impact of family violence and how it affects people differently, especially at various ages. It's taught me to approach others with empathy and respect, as we often don't know what challenges they might face behind closed doors." This experience has impacted all those involved and inspired future others to consider volunteering if given the opportunity, as it provides a unique and eye-opening perspective.

Connor Nicolaou (Year 11)



Recently I went to 'Young, Fit and Deadly' at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE). I thought I was the one helping the less fortunate, homeless children that are picked up from the streets of Redfern. Redfern is a suburb in inner Sydney that has some challenges. I soon learned that the reality was, I was the one that gained so much from giving a hand, playing sport alongside and caring for these kids. I learnt how blessed and grateful we should be to have access to education, facilities, and the community we have here at Saints. It is so important that we make these connections with

the less fortunate, because not only does it strengthen our community and helps to build the foundation of Australia, but it gives us a pure and real insight to the life of people just like us, living in another world. The life stories these children tell are fascinating, but at times very sad, and teaches us what we could do better in modern Australia. It reveals a problem that many people, with all of our material things and the privileges, are shielded from. Making a connection is not hard nor a big ask. It not only helps you and the person you connect with, it helps to make progress - for the better - in the wider community. At Saints we pride ourselves with the strong community connections. I encourage us all to continue to build and strengthen these connections to make an even better world.

Will Farrar (Year 11)

Villa Bees Project

Decree 8 of the Australian Plenary Council of 2021-22 calls for an “Integral ecology and conversion for the sake of our Common Home”. To make sure that the Council’s decrees lead to actions, the Archdiocese of Brisbane held its own Synod in 2024. The Synod’s action plan, among other things, sets in place actions that might lead to ecological conversions.

One such action was initiated at Villanova College in 2022 when a year 12 student donated two bee hives for keeping on the College’s Coorparoo campus. This student maintained the hive for two years while introducing others to a bee keeping awareness. This year, a current year 12 student, a private beekeeper, took over the care of the hives. And the College’s purchased additional hives.

Because of construction work on campus, the Villanova hives have been transferred to the College’s sporting fields. Increase in honey production suggests that the bees love their new home!

Our current student beekeeper has just graduated. To ensure succession planning for the ongoing care of the hives, in the last week of the school year, the Villanova Mission and Identity Team arranged bee keeping training. Nine Villanova staff participated. Un bee lievable!

Various staff participants have responded by expressing a desire to: learn more; be on roster to inspect or rob the hives; find ways to introduce ‘bee-ecological-knowledge’ into their teaching practise; train students in bee keeping ways. In addition College Chaplain, Fr Peter, earned the title of “queen bee whisperer” as he was the first of the group to identify the hive queen.

Villanova rejoices in its Villa Bees Project a result of student initiative, generosity, and response to the call of Pope Francis to care for our Common Home.

Fr Peter Wieneke OSA



WHO ARE THESE FRIENDS? HOW CAN THIS BE?

People in 2024 claiming to be ‘friends’ of Augustine, he who lived so long ago (340-430) and so far away (in Africa and Italy)?

This year when some Aussies attended the International Congress for Lay Augustinians we found Judith Duncan, Co-Leader of *Friends*, texting back to Australia that she felt **so much at home!** Certainly, those who live in Augustinian parishes will have some understanding of why Judith felt like that.

Augustine himself was always eager to be surrounded by friends, so we begin to sense the value of friendship, a certain kind of friendship, and therefore, dare to call ourselves *friends* of Augustine. (FOSA.)

In *The Confessions* we find him writing, “*To teach each other and to learn from each other, these and such things kindled a flame that fused our very souls together and made us one out of many.*” Conf. 4.8

Joseph Kelley, keynote speaker at the 4th National Lay Congress in Australia in 2010 and present at the Rome Congress this year, speaks about this kind of friendship in his book, *Faith in Exile* (Paulist Press 2003. p.78 -80.)

“To share one’s spiritual life with others requires more than publicly praying with them, though shared prayer can be of great value and can be the beginning of shared spirituality. Joe suggests that, Shared spirituality moves beyond public worship and expressive prayer to the realm of friendship. And that, Even, at the deepest levels of our souls, where we and our God meet, friends can be invited. Our spiritual pilgrimages can be shared with others we meet along the way.”

Friends of St. Augustine (FOSA) seeks to build on this idea as we gather across Australia, and within this framework of friendship one’s faith journey is nourished, challenged and certainly enhanced.

As ‘friends’ across Australia seek to learn about Augustine they continue to be surprised by the relevance of his thought as he urges us forward on our faith journey.



*Members of Friends
Holy Spirit Parish, St. Clair*

Friends gather in Mareeba, Cairns, Coorparoo, Gold Coast, St. Clair, North Harbour and South Yarra. Our Newsletter *Amici* and a Prayer Resource are available to members several times a year.

Membership enquiries welcome to Judith Duncan judithpduncan@outlook.com 417 309 747
or mary_mccormick@bigpond.com 0419134075

AUGUSTINIAN FORMATION ASSOCIATION

Many thanks to everyone who attended the AFA Christmas Dinner on Saturday, 23 November at the Wakehurst Golf Club. We had a great turn out and it was a fun night. With everyone's help and generosity we raised just over \$4,000 which is fantastic. Thank you to all those who couldn't attend but gave a donation or purchased a ticket for an Augustinian. Many thanks to everyone who donated raffle prizes which was greatly appreciated. To our two major sponsors Wilson Family Funerals and Cunninghams Real Estate we thank you too for your continued support and generosity. Congratulations to all our raffle and lucky door prize winners on the night. Our 1st Prize of \$1,000 was won by Rhonda & Paul Daly and Robyn Bulmer went home with the Scratchie Tree.



On the 7 December 2024 we were lucky to witness Fr Joseph Van Tu Nguyen's OSA Ordination to the Priesthood by Most Reverend Anthony Randazzo DD JCL. It was a very beautiful and moving ceremony that took place at St Kieran's Church followed by celebrations in the Parish Centre. AFA wishes Fr Tu all the very as he leaves for Vietnam early next year to take on his ministry over there and we express our gratefulness for all he has done over the past 8 years here in Australia. May we continue to keep Fr Tu in our prayers.



AFA has had another successful fundraising and social year with the Fun Walk in April, the Christmas in July Dinner and the recent end of year Christmas Party raising a total of around \$14,000. At our recent dinner it was with pleasure to hand over \$10,000 to the Order which would not have been possible without the support and generosity of AFA's members and friends.

AFA would like to thank all our members and friends in Australia and overseas for their continued support throughout this year and we send our best wishes for a very Holy & Happy Christmas and a Peaceful & Joyful 2025.

God Bless
Adriana Bowyer
AFA President

Augustinian Young Adult Ministry

“We are here to form brothers and sisters in Christ.”

This is the vision statement of the Young Adults Ministry (YAM) at St James.

The tinkle and buzz of chatter and laughter fill the room as we greet one another, laugh together and share food with each other.

I find myself surrounded by young adults from all over the world, and even from different parish's here in Brisbane, as we gather for our fortnightly bible studies. What's drawing us together is our common love for Christ, the desire to grow in our faith, and for fellowship.

The fortnightly bible studies we host at St James YAM is easily the most successful of our regular events that we have created. We use Lectio Divina, to help us reflect on the Gospel of the day, which is followed by group discussion, where we share our reflections, ask questions, and jointly dissect scripture to apply what God is communicating to us into our own lives. After this, an equally successful space we have created is “Brotherhood and Sisterhood” time. This is when the young men and women separate for the evening and have time to share how we're each doing in life, have heart to hearts, and pray for each other in a safe and cozy environment.

During our Sisterhood times, one moment the girls and I are laughing, the next moment we're in tears as we take the courage to be vulnerable with each other and express heart felt prayers for each, the fact that we are all sisters in Christ takes prevalence over anything else.

This has been incredibly beautiful and sacred space that I feel so grateful to be part of. I feel supported by the other Godly young women who are in a similar stage of life as myself, who can relate with me, and go through life with me.

None of this existed this time last year, and it's amazing to think in the space of one year how much of a strong and vibrant Young Adults community we have created. In 2024 we have also grown our music ministry for our monthly YAM Mass, hosted monthly Morning Tea's after 9am Mass, have put on monthly

socials whether it's a hike or a coffee catch up, hosted our first St James Dance to celebrate the Feast Day of St James, where we danced the night away to disco night hits, we went on a 3 day Retreat to Marian Valley, we hosted Worship Nights, volunteered together at local homeless sanctuary ECM... the list goes on!

It has been incredible to witness and reflect on how much we've grown, and how important and valued it is to create a space for Young Adults to be able to express themselves freely, grow in their faith and have fellowship with each other. We are very grateful for the whole parish community that have supported us, and for the Augustinian priests who have helped guide us throughout our endeavours.

Theresia James

Young Adult at St James Parish, Coorparoo





Planning for Eternity: A Parish Seminar on Catholic Funerals

On All Souls' Day, November 2nd, 2024, St Kieran's Church in North Harbour Parish hosted a unique seminar focused on a topic often avoided: planning one's own funeral. The event, which drew a considerable number of parishioners, featured two insightful speakers: Father Abel Van Der Veer, a retired priest residing in Manly Vale Community, and Funeral Director Jenny Smith.

Funeral Director Jenny Smith offered practical advice on planning a funeral. She emphasized the need to normalize death, transforming it from a taboo subject into a shared experience filled with joy, humour, anticipation, and hope. By actively planning one's funeral, individuals can ensure that their final farewell reflects their personal beliefs and values.



The seminar encouraged participants to take an active role in planning their own funerals. A form was distributed, allowing individuals to specify their preferences for the ceremony, readings, music, and other details. These forms will be kept in the parish records, ensuring that their wishes are honoured when the time comes.

Father Abel, drawing from his personal experiences and learnings from a two-week retirement course, provided a poignant perspective on aging and death. He emphasized the importance of finding meaningful pursuits to keep oneself occupied, such as hobbies and volunteer work. He also acknowledged the realities of aging, including potential health declines like dementia. Father Abel stressed the importance of bearing suffering with patience and faith, drawing inspiration from the suffering of Christ. He also briefly discussed the Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) legislation in NSW, highlighting the importance of embracing suffering as an opportunity to unite oneself with Christ.

By addressing the often-taboo topic of death, this seminar empowered parishioners to approach their mortality with greater peace and acceptance. By planning ahead, they can alleviate the burden on their loved ones and ensure that their final farewell is a fitting tribute to their lives.



Augustinian Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation (ASOLC)- Mission in Australia



Sr. Jiji at the Youth and Vocation Gathering of the Diocese of Broken Bay

On 3 August 2019, Sister Jennifer and I arrived in Australia. We were sent by our Congregation to expand our mission in the Diocese of Broken Bay, particularly within the Catholic schools of the Diocese. Sister Jennifer has been assigned to MacKillop Catholic College in Warnervale, while I am at St. Brigid's Catholic School in Lake Munmorah. During the weekends, we both minister at St. Mary's Parish in Toukley/Lake Munmorah. We are fortunate to have a beautiful convent in Noraville, right next to St. Mary's Church in Toukley. It is truly a blessing to serve the people in our Diocese, especially the young.

During the pandemic, we faced numerous challenges in our ministry, including the closure of churches and a shift away from traditional face-to-face schooling. Despite these obstacles, we found innovative ways to connect with our students, parishioners, and families in the Philippines. We embraced online learning and various digital platforms to maintain our community ties. Through these efforts, our parish conducted online rosaries and initiated Augustinian Lectio Divina sessions, a practice that continues to enrich our spiritual lives today. We also embraced the opportunity to live stream our weekend parish Mass, reaching more people than ever before.

While we celebrated these accomplishments, we also navigated difficult circumstances. Sr. Jennifer experienced the loss of her father, Arturo, during the pandemic, and travel restrictions prevented her from being by his side. Yet, our commitment to our mission remained unwavering.

As the world gradually opened up after three years of restrictions, we discovered new opportunities to appreciate the beauty of our surroundings. I was able to travel and spend valuable time with my elderly mother, Helen, which was an important opportunity for us both.

In August 2023, I had the honor of attending World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, where both Sr. Jennifer and I were invited by the Diocese to lead small groups of young adults. This experience was profoundly uplifting, filled with shared faith and inspiration from Pope Francis, who encouraged many young participants to deepen their faith and find their courage. Our journey culminated in Fatima, Portugal, with a retreat led by our Bishop Anthony Randazzo. Although I had to leave early due to my mother's passing, it was a moment filled with sadness but also comfort, knowing she was free from suffering.

After Christmas in December 2023, we enjoyed a long holiday back home, marking a significant milestone as I celebrated my 25th Profession Anniversary. It was a joyous gathering with family, sisters, and friends—an opportunity to reflect on our journey together.

In May 2024, we welcomed Sr. Eden Gicana, our Superior General, and Sr. Flolyn Catungal, Councillor on Apostolate, during their canonical visitation. They engaged with us, visited our schools and parish, and met with Fr. David Ranson, the Vicar of the Diocese, to discuss renewing our contract with the Diocese.

After four enriching years of ministry in Australia, we are thrilled to announce the extension of our agreement with the Diocese of Broken Bay, with Sr. Jennifer and I continuing our service at St. Mary's Catholic Primary School and St. Brendan's Catholic Primary School, respectively. Additionally, Sr. Jennifer has taken on the role of Sacramental Coordinator, while I have become the Catechist Coordinator. We are immensely grateful for the support of the Diocese Office, which has helped us secure our Permanent Residency.

Our mission here in Australia has been truly blessed. While we work closely with the Diocese, we also maintain strong connections with the community of our OSA Fathers, who continue to support us. As St. Augustine wisely said, “Be glad that you are gathered together by the grace of God, supporting one another in charity, and careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Epist. 210,1). Together, we will continue to foster this spirit of unity and collaboration as we move forward.

Sr Josie L. Mabini OSA



*Sr Josie with Augustinians Fathers
John and Michael*

A Journey Fulfilled: Reflecting on My Priesthood Ordination



There are moments in life when time seems to stand still—when the culmination of countless experiences, decisions, and graces converge into one profound point. For me, December 7th, 2024, was one such moment: the day I was ordained to the priesthood. As I knelt before the bishop, feeling the weight of his hands on my head, it felt like my entire life had been building toward this sacred moment. Years of prayer, discernment, formation, and countless experiences of grace had all converged, leading me to say “yes” to God in a way that would forever shape my life.

What struck me most that day wasn’t just the significance of the ordination itself but the journey that brought me there—a journey marked by God’s gentle and persistent call, the love and support of those around me, and the deep conviction that this was where I was meant to be. It was not a single moment in isolation but the culmination of a lifetime of grace.

The journey began with a stirring in my heart—a quiet but persistent sense that God was calling me to something greater. St. Augustine’s charism—his love for community, his interior search for truth, and his commitment to service—drew me to the Augustinians. His teachings resonated deeply with my own longing for a life rooted in faith, fraternity, and purpose.



My formation with the Augustinians was a time of profound growth. It was not always easy; moments of doubt and struggle were interwoven with moments of clarity and grace. Living in community taught me the beauty of communal life—praying, working, and journeying together. My brothers’ support and example helped me envision the kind of priest God was calling me to be: one who serves with humility, listens with compassion, and loves without reservation.

Significant milestones along the way prepared me for this sacred day. My diaconate ordination was one such moment, marking my first steps into the role of servant-leader. Assisting at the altar, preaching the Word, and serving God’s people deepened my understanding of ministry and strengthened my confidence and faith. Those months as a deacon were a powerful reminder that priesthood is not about personal accomplishment but about being an instrument of God’s love.

Another pivotal chapter was my time at North Harbour parish, where I ministered among a warm and faithful community. Their encouragement gave me the strength to take this final step toward priesthood. The ordination itself, with the prayers of the faithful during the Litany of the Saints, reminded me I was not alone but supported by the Church, the saints, and all who walked this path before me.



The next day, on the 8th of December, I celebrated my first Mass, a moment as humbling as it was joyful. Standing at the altar, holding the Body and Blood of Christ for the first time, I was overwhelmed with the enormity of God’s trust in me. My hands, now consecrated, were a vessel of His grace. This was not just the fulfilment of a calling but the beginning of a lifelong mission to bring Christ to others. With joy and humility, I step for-ward, ready to serve as an instrument of God’s love and mercy.

Fr Joseph Van Tu Nguyen OSA

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