

*WORKING PRESENTATION DOCUMENT*

"Sharing the Joy of the Gospel through  
Community, Service and Marriage"

To open our time together today, I pray & ask for the guidance of Venerable John Iossa, a 19th century Secular Augustinian from Naples, whom Fr. Josef Sciberras, our Order's Postulator General, mentioned in his presentation yesterday.

Secondly, I would like to apologise for the heat we have suffered through here the past few days, both outside, in our rooms, and especially here in this meeting room -- ¡es muy mucho caliente! -- and to be sure, we are all drowsy because of it. But you'll find out very shortly that my talk today will put you to sleep *much* more quickly than the heat in this room!

As some of you have experienced already, I speak & understand a little bit of Spanish & Italian, 'poqueño y poco'. What you do not know is that I also have the gift of understanding canine / pero / cano barking language. Last night, we all listened to the 'conversation' that several dogs were having with each other, all night long, but amazingly what they told me was that it was here, in Sacrofano, in heat just like this, is where the poet Dante was inspired (or maybe baked!) to write his epic masterpiece, the "Inferno"! It is my private, non-scientific belief that, perhaps, he began his descent down into Hell through a trap door / gateway that opens up in our very own Translation Booth in the back of this room, for it has only one small / pequeña / piccolo little roof fan, and is itself sealed up

within in our already very hot conference room ----- my brother translator, Fr. Antonio, is  
this truly so?!?!?

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Good afternoon, and welcome! My name again is Bill O'Connor. In deference to my  
Spanish-speaking brother & sisters, you may refer to me either as Guillermo Francisco José  
Schwerman-O'Connor, or maybe, as I have modified it to make all of our pronunciation  
lives easier by moving the "O" in my name around -- Guillermo Connor. My  
Puertoriquenos & Hispaniola friends named me "Tico" many years ago ... and so by all  
means, call me that too, and I will answer (especially if you have cervesa!)

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I am the man who has been wandering amongst you the past few days, escorting the lovely  
Lady Maryann Gormley-O'Connor to our Congress here in Sacrofano this week. And I am  
indeed truly blessed.

During my life as an Augustinian friar, I lived with 2 men, Augustinian friars, who are now  
officially going through the Church's process of beatification, leading to possible  
canonisation as Saints: Frs. John McKniff, whom some of you knew, and Bill Atkinson,  
whom we can talk about later, but who was the Church's very first quadriplegic to be  
ordained a priest, and with whom I lived, studied & worked as a friar for several years.  
Now, as a Secular Augustinian who is married, once again a third person has been forced to  
live in community with me -- and she's absolutely certain that she too will also be  
considered for sainthood -- my wife, Maryann. In a feeble attempt to defend myself, I must

tell you that a priest friend from Philadelphia once said, after observing us together: *"there are saints ..... and then, there are saint-makers!!!"*

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By way of background, I was first introduced to the Augustinians in 1965, when I began my secondary school studies in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania of the U.S. at Msgr. Bonner High School, at that time staffed by approximately 40 Augustinian friars. Upon graduation, I entered and was received into the Order of St. Augustine, Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, as a Novice in August of 1969, taking Temporary Vows one year later, on the Feast of St. Augustine, 28th August, 1970. (Three of my classmates whom you might be familiar with are the world renowned artist & teacher, Fr. Richard Cannulli, Fr. Gary McCloskey, the noted educator and international scholar of Augustine, especially in the areas of Pedagogy and Information Technology, along with Fr. Gary Sanders, currently the Prior Provincial of our West Coast /California Province.) I then began studies at Villanova University. In 1972, not quite sure that my calling was to be a friar, I requested a Leave of Absence, which continued in several forms up until May of 1985, when 3 of my brother Augustinians concelebrated a Nuptial Mass at Villanova in which Maryann and I were married (at times, to her regret over the ensuing years, I might add!); other of my former classmates participated in various lay ministerial capacities such as music, voice, etc.

Over the years following, as I knew that I was still called to be an Augustinian but not a friar, I directed my focus to life in Promises as a member of what was then called the Third Order or Tertiaries, today known as the Secular Augustinians. Over the past 34 years, Maryann has been a willing, contributive partner with me on this Journey, and of enormous

help as we have both, together, sought to feed and share the fire that burns with our restless hearts. (*The fact that she has tried to give me back to the Augustinians for roughly 33½ years should not be held against her ... no one told her that the friars don't take returns!*) In all seriousness, this little reflection I offer to you today, would not be possible without her. This will thoroughly embarrass her, but ... Maryann, please stand up and say "Hello!", if you would? Thank you, Maryann!

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As we begin, let me state, categorically: I am no scholar -- of that much you will quickly become painfully aware, and for that, I ask your indulgence in advance. What I will do is to attempt to offer some thoughts in order to stimulate our subsequent discussions, so allow me to get some 'housekeeping' out of the way as we begin. I am a practitioner of the business concept of R&D (Research & Develop); however, you'll soon find out that in my case that it's really more accurately defined as "Research & Duplicate"!

I will be drawing (quite heavily) upon the following sources, in no particular order:

Scripture, especially the Gospels

"The Joy of the Gospel" -- Pope Francis (JOTG)

"On The Way With St. Augustine" -- Curia Agostiniane, 2001 & revised in 2012 (OTW)

"On The Good of Marriage", "Confessions", "De Trinitatae", and various other sources --  
St. Augustine (AUG)

"Our Restless Heart - The Augustinian Tradition" -- Thomas Martin, OSA (ORH)

"Augustinian Learning Practices for a Technological World" (ALP); "Augustinian Reflection Circle" -- Gary McCloskey, OSA, and additional various sources

Various sources, taken from and inspired by the following noted Augustinian scholars:

Tarcisius van Bavel, OSA; Robert Russel, OSA; Robert Dodaro, OSA; Donald Burt, OSA; & Mark Garret, OSA

"Augustine of Hippo" -- Peter Brown

"Augustine of Hippo on Marriage as Good & Holy" -- Barbara Dozier

"Augustine for Today: Living Together" -- Friends of Augustine, Clare Priory

"Augustinian Spirituality" -- Augustinians, Limerick, Ireland

"What Would Augustine Say" -- W. Jay Wood

Bishop Robert Barron, Word on Fire Ministries -- various sources

*(\* I will make this available to anyone who would like it afterwards)*

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**What are our Augustinian Characteristics, the hallmarks of our life?**

- A. **Community:** As *"branches of one vine"* (Jn. 15, 5) we live *"united in what unites us, and separately in what separates us ... to share our different ways of life, mutually enriching one another through our own vocational identity."* (OTW)
- B. **Contemplation / Interiority / Prayer:** To listen to our hearts, intent upon God, and let Him reach in and touch our hearts. We cannot be in relationship, any loving

relationship, without time devoted exclusively to the object of our love ... prayer is the dialogue of the heart, the manifestation of desire. *"Be silent, and you will cease to love."*(Aug.; "Exposition on the Psalms", 37) We *"ought always to pray."* (Luke 18,1)

- C. Conversion: which is constant, a summons to both Interior & Exterior renewal, to turn away from sin, to heal and return to God.
- D. Service: To engage in Missionary outreach as disciples, formed in Augustine and nourished by the Holy Spirit, to live our lives in service to God in others.

Let us now take a look at our Logo, which we all wear, in one form or another:

*What comprises the Logo of the Order?*

**A Heart Aflame: Central To The Augustinian Spirit, a metaphor for our deepest Selves, and for a burning Love -- Augustine is most often depicted prominently with a Heart**

**An Open Book: Of Scripture and the seeking of knowledge. It Supports the Heart -- "Scriptures knock at the Door Of My Heart." (Conf.)**

**An Arrow: The arrow of Humility; a Heart, pierced by a quill used to write about the Word. (Conf.)**

*So, How exactly do we share the Joy of the Gospel as Augustinians?*

**In Community / En comunidad:**

This is our signature charism as Augustinians. We are most commonly defined as exemplars of Community, where Restless Hearts join together as one in a common Journey, in search of *'Beauty, ever Ancient, ever New'*.

We are Missionaries, in that we can be flexible, adapting to the world in which we find ourselves. We are "*A community of communities, a sanctuary, where the thirsty come to drink & be refreshed during the course of their Journey, a center of constant missionary outreach.*" (JOTG, 28) We are individuals who, while vastly different, come together as one, going out into the world to work in that state of life in which we find ourselves, yet always returning to our communities to be both refreshed & energised, over, and over, and over again.

We find ourselves today in a church and in an Order that is in many ways, at at crossroads. Do we continue to do things the way we have always done them? Or do we become "*bold & creative*" (JOTG, 33) and engage in *rethinking* the way we live in community?

We, as Secular, Lay, or Fraternal Augustinians, have been in, around and a part of the Order ever since its' very beginnings. However, we are but ONE leg of a table, a table comprised of friars, sisters, seculars, and laity who together work with & support us, not only in our Journey together as One, but in all of our various missions. If any of the supporting legs does not fulfill its' destiny and falls short, the entire table will tilt, and go off balance.

Is it not our responsibility to not only organise ourselves effectively & cohesively, but to strive to maintain symmetry with our partner 'legs' of the table, that our Journey together might always be mutually supportive, and in balance???

We must both *"listen to and complement each other in our partial reception of reality, and the Gospel"* (JOTG 41), all with the objective of discerning how we can best contribute to the Whole -- in service to our community, our Order, our Church, in our search for communion with God, or Being Itself, thru Christ who lived amongst us, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit who will lead us along the Way ... if we listen.

St. Augustine insisted upon moderation. We must take care not to make our Way of Life burdensome. But, what does this mean? That, as Francis exhorts us continually, we must be ready to go out, to *"go forth to everyone without exception"* (JOTG,48), to offer ourselves as a model of community, of faith-filled believers, journeying together in common.

Communally, we put into practice those words Augustine heard in Milano: *"Tolle lege, tolle lege!" ... "Take up and read, take up and read."* Through love for the Scriptures and the enlightenment of sharing in a communal setting, we Journey ever deeper into our Love relationship with God, which then manifests outwardly, in humility and service to others.

Augustine links humility and love, love and humility. As Augustinians, we strive to take the whole notion of humility and vitally link it to love. *"Love transforms humility, making it redemptive, humility transforms love, making it universal."* (ORH, Martin) While the Journey of a Restless Heart is an interior, contemplative, personal one, it is folly to forget that our Journey is a shared pilgrimage, a communal seeking of fellow believers journeying together in faith towards God, Being Itself, that *"Beauty ever ancient, ever new."* In *"On the Trinity"*, Augustine wrote: *"Open to me as I knock ... let me understand you, let me love you."* (Aug, de Trinitatae)

As Lay Augustinians, we do not live our way of Life as our brother & sister monastics do, within the channels of the evangelical counsels of Chastity Poverty, and Obedience. Yet we derive our inspiration from the very same Rule of Augustine, and there are parallels that are just as significant in our Way of Life. Let's briefly touch upon the Rule itself to seek guidance. (\* N.B. -- And I encourage each of you to take the time to explore the Rule, returning to it often, reflecting upon it frequently.)

There are eight basic chapters to the Rule, simple in precept, yet underlying challenges to this simplicity abound. It is not our purpose to academically explore these in detail, but a general outline of reference to the chapter headings will be helpful in guiding our discussions moving forward, and yours in the future. These are taken from Robert Russel's translation of the Rule that I was first introduced to back in 1969:

*(slow, for translators)*

- 1.) Purpose and Basis of Common Life
- 2.) Prayer
- 3.) Moderation & Self Denial
- 4.) Safeguarding Chastity and Fraternal Correction
- 5.) Care of Community Goods and Care of the Sick
- 6.) Asking Pardon & Forgiving Offenses
- 7.) Governance & Obedience
- 8.) Observance

Once again, and I emphasize: while our Way of Life as Lay Augustinians is not monastic in form, nor is that the intent of our Journey, we DO drink from this wellspring. As the noted Augustinian scholar Tarcisius van Bavel, OSA, remarked once in an article, Augustine's vision was based upon, and I quote: *(slow, for translators) "foundational gospel values: 1.) unity of heart, 2.) community as an expression of love, Christ's First Commandment, 3.) respect for the person of the other, a consistent love of the other, 4.) humility as indispensable in opening ourselves to others & counteracting egoism, and, 5.) the community of goods as a resistance to the temptations of the world & the realisation of openness to others."*

I submit to you that the parallels to our way of life as both single and married Lay Augustinians living in the world outside of the cloister walls are rich and many. Our calling is to drink from these wellsprings, reflect on the parallels, share amongst and within our communities, and put these gospel values into practical practice within our own particular state in life, living out the themes of *(slow, for translators) grace, humility, love, heart, and freedom.*

The evangelical simplicity of the Rule, modeled upon the early Jerusalem community we find in Acts of the Apostles, with its' *"oneness of heart and soul intent upon God"* manifesting in humility and in unselfish love, combined with an individual striving for holiness in a strong communal context, is *"what has made it so attractive to many different expressions over the centuries"* (ORH).

And it is the basis for our Journey here together this week -- it is the driving force that has

brought us together today from all corners of our earth.

In Service / En servicio:

*"The Church is sent by Jesus Christ as the sacrament of salvation offered by God." (Lumen Gentium) Through grace, we are in a constant process, a coming to Be, of being drawn to God, as He makes us One with Him. We, as Lay and Secular Augustinians, are committed by our Way of Life either juridically or in spirit, to be both *"witnesses and builders of the Kingdom."* (OTW)*

Let us take a moment here to underscore a point: It is important to acknowledge that, while there is a "differentiated equality" between lay members and consecrated religious members of the Order of St. Augustine (Lumen Gentium; OTW) it is within the context of this diversity and complementarity that there is the *"unity of a single Spirit."* (OTW) Our work, God's work, takes place definitively within that world in which we live, as committed Catholic Christians and Lay Augustinians -- the world that is the human home.

The three fundamental imperatives of this, our Augustinian character, are: 1.) the summons to 1.) Justice, 2.) to Peace, and 3.) to Solidarity in Service, all part of the evangelising mission of the Church in its entirety. *"Do justice and you will have peace."* (Aug., "Exp. on the Psalms", 84) *"There can be no justice if we have been backward in paying out mercy"* (Aug., Serm. 144, 4) Pope Francis clearly states: *"Being Church means being God's people ... this means that we are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity."* (JOTG, 144)

Our call as Lay Augustinians to live in the spirit of the evangelical counsels shaped by our own station in life, is made manifest in our charism of Community Life -- the sharing of, or communion of goods. *"Let the voluntary want of the person who has plenty become the needed plenty of the person in want."* (Aug., Sermon 210,12) And no one, however poor they may be, can feel exempt from sharing what they have -- *"Give it to Christ", even if only "a cup of cold water. If you have more, you should give more."* (Aug., Sermon 39)

The world in which we find ourselves, regardless of our state in life, by being both present and active in the world, becomes the means by which we fulfill our vocations, both as Christians and as Augustinians.

Furthermore, *our existence in the being part of, and acceptance of, the world, begets both gratitude and responsibility. Gratitude, because the world is our home, and responsibility because we are to immerse ourselves in its' transformation.* (OTW)

Charity and service is at the very root of our Augustinian existence, our soul or nuestra alma, if you will. *"The love of God is first in the order of commandment, but the love of neighbor is first in the order of actions."* (Aug., Treatise on the Gospel of St. John, 17)

We are called to be a living cell of service, a fermenting cauldron of renewal, a public presence in service to the Church as a whole.

### [In Marriage / En Matrimonio:](#)

1.) *"The marriage union is good, it is the first natural union of human society, a union of*

*friendship ... it is the natural companionship itself between the two sexes.*"; *"The good of marriage ...lies also in the holiness of the sacrament"*, an inseparable union dissolvable only by death. -- (Aug., "De Bono Coniugali" / "On the Good of Marriage.")

Augustine's views were partly shaped by his sexually active youth, partly by Neo-Platonism and partly by both his exposure to, and responses to, the various heresies of the day, e.g., Gnostic Manicheism, Pelagians, Donatists, etc. Some would hold that his views evolved, but he did defend sexual abstinence, etc. And, no doubt, he would probably be appalled at some of our contemporary marriage instructions and views on sexuality. Yet, he writes that the intimate relationship of the conjugal marriage bond shows a sign of acceptance & affection for the other in a union of love, trust, and fidelity. He also seems to add that marriage should be a natural setting for recreation, with conjugal love building the unifying bond between the two partners; and should the union not produce children, there was the existence of what he defined as *"ordo caritatis"* unity, or the *"order of love" unity*.

I will leave further examination of his thoughts on concupiscence, chastity, procreation, etc., etc., etc., to academics and scholars far more qualified to discourse on the subject than I, but suffice it to say that there is ample evidence of valued members within his circle of friends who were lay men & women, both single and married, as well as the committed celibates of his first community.

And that is what we find as the composition of the Order of St. Augustine through the ages, up to its first 'official' inception in 1244, through the Grand Union of 1256, and right on up to the present day: individuals of various states of life joining the Order, coming together to be *"of one mind and one heart on the way to God"*, uniting to live, work, and pray together in

the manner most suitable to their own state in life ... in community and service for the common good.

How do we as members of the Lay component of the Order of St. Augustine express the yearnings of Restless Hearts in the world in which we find ourselves today, a world very different, alien even, to the world of Augustine? That, my sisters & brothers, is what has drawn us here to Sacrofano this week. We have come here to ever-so-briefly live, pray, eat, laugh, and learn from each other -- to share our experiences in community.

It is also incumbent upon us to take what we learn from here and be missionaries, bringing our Way of Life back to the worlds from which we each have come, to offer what we have discerned together to those who seek to drink from the deep fountain of Augustinian spirituality, resources and values -- *our Augustinian ethos*.

We are here, to *"listen to one another, to nature, and the larger world around" us*, (McCloskey, ALP) in reflection and dialogue.

The intense interaction and dialogue of Marriage is but one of the pillars of the image of the table that I drew for you earlier. As a Lay Secular Augustinian who is married, I can only speak for myself when I say that, without the symbiosis of the relationship with my spouse, Maryann, the love and constant coming-to-be that has grown in, out of, and through that relationship, along with all that is inherent in being an Augustinian in one form or another over the past now almost 50 years as an Augustinian and 34 in marriage, I would not be where I am today (to be honest with you, it's far more likely that I'd be stuck in adolescence or first gear, limited to be solely like the Augustine of his youth, taking far too literally his

musings of "*O Lord, grant me chastity ... but not yet!*")

Our prayer and interior life is very important to both Maryann & me, each of us journeying sometimes in very different ways, but always coming back together to inform, support, correct and encourage each other as we both seek out the face of "*Beauty, ever ancient, ever new.*" Our lives are a mélange of interiority & prayer, of service to others, 1.) in our local community, 2.) in our local parish, 3.) amongst the profoundly disabled and elderly, and much, much more, as we try to respond to whatever we find, wherever we find it, amongst whomever we find ourselves. In other words, *we strive to be the Gospel, wherever we are.* To borrow & learn from our brother mendicant and the Pope's namesake, St. Francis, we must all strive as best we can to live our lives such in a manner as to "*preach the Gospels always ... and if necessary, use words.*"

Yet both of us return, continually, for sustenance from the font of the Scriptures, Augustine, and our brothers & sisters in our various Augustinian communities across the United States & around the world, all of the Restless Hearts whom we have met over the years ... and those whom we have still yet to encounter.

In North America, we have four Provinces: West Coast (California), Mid-West (Chicago), Canada, and East Coast (Villanova), each of whom has varying expressions of Augustinian Laity, ranging from Seculars through to what we are calling Friends, educators in our schools, graduates of our schools, members of our missions & parishes, and many other restless hearts who reach out to us seeking guidance, solidarity and community on their Journey. The friars of these 4 provinces are also in the development stages of exploring a Federation of the Augustinians of the North American provinces (FANA), but that is very

much in the process of emerging as of this writing.

What we as Secular & Lay Augustinians are also attempting, under the umbrella of FANA and in communion with all of our Circumscriptions or Provinces, is to establish both a resource pool and a forum of communication amongst these all, which is starting to realise success, in that our communication has been enhanced ... but, we have much work yet to do.

*(Antonio: I will go somewhat "ex temp" here but I won't drift too far ...)*

Over the past week, we spent some time at our Augustinian house of hospitality, contemplation and prayer, Convento di Sant' Agostino, San Gimignano, in Tuscany, 700+ year old gem beyond description of our Order, brought back to life by our beloved, recently departed brother, Fr. Brian Lowrey. I cannot possibly recommend highly enough to all here present to try to make a pilgrimage or visit to San Gimignano at some point in your Journeys. There, as always, we were blessed to share in both the joy and the tribulations of this common Journey with fellow Augustinians: women & men, single, married, friar and sisters, from all around Italy, Britain, France, India, Peru and Australia. And, it is exciting to continue this Journey of like-minded Restless Hearts here in Sacrofano this week.

As I said at the beginning of my time with you today, we must incorporate the advise of Pope Francis, take it into our hearts, reflect upon it through the prism of Augustine, and then *act* upon that which the Holy Spirit is telling us, to be "**bold & creative**" (JOTG, 33) and to engage, *beginning right here, right now*, in *rethinking* the way we live in community today, in a world that is at once, more in communication with others than it has ever been before ... *but a world that is too often simply a communication of disordered cacaphony.*

My brothers and sisters, we have a Way of Life that can be shared with those who are seeking, with other Restless Hearts.

We are being called to listen to our hearts, to discern the message of the Spirit, and not keep to ourselves or waste all that we have to share, to give.

And we are being called to start, anew, *Right here.* *Right now.* *Today.*

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From the bottom of my own Restless Heart, I say "Thank you!", for lending me an opening into your hearts for a few minutes this afternoon. *Gracias!* *Obrigado!* *Grazie!*

==== AS WE GO TO BREAK, GIVE TRANSLATED COPIES TO EACH WORKGROUP====

I would recommend, as we take our break, that we all reflect upon the general themes that we have covered here today, namely:

- ✧ Community -- *What is community as we described it today to you?*
  
- ✧ Service -- *How do you and your community witness our Augustinian Values, our Charism, in Service, (beyond of the traditional roles of Eucharistic minister, or teacher, or the like) ... are you available to all whom you encounter as a follower of Augustine & witness to the Gospel, regardless of where that missionary service to others may take you?*
  
- ✧ Marriage, (or your particular state in life.) -- *How does your state in life shape your Journey as an Augustinian?*

Please prepare to bring your own particular experiences from your home corner of the world to share with the rest of your sisters and brothers who came to hear you at this gathering.

The Workshop portion of our exploration of these subjects will be dedicated to that discussion and sharing, listening to & learning of your own particular Journey's, from all here present.

===== Some 'ex temp' comments I made, after Plenary session, to wrap up =====

- ▶ Remember, we are but one (1) leg of the table; we must always seek balance.
- ▶ We must live our Augustinian charism in a way that comes primarily from us - we must not, & cannot depend on the friars for anything more than collaboration, guidance and advise.
- ▶ We are continuing the vital process here of Re-Thinking our Way of Life in balance with the rest of the Order, the other legs of our communal table.
- ▶ Let us then re-commit to that process going forward.
- ▶ Thank you!