

## **The Impact of Augustinian Spirituality on the Lay Augustinian.**

The Spiritual life is the real life, every other thing is illusion or secondary. Only those who are attached to God alone and live up to the highest light of Love and share this love in harmony can be said to be living this real and authentic life.

The main purpose of Augustine forming a community of friends was precisely to come closer to God and His wisdom – Jesus Christ. This can be said to be the root of the Augustinian Spirituality, as the term Spirituality can be describe as a state of being concern with life’s matters.

The Augustinian Spirituality is therefore a gift from God to the Augustinian through the teachings, writings and example of our holy father – St. Augustine. It means living together in harmony and being of one mind and one heart intent upon God like the first Apostles (Acts.4:32-35).

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In the Province of St. Augustine of Nigeria in Africa, we basically have two groups of Lay Augustinians apart from the Young Augustinian or the Augustinian Young People Association (A.Y.P.A.) as it is called. The aim of these Lay Augustinians coming together is to share in the Augustinian spirituality as well as support us in our Mission to the world.

One of these Lay group is called the Augustinian Associates. This group is formed in our parishes and other Churches where we work. Initially it appeared as if the aim of this group was to support the training of our friars in formation, but this was corrected as apart from supporting our friars in formation, the National Director who is an ordained friar, visits each group all over the Country once in a year, direct a day Retreat – Re-Collection for members with a lot of input from writings of St. Augustine, and during this Retreat – Re-Collection, members are allowed to share with others the fruit of their Reflection during the period of Retreat – Recollection, By so doing bringing that aspect of our Augustinian Spirituality to play.

Apart from the meeting and Retreat – Re-Collection with the National Director, each centre in the parish meet Quarterly with the Local – Co-ordinator who is an ordained friar from the Augustinian Community. Each centre has a Secretary and a promoter. The meeting period is not more than one hour and the greeting is “One Mind One Heart”

The format of the meeting is as follow:-

- (a) Invitatory Antiphon (Taken by the Leader of the Prayer Session)
- (b) Opening Prayer:- The Rosary, Prayer of the Associate, Prayer for Vocation)
- (c) Spiritual Reading (Taken from the scripture or one of the works of St. Augustine)
- (d) Exultation by the Co-ordinator
- (e) Sharing by members
- (f) General discussion
- (g) Concluding Prayer: Prayer the Associate and Prayer for Peace)

The other group of lay Augustinian is what we call Secular Augustinian (Third Order). This was established by then, Rev. Fr. Patrick Sheeham, OSA, (Now ‘Bishop Patrick Sheehan, OSA) in Mapo when he was the Parish Priest in the early 1960s. This group of Lay Augustinians are mainly found in the Northern part of Nigeria, that is, mainly in the dioceses of Yola, Maiduguri, and Jalingo. Since it was the Augustinians that evangelized these region, the secular Augustinian are not restricted now to parishes administer by the Augustinian.

Members of this group of Lay Augustinians have a well arranged program for themselves. For one to become a member, he/she must be a practicing Catholic, that is, they must be Baptized and Confirmed Catholic if single, and if married, they must have received the Sacrament of Matrimony.

They have their Novitiate, where members are taught and studied the Augustinian way of life, that is, the Community living, Augustinian ways of meditation and spirituality. Part of the material used in their Novitiate is the studying of the Rule and Constitution of the Order and the Life of St. Augustine and other Augustinian saints, so that members will be well informed about the Order. After their Novitiate, they are professed and become full members of the Secular Augustinians.

The main apostolate of this group of Lay Augustinians is to assist in the Parishes where they exist. They assist in teaching Catechism and accompany the Priests as they travel to the out-stations of the Parish. They organize, instruct and advise intending married couples in the Pre-Marriage instruction class. They also lead prayers in the parish. So it can be said that, their apostolate is like that of the Catechist.

Members meet monthly in their various parishes to pray together, discuss their growth and spiritual life and this is done in the form of sharing. In such meetings, they advise and encourage themselves as well as contribute financially to a common fund where they can help themselves whenever the need arises. They hold their General Chapter every two years and new officers are elected every four years.

Other apostolates of the Augustinian Associates and Secular Augustinians include visitation to the sick in the hospital, the Orphans and prisoners.

Whenever any of these two lay groups of Augustinians meet four elements of the Augustinian Spiritual life is reflected –

- (a) Common Life
- (b) Integral Love of God and Man
- (c) Stance for God as individual and a group
- (d) Responsiveness and Fidelity to the mind of the Church.

(a). **Common Life (Community)** – It is in the community that St. Augustine placed great emphasis in his following of Christ, thus every other thing takes its root from it. The community is a place where brothers live in harmony, peace and love, sharing the faith and love for God together. Members of the Augustinian and secular Augustinians have adopted this by saying that- their meetings or gathering is a place where members live in harmony, peace and love in sharing their faith and love for God. Their meetings or gathering is distinct from any other meeting or gathering of Christians in that, it serves as a model for other groups or societies to imitate because of the shared love and concern that exist not only among members but also extended to others – Christians and non – Christians alike.

(b). **Integral love of God and man:** the Psalmist said “How good and how pleasant is it when brothers live in unity (Ps132). The Augustinian Spiritual life finds a fuller expression when lived in unity and in sincere love for one another mutually. This also reflects the teaching of the Gospel, that unity is the fruit of love.

In giving a concrete expression for love of God, members see their gathering to share and search for God as an expression of love for God and restlessness of the

heart. This love is also expressed in their love for neighbour as seen in the support to the training of friars in formation, no matter the little they can avoid.

- c. **Search for God as Individual and as a group:-** In life generally, there is that tendency in man to know more about himself, his origin and destiny; this automatically leads to the search for God, the ultimate source of all things. Just as friars in the Augustinian Order encounter God individually in Community as well as group during contemplation, so also members of the Augustinian Associate and Secular Augustinian encounter God as individual and as a group during prayer. Members seek God in the scripture and books but find God in Prayer. Their encounter with God in prayer is the summit of their encounter with fellow members in the group, thus with members and through members they come to an encounter with God.
  
- d. **Responsiveness and fidelity to the mind of the Church:-** It is a fact that cannot be debunked that St. Augustine had a great love for the Church. This is obvious from his writings where he defended the Church's teachings against so heretical group. Just as Augustinians are loyal to the Church and her mission, members of these groups are also very loyal to the Church's teaching in all that they do but during meetings and in their individual home.

By Fr. Andrew Ibegbulem,OSA