



FATHER BILL ATKINSON, O.S.A.

TAKING UP THE CAUSE

On a quiet night in the middle of August, 2014, a group of twenty-five invited guests gathered at Saint Augustine Friary in Villanova, to meet with the Augustinian Postulator General and me. The agenda was simple, if unusual! Fr. Josef Sciberras had come from Rome for an informal conversation with friars and laity, relatives, friends and confreres of Fr. Bill Atkinson, to determine whether or not this friar might be someday, a future canonized saint of the Church.

Fr. Josef offered a challenge to those gathered: *“Convince me that Fr. Bill lived a life of heroic virtue. Persuade me that he is a saint.”* One after another, individuals told the stories of their relationship with Fr. Bill and made their case for his character, his virtue, his fidelity, his ministry, his humor, his humility, and much more. By evening’s end, Fr. Josef acknowledged that he was convinced. If canonization were only that easy! But it signaled the beginning.

Fr. Josef’s work was before him. There seemed to be sufficient reason to believe that a serious and formal look should be made into Fr. Bill’s life. Questionnaires were distributed to those present, who were asked to take them home, fill them out, and return them to the provincial office, which, in turn, would send them off to the office of the Postulator at the Augustinian General Curia in Rome.

We’ve begun! And now we happily announce to all of our readers, and to the many friends of Fr. Bill, to all who benefited from his life and ministry and example, that we will take up the cause, and if God so wills, that we will put forward this worthy servant for the good of the Church and for God’s own glory.

To those of you who knew Fr. Bill, or who benefited from his ministry, or were touched by his example, we invite you to send your remembrances, testimonies, or notice of favors received, all of which will

be very helpful as we move forward. We will keep you informed on our progress through this magazine and, as time goes on, through other means as well.

Please direct all correspondence regarding Fr. Bill and his cause to:

FR. BILL’S CAUSE
Augustinian Provincial Offices
P.O. Box 340
Villanova, PA 19085

We invite you also to spread the word. Let others know what has begun, especially those who have known Fr. Bill. And pray! Pray that in this Year of Consecrated Life, the example of this courageous and dedicated religious may continue to speak and to inspire.

WILLIAM EDWARD ATKINSON WAS BORN ON JANUARY 4, 1946, IN PHILADELPHIA, ONE OF THREE SONS AND FOUR DAUGHTERS OF ALLEN ATKINSON AND MARY CONNELLY.



He attended St. Alice’s Elementary School and Monsignor Bonner High School, and upon graduation, asked to join the Augustinian Order. He spent a year as a postulant at Augustinian Academy, Staten Island, New York, and then entered the Villanova Province’s novitiate of Our Mother of Good Counsel in New Hamburg, New York, on September 6, 1964.

The following February 22, 1965, while recreating with several other novices on the novitiate grounds, the toboggan in which he was riding hit a tree, leaving Bill almost completely paralyzed from the neck down. Amazingly, he survived the accident, and following extensive rehabilitation, expressed his desire to continue as an Augustinian. He began again his novitiate year at Villanova, professing simple vows on July 20, 1970, and solemn vows on July 20, 1973. A care team of friars assisted Bill during his time in formation, and for many years beyond, as he moved about with the use of a motorized wheelchair. Bill completed his years of college and theological studies at Villanova, and with a special dispensation from Pope Paul VI, John Cardinal Krol ordained him to the priesthood at his hometown parish of St. Alice in Upper Darby, Pa., on February 2, 1974, almost nine years after the accident that left him a quadriplegic. He celebrated his first Mass at the Field house of Villanova University.

From 1975 until 2004, almost thirty years, Fr. Bill was stationed at St. Joseph’s Friary, where he taught at Msgr. Bonner High School, was assistant school chaplain, senior class retreat coordinator, moderator of the football team, and the director of the after-school and Saturday detention program. He was known for his wonderful sense of humor, and was recognized as an excellent teacher, encouraging moderator, and compassionate confessor. Fr. Bill was the recipient of many awards and acknowledgements, among them an honorary doctorate from Villanova University in 2000.

In 2004, Fr. Bill moved to the Health Care Unit of Saint Thomas Monastery at Villanova University. He passed over to the Lord on Friday afternoon, September 15, 2006, surrounded by those who loved and cared for him. His funeral liturgy was celebrated on Tuesday, September, 19, 2006 in Saint Thomas Church, Villanova University, after several hours of visitation. Fr. Bill was buried the following morning in the Augustinian section of Calvary Cemetery, West Conshohocken, Pa.