



Father Bill Atkinson Guild

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EXTRAORDINARY: THE FATHER BILL ATKINSON O.S.A. STORY airing now nationwide on PBS

Issue 1
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The Mission *of the* Guild

The Father Bill Atkinson Guild was established in 2015 to support the Cause for Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Augustinian Fr. William Atkinson. Its inception coincides with the launch of the Cause itself which occurred on September 15, 2015, the anniversary of Fr. Bill's death, when the Postulator General of the Augustinian Order, Fr. Josef Sciberras, O.S.A., and the Prior Provincial of Fr. Bill's Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, Fr. Michael Di Gregorio, O.S.A., met with Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., the then Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, to present to him the necessary documents, including a formal letter of request for the Cause to be opened.

The Guild coordinates the promotional and fund-raising activities associated with the Cause and enrolls individuals who wish to assist in the mission of the Guild by their prayers, their financial support, and efforts to make Fr. Bill more widely known. Members of the Guild participate in the spiritual benefits of association in this work of evangelization and in prayers offered for the mutual benefit of members.



PRAYER FOR BEATIFICATION

Blessed are you,
Father of life, source of goodness and peace,
in whom all creation has its origin
and by whom every person is loved.

In Father Bill Atkinson
your mercy and compassion were made manifest
as he brought solace to the suffering
and hope to the needy.

By carrying the cross of life faithfully
he proclaimed confidence in your love
and conformity to your will,
and so, drew others to you
and to the generous gift of your grace.

Hear our prayers
which we offer through his intercession
so that as your work continues to unfold among us
it may bring honor to you,
comfort to your people,
and, according to your will,
glory to your servant.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

The Road to Beatification

In preparation for the formal request that would eventually be made to the Archbishop of Philadelphia to initiate the Cause for Beatification of Fr. Bill, a group of twenty-five friars and laity, friends and relatives of Fr. Bill met with Father Josef Sciberras, O.S.A., Augustinian Postulator General, at St. Augustine Friary, Villanova, in August 2014, to discuss whether or not there was sufficient reason to take up the initiative. Fr. Sciberras asked the assembled acquaintances of Fr. Bill to persuade him of Fr. Bill's sanctity. One by one they told the stories of their relationship to Fr. Bill. They spoke of the witness of his life, his ministry, his virtues, and the reputation he enjoyed among those who knew him. By evening's end, the Postulator General confessed that he was convinced that

the Order should initiate the Cause. Those present were asked to present in writing their thoughts and reflections and to send them to Fr. Sciberras' office in Rome so that he could prepare the documents that would be needed to present a formal request to the Archbishop of Philadelphia, in whose diocese the first phase of the Cause would unfold.

In September of the following year, Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap. accepted the request of the Augustinian Order to introduce the Cause, and two months la-

ter brought his decision to the attention of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at their annual meeting, stating: *"William Atkinson's Cause will be a beautiful one, because it would be a source of encouragement for people with this kind of accident in their life, this kind of disability, but also because it reminds us of the great generosity of his family and his religious community; they were all called to holiness by their special care for this man. I think he will fit very beautifully into the niche of the communion of saints as a very special patron."* The assembled bishops responded with their unanimous assent.





WHO IS FR. BILL ATKINSON?

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 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 on September 6, 1964, entered the novitiate of the Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, located in New Hamburg, New York.

The following February 22nd, while tobogganing with several other novices on the novitiate grounds, the toboggan with Bill seated at the lead hit a tree, leaving him almost completely paralyzed. After many hours in which his very survival was in question, and with family gathered at his bedside, the novice director received Bill's profession of vows, an extraordinary allowance for a novice in danger of death. But death's hour was not at hand. Gradual improvement over the following days and weeks allowed Br. Bill to undergo rehabilitation treatment back in Philadelphia, and though the paralysis was permanent, he expressed his desire to continue his journey of religious life. The province accepted him once again and received him in the house of formation at Villanova where, after a year's novitiate, he professed simple vows on July 20, 1970 and solemn vows three years later on July 20, 1973. Teams of student friars cared for his physical needs during the years of university and theological studies as Bill followed the regimen of religious life along with his brother Augustinians.

With a unique dispensation from Pope Paul VI, Bill was ordained to the priesthood by John Cardinal Krol on February 2, 1974, the first quadriplegic in the history of the Church to receive Holy Orders.

From 1975 until 2004, Fr. Bill was assigned to the Augustinian Friary of St. Joseph in Upper Darby, where he taught at Monsignor Bonner High School, was assistant school chaplain, senior class retreat coordinator, moderator of the football team and director of the afterschool and Saturday detention program. Fr. Bill was known for his sense of humor, his availability in ministry and compassion as a confessor and counselor.

In 2004, as his overall health began to decline, Fr. Bill was transferred to St. Thomas Monastery, Villanova, where he was cared for in the friars' health facility. He passed over to the Lord on Friday, September 15, 2006. Following his Funeral Mass on September 19, 2006 at the Villanova Church, Fr. Bill was buried in the Augustinian section of Calvary Cemetery, West Conshohocken, PA.

"I should like to note that in the many hours I spent beside his hospital bed he never uttered a single word of complaint or self-pity, even during times when he was obviously in great pain or discomfort from breathing difficulties and from six weeks of traction during which frightful bed sores developed on his shoulders, back of the head and lower back."

— Note of Fr. William Krupa, O.S.A., Master of Novices in New Hamburg, NY, who received Bill's hospital bed profession of vows in 1965.

Let Us PRAY

Many people who have been introduced to Fr. Bill and his Cause, have asked to be remembered in prayers that are offered through his intercession. We are happy to include all the many intentions that are recommended to us. We ask that while working and praying for Fr. Bill's possible beatification, members of the Guild also pray for all those who are seeking God's protection, guidance, or healing through Fr.'s spiritual assistance. All intentions are happily received at:


Father Bill's Cause
214 Ashwood Road
Villanova, PA 19085



extraORDINARY

THE BILL ATKINSON STORY



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