

St. Augustine of Hippo Roman Catholic Church

This fine modern church serves the Catholic community in this part of Cornwall. It is the place of worship for Roman Catholics living in **St. Austell** and also for those in the surrounding area, including **Lostwithiel, Fowey, Par, Mevagissey, Bugle, Nanpean** and the many surrounding villages. It is the parish church for the weekly Sunday Eucharist where we gather to praise God and to be nourished with the Word of God and the Sacrament. It is also a place of daily worship and where people gather together to celebrate the baptism of new members, the marriage of parishioners and the funerals of the faithful departed.

The church is dedicated to **St. Augustine of Hippo**, one of the great early teachers and preachers of the faith, because it was established by an order of religious priests, the **Canons Regular of the Lateran**, who trace their origins back to St. Augustine and look upon him as their father-founder. At one time a great many of the catholic churches in Cornwall were run by the Canons Regular, based at their Abbey of St. Mary in Bodmin.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PARISH

During the middle of the 19th century, Catholic worship in this area consisted of the occasional Mass in private homes. The first chapel, built in 1913 and dedicated to St. Augustine of Hippo was built on a site in Ranelagh Road. Later, in 1937, the present church site was purchased and a church built here. 1960 saw the establishment of the Parish with a presbytery and its first resident priest. During this period of expansion in St. Austell, churches were established at **Fowey (1914), Par (1935) and Mevagissey (1953)**. In 1975 the church at St. Austell was extended to accommodate the growing number of Catholics and to provide accommodation for social activities. During the late eighties it was decided to sell the outlying churches and centralise Catholic worship in the area. The present church was built and consecrated on **6th May 1990**.

A TOUR OF THE CHURCH

The church is entered through the **Porch** where is placed a statue of St. Augustine of Hippo. One of his most famous sayings was *“Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you.”* The floor-standing granite bowl, full of holy water, was formerly the baptismal font in the old church. It is a tradition for Catholics to bless themselves with holy water on entering a church in remembrance of their baptism. On a plaque next to the granite bowl is an inscription from the book of Kings *“Day and night let your eyes watch over this place (1 Kings 8:29)* which continues, *“Listen to the prayer that your servant will offer in this place.”* In the Porch are also

found the notice boards and the Parish Diary.

Proceeding through the double doors one enters the **Narthex** (an old word meaning a porch built on the west side of a church). This is an important area used for social gatherings, meetings etc., from which there are three sets of doors leading into the main body of the church. The **large central doors** are opened for special occasions such as marriages, funerals and the Easter liturgy. At other times the congregation use the doors to the left or right. The small glass panels in these doors as you enter the church depict the symbols of the first and last letters of the Ancient Greek alphabet, **Alpha** and **Omega**, reminding us of the words in the book of Revelation:

“I am the Alpha and Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’” (Rev 1:4)

The wide, open design of the church allows the people of God to gather around the altar. There are **seven pillars**, as referred to in Proverbs 9:1 *“Wisdom has built herself a house, she has erected her seven pillars”* and **seven candles** mark the points where the walls were anointed during the dedication of the church.

At the back of the church there is a large **mosaic**. This was a gift to the parish from a Glasgow based artist, Peter Connolly. It portrays our Patron as a Bishop surrounded by the symbols of the parish: the sea, beaches, sailing boats, palms and flowers; fishing at Fowey and Mevagissey; clay tips and the chimneys of the clay dries at Par, also a cliff top engine house, a reminder of the once thriving tin industry. The words ‘Bless us’ in Cornish, a Holy Well and a granite Celtic cross, reinforce links with the Celtic Church and Saints.

At the back of the church is also situated the **Reconciliation Room**. Here people are invited to come and share in the feast gained through our reconciliation with God (the Sacrament of Reconciliation). The stained glass windows in the Reconciliation Room are both designed and made by Mark Angus, one depicting the return of the Prodigal Son. Also in this room is found a replica of the crucifix at Taize and a reproduction of Rembrandt’s ‘Return of the Prodigal Son’.

Returning to the main body of the church and turning right, visitors will be immediately struck by the unique style of the **Baptismal Font** over which there is a panel, executed by David John, an internationally acclaimed artist and cousin of the famous sculptor. It depicts Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan, with Mary and Joseph looking on. The unusual design of the font takes us back to the earliest origins of the Church in that it allows for the immersion of the person being baptised. This, however, is only by request and is by no means compulsory! The tiles, depicting fish, are examples of the work of Sebastian John, another member of the John family. Standing to the side of the font throughout the year, other than at Eastertide when it stands by the Lectern, is the **Pascal Candle**, symbol of the Risen Christ.

The **Aumbry**, set in the wall to the left of the font, securely holds the sacred oils, namely the **Oil of Chrism**, the **Oil of Catechumens** and the **Oil of the Sick**. These are used in the celebration

of some of the Sacraments and for some blessings.

The **Altar Servers' Sacristy** is entered through the door on the right. Here the servers, who prepare the church and assist the priest during the Mass and the celebration of the Sacraments, don their **albs**, traditional wear for altar servers. The windows in this room, visible from the road outside, depict Guardian Angels, traditional guardians particularly of children. All the pictorial windows in the church were designed and made by Mark Angus, whose work may be seen in many churches throughout the country.

From this room a doorway leads into the **Priest's Sacristy** where the priest's and deacon's vestments are kept and where they prepare themselves for the Celebration of Mass and the Sacraments. The windows of this room are representative of our journey through life and our eventual reunion with God in heaven. The figure on the crucifix has been remounted and came from the tiny church in **Fowey** which closed in 1989.

In the **Cuthbert Mayne** room which leads from the Priest's Sacristy is found the **Cornerstone** of the church, showing the date 1989, and the year it was laid. Hanging from the beams in the centre of the room is a carved wooden crucifix. The figure here was brought from the chapel at **Par** when it was closed in 1990. In remounting the figure on the new crucifix, David John added dice at the foot: "*Then they cast lots to share out His clothing*" (Luke 23:34).

Outside the Cuthbert Mayne Room is the **Memorial Garden**. In this garden the ashes of parishioners are buried close to where they worshipped. Here is a memorial stone made from the slate altar brought from the church at Par - on this stone is inscribed the Latin text of a traditional prayer for the dead: "*Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them*". Above it is a quotation from Julian of Norwich which sums up our Christian belief: "*From Him we come, in Him we are enfolded, to Him we return*".

Proceeding through the double doors and, walking down the slope, visitors will find themselves back in the main body of the church with the **Lady Chapel** on their right. This is an area set aside for prayer to Our Lady, the Mother of God. On the large wooden panel, a further example of David John's work, you will see depicted Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, together with St. Anne, the mother of Mary, who is greatly revered in Brittany, and is another reminder of our Celtic heritage. The windows in this area are abstract and intended as an aid to prayer and meditation.

As one moves into the main body of the church and turns towards the raised **Sanctuary**, the stark simplicity of the granite **Altar** on which the Eucharistic celebration takes place is very noticeable. A small bronze box is inset at its foot. This holds the relics of St. Cuthbert Mayne, a martyr priest of the Reformation period who ministered and died in Cornwall, and also of St. Augustine of Hippo, the church's patron. These relics remind us of our union with the saints that have gone before us: "*When he broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of all the people who had been killed on account of the word of God, for witnessing to it.*" (Rev 6:9) The

candlesticks either side of the altar were designed by David John and made by a local craftsman, as was the Pascal candlestick seen previously at the Font.

On the left, as you face the altar, stands the **Lectern** or **Ambo** from which the Word of God is proclaimed. The seating to the left on the sanctuary is for the altar servers and the central chairs are for the priest, deacon and acolyte. These seats complete the 'round' with the seating for the people and music group. They illustrate that there is a place for everyone within the Church.

On the right of the sanctuary, set into the wall, is the **Tabernacle**. This is where the consecrated hosts are reserved for the distribution of Holy Communion to members of the church community who are unable to attend Mass, either through illness or infirmity.

The tabernacle is cast in bronze (again by David John) and shows on the one side bread and grapes signifying the Body and Blood of Christ after the consecration and, on the other side, loaves and fishes, reminding us that God feeds us through his Word and Sacraments and recalling Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

Over the altar is a suspended wooden crucifix showing Jesus crucified and, at the foot of the cross, St. Augustine and his mother, St. Monica. On the back of the cross is a carving of the Pascal Lamb and an inscription from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

*"Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her"
(Eph. 5:25)*

Stations of the Cross are mounted around the walls of the church. There are fourteen of them, each one illustrating a stage of Jesus' journey to Calvary. They were painted by one of our parishioners, Miss Pamela Platt, in 1966 and originally hung in the old church before being remounted to take their place here.

Visitors to St. Augustine's are always most welcome. We hope they will find a walk around our church interesting, will take the opportunity to spend a moment or two absorbing the quiet atmosphere of this House of God and to say a prayer for the parish community that worships here, that it may be a living witness to the love of Christ and all that this church stands for.