



PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

AUGUSTINIAN
COMMUNICATIONS
OFFICE

Villanova University
Villanova, Pa. 19085

William Atkinson Ordained



The Imposition of Hands: John Cardinal Krol invokes the Holy Spirit as he ordains William Atkinson to the Priesthood. In the center of Photo is Rev. Mr. John Stack, OSA, Deacon of the Mass.

EDITORIAL

An Ordinary Young Man

As a novitiate classmate and good friend of Bill Atkinson, it is difficult for me to write these lines and to print this large section on his ordination. It is difficult because I know how much he hates publicity, fanfare and anything even slightly out of the ordinary. We have had a good deal of national and international publicity, but this is only because of the great good that his example can do those who have no hope or faith because of their own suffering.

Bill does not like to be treated differently . . . and with good reason, for he is not different. In one of the local TV interviews on his upcoming Ordination, the newsman asked me if Bill could really do anything that a priest had to do. I think that it is in this poorly thought-out question that we find part of the greatness which is Bill Atkinson: he is a very normal young man. He is no superstar, nor anything extraordinary or beyond the human. He is, rather, a man of deep faith and love who, like every man with faith, is trying to use his gifts in service to his Lord.

"But how can someone so handicapped do priestly things," the reporter asked me. My reply (unfortunately off camera) is one which we should always remember in dealing with the ones who are chosen to suffer . . . and it is precisely this which Bill shows so well. "Handicapped" is a mental, not a physical state; it is something which is forced upon people by those who think that they are "normal." Anyone who knows Bill knows that he is not handicapped, that he can and does do everything that a "normal" person does—except that he

cannot use all of his muscles. He is a completely normal young man who simply happens not to be able to move.

There are, I think, two great lessons which the Lord is teaching us through Bill. The first is about Faith and the second is about Love. Faith (real Faith) is always ready to be taken anywhere, to have to be taken anywhere, to have the "legs" kicked

Real love is also ready to be dispossessed at any moment, to bring another into independence, to give without worry about receiving. Bill has received much, from his great family and from his friends. He has received, but his gift of himself to all who have known him is the lesson. It is the lesson of Jesus, in giving his life for all of us; it is the lesson of sharing our lives, our faith, ourselves with those who pass



The Consecration at William Atkinson's First Mass of Thanksgiving. (L to R) Rev. Allan Fitzgerald, OSA; Rev. Francis Riley, OSA; Rev. William Atkinson, OSA; Rev. Mr. Donald Reilly, OSA, and Rev. Arthur Chappell, OSA.

out, to be completely dispossessed of all favorite systems of thought and action. Real Faith sees the loving and gentle finger of God in all things; Real Faith asks and expects nothing more than Jesus promised. Himself and His life. Bill's life is a concrete witness of this.

through our lives; it is the giving of what we have that others might be enriched without worry about ourselves. Bill's life is a concrete witness of this along with the ups and downs that go into living this.

We, his brothers, can only turn to him as we do to each brother

Province Gathers to Join Bill in Celebration

William E. Atkinson, OSA, achieved his lifetime goal on Saturday, February 2, 1974. Before a packed church of relatives, friends, and members of the Augustinian Order, John Cardinal Krol, Archbishop of Philadelphia, raised Bill to the Order of Presbyter. The Ordination was made possible by a special dispensation from Pope Paul VI.

The ceremony took place in Bill's home parish, St. Alice, in Upper Darby. In the presence of his pastor, Bishop Gerald McDevitt, Bill and the Cardinal were joined in a concelebrated Mass by the priests of the Collegiate Seminary, Fr. Cassal, Fr. Melton, and Frs. Frank Riley and Bob Terranova. John Stack, a close friend of Bill, was the Deacon of the Mass.

The Atkinson Family also participated in the Mass. His oldest sister, Joam, was the first Lector. His brother and sister, Ed and Patty, washed Bill's hands following the anointing and joined other members of the family in the Offertory Procession.

But it was truly an Augustinian celebration. Nearly one hundred and fifty Augustinians from throughout the Province traveled to join with their brother Bill. Seminarians from both Villanova and Washington, as well as the Augustinians of the Midwest Priory at Villanova, provided the music for the Mass. Francis Horn and Joseph Mostardi served as acolytes. The vestments for Bill were made by Bro. Richard Cannulli. John Ryan was the official photographer.

But the most impressive sight was the presence of the large number of Augustinian priests and brothers processing into the church. All of the priests present participated in the imposition of hands and the reciting of the prayer of consecration. Following the ceremony most of the Augustinians present joined the congregation in a simple reception held in the parish hall.

The Augustinian presence was even greater the following day

who is strong enough in Faith and love to accept the Lord's call to the Priesthood. We can only turn to him and express our love and thanks that he has had the courage, with some help from all of us, to accept the Lord's call to be dispossessed, to live each day as a brother Augustinian, to praise the Lord each day as a Priest forever.

We know, Bill, that you do not want this publicity, but we know, as do you, how the Lord will use you to spread the Good News . . . to those who would otherwise never have the faith or the love to live their lives. You have played a large part in giving many of us the faith and the love to accept our own vocations. May we all continue to support one another. ABC

at Bill's concelebrated Mass of Thanksgiving. Responding to Bill's open invitation to concelebrate, Augustinian priests from across the United States braved inclement weather to join Bill at the Villanova Fieldhouse. The fieldhouse was prepared for the Mass by Augustinian seminarians and members of the Villanova Stage Crew. Bro. Richard Eckmann, OSA constructed a raised platform with ramp and portable altar used for the Mass. The altar is collapsable, and can be easily transported for Bill's use.

The Mass began with nearly one hundred and fifty priests processing in to the music of "Godspell" played by seminarians from Villanova and Washington. The first reading was done by Bill's brother Al, Middleline-backer for the New York Jets. Norman McMahon, a close friend of Bill's, read the second lesson. Donald Reilly, OSA, was the Deacon of the Mass, and Fr. Alan Fitzgerald, OSA, was Master of Ceremonies. Bill Atkinson himself preached the Homily. (Text inside) Members of Bill's family served as Altar Boys and presented the Offertory Gifts.

The Mass was attended by over 900 people. Many friends and relatives of Bill, members of his parish, students at the university, and families of Augustinians were there. The Novices were allowed to join in the Mass. Also in attendance were many of Bill's teachers from both Villanova and Bonner.

Many people came because of the extensive coverage the Ordination received. Bill was featured on network television as well as the local and national press. Seminarians acted as press aides and maintained the dignity of the Mass. At Bill's request, there were no television cameras allowed inside during the Mass.

Following the Mass there was a reception held in a local hall. It was a successful climax to a weekend that showed not only the courage and faith of Bill Atkinson but also the spirit of brotherhood present in the Augustinian Order.

The Province Newsletter and its special editions are the publications of the Augustinian Communications Office. General permission to quote or use pictures from this special edition is hereby granted on the condition that credits are given and two copies are sent to this office at Villanova University, Villanova, Penna. 19085. All pictures credited to the Evening Bulletin may not be reprinted without written permission of the Bulletin.

The Story Of A Vocation, 1963-1974

Willy Atkinson: Called To Serve

Bill "Willy" Atkinson, the third of the seven children of Allan and Mary Atkinson, was born in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania (a suburb of Philadelphia) on January 4, 1946. He attended St. Alice's Grammar School in Upper Darby and Monsignor Bonner High School in Drexel Hill. It was here that he first came into contact with the Augustinian Friars and first solidified his desire to become an Augustinian and a Priest.

After graduating from Msgr. Bonner in 1963, this blond, athletic youngster entered the minor seminary of the Order of Saint Augustine on Staten Island, New York, where he spent one year of post-graduate study, being introduced (painfully he says) to

100 acres and took up much of the novices time in grounds work. Part of each afternoon was set aside for recreation, and each afternoon Bill could be found playing football or basketball with great abandon.

Fall slowly turned to winter, but even in the snow, Bill could be found on the football field, with one or two others, passing the ball around. Like his All-American brother Al, football was his love. It was at just this time that Al was named All-American for his great performance with the Villanova University team. Bill's pride in his older brother was evident to all of us at the Novitiate.

With winter came the snows and the enthusiasm for the just-

for Bill and Ted as they tried to throw shovels-full of snow on me.

After our morning Mass and Prayer, we all faced the day with great expectations, since it was a free day and the snow was perfect for the toboggan run. As the others raced for the hill, I completed the long plowing job. At about 10:00 A.M., I returned the tractor to the barn, and had only just jumped off when one of the other novices came running up.

"Bill is hurt . . . hurt bad," he shouted. "Get help quick."

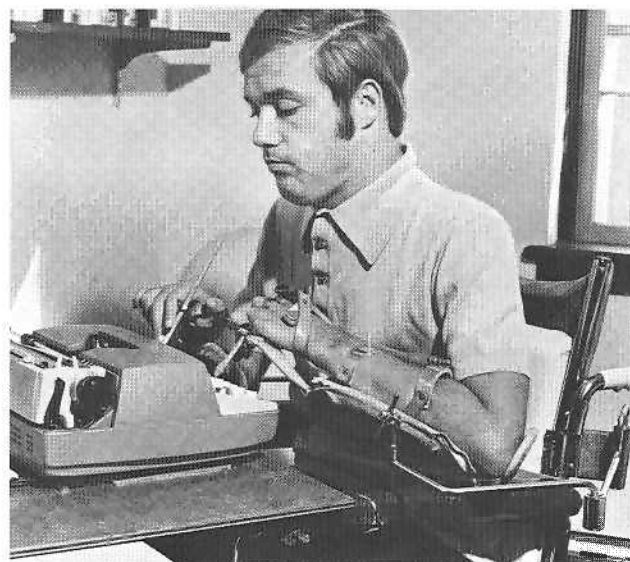
None of the roads between the novitiate and the hospital in far away Poughkeepsie, New York, had yet been plowed. The icy wind screaming up from the Hudson would have frozen Bill in a short time. He had to be moved. While I ran for the station-wagon, the other novices looked after Bill.

The toboggan had made a run like all others, except that it did not correctly make the 90 degree turn which would have brought it safely down the trail which had been cleared of all trees. It went wide and zipped off of the trail, but its plight was hidden by the light, blowing snow. Bill was seated first, and as the toboggan slammed into the lone tree, his spine was exploded by the force. We did not know that, of course, but Bill, who did not lose consciousness, did know that something was dreadfully wrong.

Another toboggan slid to a halt behind the tree and the novices and Father Tony Tomasulo, of Monsignor Bonner High School, who was visiting for the day, rushed to Bill's aid. The others on the toboggan with Bill were not hurt, but Bill was wrapped around the tree. They slid the other toboggan under him (his had completely disintegrated from the force of the blow) and layed him out on it. Quickly pulling the toboggan up to where I waited with the station wagon, he was simply lifted, toboggan and all, into the wagon. With Fr. Tomasulo and several of the novices, we set off over the unplowed roads for the 45 minute trip to Saint Francis Hospital in Poughkeepsie.

It was not until late in that day that we began to realize that we might not see our brother again. The tension among the novices grew each day, as we prayed and did everything for Bill. Each time the phone would ring, we expected that it would be the hospital with the awful news that Bill had died. In the Lord's plan, he did not die, but his suffering wrought a profound change in each one of us. As we visited the hospital, gave blood for his operations, waited through his bout with pneumonia, we all went through a change which cannot be adequately described. The thirty-odd novices who still remained grew closer together and grew in the Faith that the Father's Plan for Bill was far more important than our own.

Fr. John Melton, of the Bonner faculty, rushed to the hospital that same day, with Mr. and Mrs. Atkinson. They remained at Bill's side throughout his long ordeal; the doctors tell us that Mrs. Atkinson managed to keep Bill alive when his breathing would cease by whispering over and over, "Bill—breathe." And breathe he did . . . not well, but well enough to allow him to be transferred to Magee Memorial Hospital in Philadelphia, one of the finest rehabilitation centers in the country. The Bill Atkinson who was transferred to Magee by the volunteers of the Upper Darby Ambulance Company was no long-



—Photo Courtesy of The Sunday Bulletin

Bill uses special braces for typing. This picture appeared in newspapers throughout the world.

that he once was; at this point he tipped the scales at about 90 pounds and could not move anything below his neck.

The rest of the story, like the very beginning, is a long series of "miracles" as Bill continued to surprise the top specialists with his spirit, his sense of humor, his determination. As he notes so often today, it was the love and help and prayers of so many that got him through. The parishioners of his home parish of St. Alice put on a benefit which gave him \$10,000 toward his medical costs. The seminarians from the Collegiate Seminary of the Order of Saint Augustine continued to visit; his family and many friends supported him with their love. Father James G. Sherman, the then Prior Provincial of the Eastern Province discussed the future with Bill and assured him that he was a member of the Province as long as he wished to be. The

this writer. Teaching CCD in a local parish, being in charge of a local gym of weekends, preaching retreats at Monsignor Bonner High School, being a guest lecturer at Villanova . . . all these things are in the normal course of his life.

The rest of the story is simple indeed. He just lived a normal life, no great saint, no bigger-than-life-hero, just the life of a young man, fulfilling as best he could the Plan that he saw the Lord had for him. As I came and went, visiting him from Washington where I studied and then from Florida which was my first assignment after my own ordination, I saw a continual growth. He grew in health, with a bout or two with pneumonia thrown in; his spirit and determination increased with each passing year. He became involved in coaching intramural teams at Villanova, in his studies, in taking a full year



—Photo Courtesy of The Sunday Bulletin

Two members of Bill's crew vest him in the alb and stole of the diaconate. They are Tony Burrascano and Bob Guesetto.

medical specialists worked with Bill for a year and a half were astounded at the recovery which he made daily.

He made his first trip to the Collegiate Seminary at Villanova on Christmas Day of 1965, but it was not until the Fall of 1966 that Willy was to begin his college studies at the seminary at Villanova. A number of the seminarians were trained that summer to care for him, and they in turn have trained others as the years have gone by.

Through his electric wheelchair he was able to attend all of his classes at Villanova. He received a special truck, complete with ramps, so that he could travel anywhere in his wheel chair . . . and travel he has. He is no stranger to Valley Forge Army Hospital, Bryn Mawr or Fitzgerald Mercy Hospitals in Philadelphia: he has visited the sick and the paralyzed many times. His travels have taken him to see his brother Al practice for the New York Jets, to upstate New York to revisit the Novitiate and to

off to complete the novitiate year which was interrupted by the accident.

He became a full-fledged member of the Order of Saint Augustine when he made his final "Solemn" Profession of Vows in July of 1972. He had already the necessary undergraduate studies at Villanova to be advanced to the study of Theology which would be the last step in his preparation for the Priesthood. Somehow, I don't think that Willy Atkinson ever really thought that he would be ordained; at the same time I don't think he ever worried about the last step, since the Lord had taken such gentle care of him to that point. He continued to study Theology at Villanova, through regular graduate courses from the Theology Faculty, and through special tutorial courses.

Although he spent his summers with his family at Ocean City, New Jersey, enjoying the sun from the Boardwalk, he returned once a week to Villanova for a course or two.

In June of 1973, with his Theo-



Bill and his classmates celebrate Christmas at the Novitiate, December, 1964.

the wonders of Greek and Latin. Somehow he managed, or so his classmates say, to learn more football than Greek.

With a summer of Ocean City, New Jersey, behind him, Bill entered the Novitiate of the Order of Saint Augustine located in the remote area of Upstate New York, on the Hudson River, north of West Point. (This editor's first recollection of Bill comes from the ten-day retreat which Bill and his 42 classmates made on Staten Island before being received into the Novitiate. That recollection was strengthened throughout the six months which Bill spent at the novitiate before the accident. . . . My first memory is of the supremely confident athlete who, once off of the field, was really a very quiet, shy and deep person. I have never had the occasion to change that first impression . . . except that the shyness has been somewhat diminished.)

The 43 novices arrived at New Hamburg on September 9 and

layed-out toboggan run. Situated on a hill as it is, the Novitiate grounds were ideal for sledding and tobogganing. The novices layed out a course of perhaps a half of a mile which began at the top of the hill and ran parallel with the River for a short distance. The trail was banked for a 90-degree turn, and the toboggans would shoot around the turn and head down toward the River, past the ball field, the swimming pool, the barn and the gardens. It was indeed an exciting run, and it became the favorite past-time of all of the novices. As usual, Bill was always in the forefront of this sport also.

The novices spent Christmas in the seclusion of the novitiate. New Years came and went and the snows continued to fall. The morning of February 22, 1965, brought Washington's Birthday, the year's last snowfall and a new life to Bill Atkinson, then only 19.

I recall that morning with absolute clarity: I was assigned to



Bill's Simple Profession, St. Mary's Hall, July, 1970. Fr. Louis Rongione receives Bill's Vows.

began immediately to become involved in the routine of prayer, work and play which was to form their lives until Washington's Birthday when Bill's accident would change the complex of all of their lives. The novitiate, on the beautiful hills above the Hud-

plowing the long, winding driveway and so was out on the tractor plowing at 4:30 or 5:00 A.M. Bill and his close friend Ted Glessner were assigned to shoveling, and they too were out. I can remember racing down the drive, snow blowing high in front

Some Thoughts on Mary Atkinson

I first met Mary Atkinson in 1960 at the Junior Prom; she and Al helped me chaperone. Our friendships grew during those years, months and days. They allowed me the privilege of sharing important moments and decisions in the lives of their three sons. The Atkinsons are a beautifully tight and close family. I have found that being the Counsellor and friend to the oldest son proved to be my credentials toward being a friend to the entire family. The greatest part of being an Atkinson friend is to realize very soon that you are family.

As you grew to know the family you began to know Mary. To know Mary Atkinson was to know someone very special. She was so special, it is difficult to choose those of her qualities which made her unique.

Perhaps it was that quick smile; that deep, hardy, and sincere laugh which made you feel cheerful and happy in a home filled with warmth and hospitality. Maybe it was that gift she had of loving each of her children in such a way that each felt special and treasured: yet, none were favored. Or the singular manner in which she lived her role as wife and mother so that it became a way of life for others to envy and emulate. Was it the beauty of her faith? Mary faced every moment of life with a deep love of God and his Church. To Mary, as a Catholic, there were things you did, and other things you never did. In a way, it was all as simple as that.

It was this love of God which permeated Mary's life and was so evident in time of tremendous trial. I was asked to sit in on the doctor's conference at St. Francis Hospital in Poughkeepsie

when Mary and Al were told of the seriousness of Bill's injury. In a few words as follows the Doctor told us:

"The kindest way I can tell you this is to be brief, cruel, and to the point. Your son is gravely ill, and if he recovers, he will never move again from the neck down. Bill's life and future are in the hands of God."

Mary sat a little straighter in the chair, perhaps her hand tightened a bit on Al's arm; a vein seemed to tremble on her forehead as she spoke first: "Is there anything else, Doctor?" When he said, "No," Mary turned to Al, then to me, and after thanking the Doctor said: "Al, Father, let's go to Chapel." Our visit to Chapel was long and silent. This was the time for strong prayers, not tears. When Mary Atkinson cried she always waited until she reached the privacy of her room.

Some of my greatest memories are of phone conversations when I would call to see how everyone was on Sansom Street. She had a beautiful genius for bringing me even closer to her family by, at times, subtly setting me in the path of a plan or a decision. This is sort of why February 3rd was such a beautiful date for Bill's First Mass. Earlier this year, Mary and I were discussing the coming ordination and that Bill seemed to prefer a spring ordination. I truly feel that Mary suspected God's plan and seemed to be thinking out loud when she said that she would love to see him consider February 3rd. It was in a later conversation we had that Bill learned of his mother's thoughts, and after consideration and checking, he chose the 3rd of February to say his First Mass.

Not that it was needed but hav-

ing the First Mass on the third, kept her even more on the minds of all, on this, their thirty-fourth anniversary.

Her strength, courage, resignation, and Faith during those last few weeks were a source of edification and even amazement, especially to her doctors. All of those qualities which made her great seemed to intensify during those last weeks of pain.

We all have a treasury of memories. One of mine will always be the obsequies for Mary—it was a tribute you seldom see in today's busy world. Priests, the laity, and especially the seminarians, came together sharing admiration and affection for a great lady. Her philosophy seemed even to touch these ceremonies. Sobs of grief weren't there, but rather the gentle tears so often present when you are a part of something so majestic and beautiful. I guess I would have to put this memory in the category of Requiem for a Queen.

I anguish while writing this because words cannot touch those special feelings so many people had for Mary Atkinson.

One of the greatest rewards of my years at Bonner will always be my friendship with the Atkinson family.

I guess what I really am trying to say is that, with Bill, everyone for weeks has been thinking of Mary.

I have racked my brain attempting to think of a gift which would please Fr. Bill. Knowing Bill and his Dad and brothers and sisters, I think the best thing I can give him, at this time, is my deepest thanks for sharing Mary Atkinson with me, and to tell him and them that she has touched my life in such a way that I will never forget her as long as I live.

Fr. John Melton, OSA

This prayer, by an unknown author, is quoted on a bronze tablet at the entrance to Magee Memorial Hospital; it is a favorite prayer of Bill's.

I asked God for strength that I might achieve. I was made weak that I might learn to humbly obey . . .

I asked for health that I might do greater things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things . . .

I asked for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise . . .

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God . . .

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. I was given life that I might enjoy all things . . .

I got nothing that I asked for— But everything I had hoped for.

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I am among all men most richly blessed.

Reflections on Bill at Bonner

The Bon-Aire 1963 reads: William E. Atkinson, A-5; 409 Sansom Street, Upper Darby, Pa., St. Alice Parish, Intramural Sports 1-2-3-4; Baseball 1-4; Bonner Breakfast Club; Section Officer 1-2; St. Edmond's Guild 1-2-3-4; and Musical 4.

Bill at Bonner can be described as the tall, blond, quiet kid with an easy smile and a usually care-free spirit. His interests were varied but baseball was favored among his many athletic talents. It wasn't an uncommon sight on campus, however, to see Bill coming up the hill with a basketball under his arm.

Having an easy-going manner and a willingness to participate, he was elected twice as a class officer.

In many ways Willie hasn't changed a lot since high school days. That early morning "Don't talk to me—I'm not awake yet." look was visible most mornings when he came to serve Mass at the Bonner Monastery. Half awake or not, he was there starting many of his days assisting his priest-teachers with Mass.

Much free time on Saturdays and Sundays throughout his high

school years was spent at St. Edmond's Home for Crippled Children. Bill and many of his closest friends were the most active members of a club organized to make life brighter for the children and the overworked sisters. He and others would go home many days and evenings bruised and exhausted from an afternoon with the kids.

Bill worked hard at school work and similar to his older brother, developed a genuine dislike for College Boards and other necessary evils of senior year. Villanova was his next goal but it soon became evident that much thought was also being given to his future career. Bill will never be accused of rushing into a serious decision without ample and proper thought and consideration. So, while the news came as no surprise that he wanted to become an Augustinian, he had that great charm of making the actual announcement a surprising relief. One spring evening he came to campus and announced that he had made up his mind. Next step the minor seminary at Staten Island, then the Novitiate. The rest is history.

—John Melton, OSA

Continued from Page 2

logical studies almost completed, the Seminary faculty requested the Provincial Superior (Very Reverend Harry A. Cassel) and his Council to petition Pope Paul VI for special permission to Ordain Bill a Priest. Father Cassel drew up a long history for Pope Paul; Bill himself typed a letter to the Pope (using the special devices developed by the doctors at Magee Hospital) detailing his reasons for requesting Ordination. In July a telegram arrived. It was short and simple and came from Rome: "ATKINSON DISPENSATION GRANTED." The Latin letter followed by a few days.

Luckily, Bill was at Villanova for one of his summer classes the day the telegram arrived. Next, to the accident, this is one day I will not forget. I rushed over to Bill with the telegram, found him eating lunch, and simply placed the yellow telegram before him. He took a long sip of tea through his large glass straw; he said nothing for a few moments, but the color in his face rose and every facial muscle relaxed slowly. He didn't have to



Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, confers the Diaconate upon Bill at Villanova, October 6, 1973.

say anything; the sparkle in his eyes told the entire message. I wondered then if he hadn't known all the time. More than likely (though he isn't saying) he was prepared to say "yes" to the Lord once again . . . just as he said yes over and over again after the accident. More than likely, 27-year-old Willy Atkinson knew that

he was more blessed than most men, and that whatever the Lord wanted for him was far better than anything he could want for himself.

Plans started immediately after that July day . . . plans that were to have one more step of Faith required of Bill and his whole family. Mary Connelly Atkinson, that beautiful mother of his whose Faith and love and courage had supported Bill and the whole family so tenderly, was dying of cancer. She was well enough to be with Bill for the summer at the shore, but in September she had to be hospitalized. We talked, she and I, about the plans, about how the Lord's finger was so evident in her whole life, and she knew without any doubt that His Plan was to be fulfilled.

On October 6, 1973, Bill was Ordained a Deacon; Mary Atkinson was there to share with the whole family this great moment. At the end of October Mary Atkinson slipped into a quasi-coma; Bill remained at her bedside, as she had at his so many times, through the nights. She died very peace-

Text of Bill's First Sermon

"You will all have to pardon me if I sound a bit nervous today, for this is my first time back on the courts!! I saw my old basketball coach back there!"

"The theme of today's Mass is Thanksgiving, and the three readings follow this theme. The one from the Old Testament pictures Noah offering a holocaust to God thanksgiving and praise. In the second reading we have Paul writing a peculiar line to the Romans. He says that he thanks God for them, even though it seems that he never met the Romans. It strikes me strangely . . . thanking God for people he has never known. Then, in the third reading, there is Jesus, thanking his heavenly Father in prayer. In his prayer he says, 'Father, take care of these I have known, that they may be one just as you and I are one.'

"The theme of thanksgiving and praise runs throughout the three readings. I think it is fitting that today I give all of you thanks for everything that you have given me. But there is a

further dimension, a Faith dimension, that I wish to talk about. All of us gather here together because we have something in common. Some people have come a great distance just to be here today. All of you are drawn here by one single element, and that element is not me, but the love you have shown me over the past ten or fifteen years. That love comes from God and it is a love that renews people, a love that transforms people and, ultimately a love that unifies people because it comes from God.

"The words of Jesus in the Scripture today are very real. Just as he prayed to his Father that the Apostles might be one as he and the Father were one, so my prayer here today is that all of us gathered here might be one as Jesus and the Father are one.

"So let us all give thanks for that love, the love that you have given me, which ultimately comes from the Father. Let us stand now, and pray together the Creed which pronounces our Faith and our Love in unity."

preached at her funeral Mass. When asked by a local reporter about the loss of his Mom and the impact that would have on the Ordination, he answered with his characteristic "crooked" smile: "I don't know, you might say that she'll have the best seat in the house."

And that is the story, the story of a young man, called to a vocation, as we are all called to ours, called to be a Priest of Jesus Christ, called to be like everyman, a man of Faith and Love and Courage. The story is not ending with Bill's Ordination and

3rd. It is only really beginning, for at 28, Bill "Willy" Atkinson is only setting out once again (as we all have to do daily) to do the Lord's Will. He started one day in 1963 when he entered the minor seminary; he started again in 1964 when he entered the Novitiate; he began anew on February 22, 1965 . . . and the second day of February, 1974, will be like all of these beginnings, filled with taint . . . and with the certain and unwaivering conviction that he has been, is and will continue to be most highly blessed and gifted by the Lord.



Bill and Cardinal Krol pose with the concelebrating Augustinians and the altar boys following the Ordination Mass at St. Alice Church,



"The Blood of Christ." Don Reilly, Deacon of the Mass, gives the chalice to Bill Atkinson at the First Mass.

Gratitude from Bill's Class

The following is the dedication of the Yearbook from the Novitiate Class of 1964-65. It speaks of what "the Lord hath wrought" through Bill in his classmates of that Novitiate Year.

The 1965 celebration of Washington's birthday brought a free day . . . and tragedy to Good Counsel Novitiate. The tobogganing enthusiasts raced to the hill to make the best of the year's last snowfall. Suddenly one of the Toboggans disappeared into the blowing snow; it veered from the run and smashed into a tree. Bill Atkinson was seated first, and the force of the blow severed his spine, leaving him totally paralyzed.

He was taken to St. Francis Hospital, Poughkeepsie, where he made his vows a week later. In April he was taken to Philadelphia, where, in July, he received his first assignment as an Augustinian. While still in the hospital, he became a "member of the family" of St. Augustine's Parish, Philadelphia.

In those weeks of Lent as Bill wavered between life and death, the monotony of our daily routine took on a new complexion. Suddenly we all realized that no act was too petty to be offered to

God for this, our brother. We saw that we must ever walk with Christ, thanking Him that we are able at this moment of this day to do His Will and give Him glory. He may, in the future, ask us also to bear much pain, but it became clear that His Will and our cross lay in the day by day living that is religious and community life. We began to penetrate the mystery and power of prayer to aid and strengthen Bill, and even to work a miracle. We finally learned to will with Christ. Bill's paralysis as Bill himself willed it.

This accident was a tragedy, yes, but in precisely the same sense as the Crucifixion. For, the Cross is the key to our happiness and an essential part of our lives as Christians and Religious. Bill has given us an heroic example of complete disinterestedness in self, of love of Christ and the Cross and of loving imitation of our Lord and Master.

We face Profession as changed men, molded by Christ and formed a little more in His Image. New men we now are, thanks in no little part to the example, love, prayers and sacrifices of this, our brother. May his example remain as a beacon to all future novices on the Way of Perfection, the Way of Love . . . the Way of the Cross.

BILL'S DOCTOR:

"He Has a Job to Do"

A broken neck is a massive injury and the spinal cord is one of the baffling parts of the body even for today's medical wizards. Thanks to the Philadelphia Inquirer we quote from an article written just after Bill was released from Magee Memorial Hospital.

"If you are going to break your

A good answer I thought. Then after a few seconds I began again.

"Yo!"

"What now?"

"Well, just what do you pray for—the safety of the players?"

This time his response was downright startling:

"Nope," he said pointedly, "not even for that, exactly. When I pray before a game, I just think to myself, 'Look, Lord, I'd like to win, of course, but I wouldn't want anybody getting hurt too bad: but Thy will be done, not mine.'"

A strange sort of reply, I remarked to myself. I'd never say a prayer like that. Well, I guess it really is a bit strange. But, you know, he still says that prayer, and no other. It has been almost a year since the accident. Yet there he is, paralyzed from the neck down, just thinking to himself, "Thy will be done, not mine."

Immediately following the Mass, before giving his Apostolic Blessing, John Cardinal Krol invited the congregation to be seated. His Eminence addressed the people, giving his thoughts on the Ordination of Bill Atkinson. We respectfully publish excerpts of Cardinal Krol's remarks.

"We have probably been privileged this morning to participate in a ceremony which is certainly extremely rare if not unique in the history of the Church. I am in no position to say whether a quadriplegic has or has not ever been ordained before, but I know of none. But in this, the Priesthood is not a gift to be offered to an individual out of sympathy, but actually a call to service.

"The petition which was presented by Father Cassel to the Holy Father requesting this extraordinary dispensation was a well motivated, well documented presentation showing that the candidate Atkinson, was not just being consoled but he was, by the pattern of his life, capable of giving service to Christ and the

Bonner Honors Bill at School Mass

Father Bill Atkinson will return to Monsignor Bonner High School February 8 to concelebrate Mass with the priest faculty for the entire student body, the members of the Mothers Club, Bonner Altar Society and officers of the Fathers Club.

Father Bill will preach the homily and the music will be provided by the Archbishop Prendergast Glee Club.

At the conclusion of the Mass Father Bill will be inducted into the Monsignor Bonner High School Hall of Fame along with his brother, Al Atkinson, of the New York Jets.

A Special Award Plaque will also be dedicated in honor of Father Bill's Ordination.

Remarks of John Cardinal Krol



Fr. Harry Cassal, OSA, Prior Provincial, poses with Bill Atkinson and Cardinal Krol following the Ordination.

Church and the people. . . .

In the ceremony itself, Christ's own words that he came to "serve and not to be served" are incorporated as an exhortation to the newly ordained. There is no question about it, that in the Providence of God, Father Atkinson will require the charitable assistance and consideration of his brothers in the community; in this he has no choice; it is the Will of God. But apart from the physical necessity, he was ordained a Priest of Christ today, not to be served but rather to serve.

"One of the first requisites for that service is again incorporated into the ceremony by way of an exhortation: that his first duty is to pray, to pray every hour of the day to God. In this, we priests often ourselves are inclined, not to forget, but at least not to be sensitive or sufficiently sensitive that our first call is to praise God

and sanctify the people. And we do this through prayer.

"The breviary is now called the 'Liturgy of the Hours' to show that we thank the Father every hour of the day. . . . I am calling on Father Atkinson to do exactly that. In this sense, Father Atkinson has no limitation and his contributions can not only equal but can surpass any priest who is engaged in the active ministry. More than that, the power to sacrifice, the power to forgive sins, the obligation to teach, all of these are within the realm of possibility. Thus he enters the Priesthood even as Christ did not to be served but to serve.

"That he might achieve a life of service pleasing to God and helpful to men, I have prayed and I ask you to continue your prayers so that he may & in this ministry of Christ the joy which is the natural accompaniment of those who serve God and serve the people of God."



As Don Reilly looks on Bill Atkinson delivers the Homily at his First Mass.

Seminary Dedicates Gift Bible

On the occasion of his Ordination to the Diaconate, the Seminary Community gave Bill a Bible signed by all and with the following inscription:

"But the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength, so that through me the preaching task might be completed and all the nations might hear the Gospel . . . The Lord will continue to rescue me from all attempts to do me harm, and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom."

All of our experience teaches us that we can do little or nothing unless the patient is working with us."

"When (Bill) came here I didn't know what to expect from him," Dr. Parry said. "He has done amazingly, gratifyingly well. All I can say, from the way he has come back, is that he must have a job to do somewhere in the world . . . although I don't know what. This is what makes it all

2 Tim 4. 17-18

To "Willy" Atkinson, on the day of your Ordination to the Diaconate, October 6, 1973. The Lord has stood by your side and given you strength; He has touched you deeply with his Word and led you where you would not go by yourself; He has touched us, your brothers through you.

We, your brothers, pray that you may respond all the days of your life to his gentle call, and allow Him to strengthen you.

We offer you this Book of His Living Word that you might always listen to His Voice as He stands by your side.

Additional copies of this newsletter are available at a nominal cost by contacting: Rev. Arthur B. Chappell, OSA, Augustinian Communications Office, Villanova University, Villanova, Pa. 19085 (215) 528-2837

"The Prayer"

The following short article entitled "The Prayer" appeared in the December 1965 issue of the Mendicant, a publication of the Professed seminarians of the Collegiate seminary at St. Mary's Hall. The author was Bill's novitiate classmate, Lonnie Barone.

There I was, flat on my back in bed—and in the middle of the afternoon. No, I wasn't sick, not even particularly tired, but it seems like the normal thing to do when you're a post-grad seminarian at "the Rock." Anyway, the fellow directly across the narrow hall (both our doors were wide open) was likewise prostrate on his mattress. That's when this silly question popped into my head, and I just had to ask it. So I called.

"Hey!"

"Yeah?"

"You know when we always say the prayer before a football game?"

"What?"

"You know, the Hail Mary we always say before football games."

"Uh huh."

"Well, just what do you pray for I mean, do you pray to win?"

He took me seriously, and his answer came quicker than I expected.

"Nope, I never pray to win. Sure, it's nice when you win, but I don't think my team deserves any more favoritism from God