First of all, I would like to greet all of you, and to say thank you to each and every one of you, along with so many others, who work together with the Augustinians in elementary schools, high schools and universities throughout the world, in this vital mission of "education", accompanying and teaching young people as they grow in knowledge and in their understanding of the true meaning of life. From the outset, a word of special thanks goes to the organizers of this Congress, especially the members of the Order's International Commission for Education, who put together the program for this event, and who were kind enough to invite me to be a part of this congress, as well as to give this first presentation.

As you all know, I am sure, among the most common portrayals of St. Augustine, he is shown holding in his hand either a book, or a heart. Both of these images are potentially striking expressions of the message that I would like to share with you today. As teachers in Augustinian schools, you are of course called upon to share "knowledge" with your students - hence, the image of the book. But the heart is also important in Augustinian education, because we as followers of the great Bishop of Hippo have also come to recognize that full and authentic development of the human person depends upon the training of the intellect and also on growth in human understanding of the affective and the spiritual dimensions of life. These, well represented by the heart, make up an integral part of what Augustinian education is about.
I have been asked to speak about the Augustinian commitment to education in the context of the Gospel and with an understanding of how this particular mission helps lead people toward the Kingdom.

But before going directly into some reflections on the nature of Augustinian education along with the teaching of the Gospel, I would like to ask a preliminary question, one that is essential if we are going to have an authentic understanding of the role that all of you play, no matter what your particular work may be, in the setting of a Catholic and Augustinian school. Here is the question: is education primarily a “secular” task? Or can it be understood to have a “spiritual” or “religious” or even “transcendental” dimension? Do you, do we, conceive of our role in teaching or working in an Augustinian school as a part of the mission of the Church?

Let me explain the question by asking some more specific questions, or by asking you to think about your role and your understanding of what really takes place in the school where you work.

1. Does the entire school environment promote a sense of community, based on faith, in which all participants (faculty, students, staff members) come to an understanding that they are involved in more than an institution of intellectual development and academic pursuits?

2. Do the teachers of such subjects as science, mathematics, history, social science, etc., perform their jobs in the identical way in which teachers in non-Catholic or public institutions would carry out their teaching assignments?
3. Are the teaching of religion and the presence of some kind of “pastoral department” isolated activities, or do they have an impact on the overall formation of the young people who study in your school?

By asking these questions, I do not mean to imply that Catholic education should in some way depart from what are the highest standards of solid education, teaching what are effectively “secular” subjects. In no way would I propose that the teaching of science, for example, should be done without imparting a thorough understanding of the advances in investigation that have come about even in these most recent times. (Higg's Boson, that all important particle whose existence was recently demonstrated, has to be, for example, part of the subject matter of any serious physics course.) In Catholic schools, and even more in Augustinian schools, there should be no running away from scientific knowledge because of the fear that it may challenge certain areas of traditional belief, because authentic education cannot be the promotion of “fundamentalism”. (There is no need to give too much time here to explain the importance of the discovery of the laws of genetics, by the Augustinian Gregor Mendel, as one example.) The “secularization” that has taken place in the world over the past sixty or more years is not necessarily a negative process, even though a predominant ‘secularism’ – that tries to remove the significance of religious or spiritual values – is indeed one of the factors in today’s society that places a great challenge before us as Augustinian educators. The Catholic Church understands that part of the role of education is to form good citizens – effectively a “secular” project:

As the Congregation of Catholic Education states:

“A Christian education must promote respect for the State and its representatives, the observance of just laws and a search for the
common good. Therefore, traditional civic values such as freedom, justice …and the need to pursue social progress are all included among the school goals” (The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic school, 1988, n. 45 – 46)

But even in the task of forming “good citizens”, can we postulate that there is something different in the way we go about this challenge, so that as Christians and as members of the Augustinian educational system, we see our role as educators and formators, even in those “secular areas”, within the context of the teaching of Jesus Christ and in the values of the Kingdom?

At the same time, in choosing for ourselves clearly “religious” and “gospel” values, we cannot neglect the specifically “educational” challenges that must also be meet, with the highest of standards, in our schools. A distinctive sort of religious/ecclesiastical language has come to dominate the discourse about the aims and purposes of Catholic schools. It is evident in Catholic education policy documents, mission statements, vision statements, articles, conference papers and discussions of the role of Catholic schools. (See the examples in Appendix 1. This includes a secondary school mission statement, a primary school set of aims for religious education, and a wider list of aims for religious education showing how two of them are commonly emphasized while the remainder tend to be neglected.) Words like mission, ministry, evangelization, inculturation, witness and catechesis, together with a range of spiritual words like praxis, empowerment, consciousness-raising etc. have strongly colored the language about aims for Catholic schooling. In addition, the spiritual development of pupils is framed almost exclusively in terms of a personal relationship with God and in participation in the life of the Catholic
Church. While these purposes are central to Catholic education, and are not in question, they need to be complemented with aims that are more directly concerned with education -- and not just with the Church’s mission, religious development of pupils and Church membership. I believe that a Catholic school culture has developed in which there is a felt pressure to write the aims for Catholic schools with such an emphasis on formally religious terms that there is a tendency to neglect the basic educational aims of the school. If this distinctively educational thrust of the school is neglected, then it seems to me unlikely that its religious dimension will be as effective as it might otherwise be.

**Catholic Education – Mission to teach the values of the Kingdom**

In a talk given by Pope Benedict XVI when he visited the United States in 2008, he addressed the topic of Catholic education:

“Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord’s disciples, the Church.

“The dynamic between personal encounter, knowledge and Christian witness is integral to the *diakonia* of truth which the Church exercises in the midst of humanity. God’s revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history. This task is never easy; it involves the entire Christian community and
motivates each generation of Christian educators to ensure that the power of God’s truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve. In this way, Christ’s Good News is set to work, guiding both teacher and student towards the objective truth which, in transcending the particular and the subjective, points to the universal and absolute that enables us to proclaim with confidence the hope which does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). Set against personal struggles, moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge, the noble goals of scholarship and education, founded on the unity of truth and in service of the person and the community, become an especially powerful instrument of hope.”

So, with these thoughts as a kind of preface to our discussion, I would now like to invite you to reflect upon some of the specific “gospel” and “Augustinian” values of our mission in education.

I. The Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus

Every time we pray the "Our Father", we repeat the words "thy Kingdom come". What are we praying for?

In the Synoptic Gospels, the teaching of Jesus revolves very much around the "Kingdom of God". The Gospel of Mark, in Chapter one, gives us the first words of the teaching of Jesus immediately after his Baptism: "Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the Good News (Gospel) of God: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel.'" (Mk 1: 14-15).

"Kingdom" in the context of Jesus' preaching refers to "a new order", the new state of life in which the sovereignty of God is recognized and accepted. "New heavens and a new
earth” are brought about and accepted by the followers of Jesus, overcoming and even defeating those powers or those forces that are contrary to God. This Kingdom is real, and it is already present beginning with the presence of Jesus in the lives of believers, but its fullness will come about in the future.

The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus is a supernatural reality and something that is “gift” and beyond human control:

“This is how it is with the Kingdom of God. A man scatters seed on the ground. He goes to bed and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without his knowing how it happens. The soil produces of itself first the blade, then the ear, finally the ripe wheat in the ear...” (Mk 4:26-28).

It is not a kind of human goal that can be gradually conquered by using one’s own efforts. If someone thinks they can bring about the Kingdom of God by hard work, thereby becoming a controlling member so to speak, they are still far from understanding what the Kingdom is really about. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus makes this clear. The farmer plants the seed, waters it, accompanies a process that comes about “without knowing how it happens”. If he is impatient, if he thinks he can make the plant grow faster, forcing things, pulling the plants up before their time, the plant will never bear fruit, and will not give the fruit, will not be able to be harvested.

Jesus, as he begins his mission, imitated John the Baptist by baptising (Jn 3:22; 4:1); but he stopped baptising - perhaps recognizing rivalry that was created between the followers of John the Baptist and his own. The eschatological message was similar of the two
preachers, however with Jesus, there was a major shift in emphasis: John the Baptist stressed the imminent judgment and punishment to be inflicted on sinners, but the promise of salvation was implicit and not very clear. Jesus on the other hand emphasized the joy of salvation, even now impinging and soon to be fulfilled.

Jesus proclaimed this joyful news in terms of the coming of God's Kingdom, with the consequent need for all of Israel to repent. It is important to understand that Jesus announced the Kingdom to all of Israel, and not to isolated individuals. However, it is very difficult to understand exactly what Jesus meant when he spoke of the Kingdom. It may be better (in English) to refer to the Rule of God or the Reign of God - more of an abstract concept, and certainly not a territory.

The "Kingdom of God" is not an object, not stationary, not concrete. It is rather an expression of "action". "God is ruling powerfully as King." The concept is "dynamic" and not spatial: the idea of "kingly rule" and not "a territory", even though Jesus uses the imagery of place to lend some understanding to the concept.

The "Kingdom of God" is central to the message of Jesus. However, Jesus does not dwell on God as a fearsome, remote or "all-powerful" King. At the heart of the "good news" of Jesus is the proclamation of the divine King who delights in revealing himself as a loving father, a father who rejoices over regaining his lost children. (e.g. the nucleus of what we find in Luke 15:1-32).

Our job, our mission as educators, is to guide others in such a way that through their studies but also through the experiences they have in the context of our Augustinian
schools, they will come to recognize that they too are searching, looking for truth, for understanding, and that all human life has as its ultimate goal the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom is also within, in the midst of those who believe. (Lk17,21). The challenge of Augustinian catholic education (educare, cultivate, raise up) is how to lead our students in such way that they will be able to discover the Kingdom - the values of peace and justice, right relationships, the search for truth, the building of community - to be a vital and dynamic force in their lives.

[Show “trailer” of movie on Augustine's life]

The life of St. Augustine in itself, if known and understood, offers some magnificent learning opportunities for the formation of young people. Among other things, Augustine’s struggles in adolescence, his experiences in school with subjects that he did or did not enjoy studying; his relationship with his parents; the value of friendship in his life; his choices – whether or not the “truth” was going to be important as he sought to advance his career, etc.

Some Augustinian values that are an essential part of our Mission in Education:

First, a word about “educating in values” – a difficult challenge to take on. And yet it is recognized to be one of the essential tasks of our schools, especially given the lack of ethical principles or guidelines that is oftentimes found in the social environment from which many of our students come. Young people need values, they need “points of reference” in their lives, if they are going to be prepared to find their way in a world that
has, perhaps more than ever before, lost the moral and ethical sense of what human life is all about.

Thus, the moral, ethical and spiritual development of students is a fundamental goal of education. It is clearly not confined to one area of the curriculum. All teachers, across all areas of the curriculum have a responsibility to inculcate in their students positive values and a capacity for moral and ethical judgment.

But this is easier said than done. The process of cognitive learning with the result in increased knowledge in the students is not the same as the personal change and development that is sought when we speak about teaching or sharing values with our students.

In an article written by Professor Graham Rossiter, an Australian professor, entitled *Catholic Education and Values: A review of the role of Catholic schools in promoting the spiritual and moral development of pupils*, numerous guidelines are developed which can be helpful to us as we speak about “teaching Augustinian values” in our schools.

For us as Augustinian educators, it is necessary to articulate the values that it is hoped will have an effect on the lives of our students. But part of the challenge to be effective includes a clear understanding of the links between classroom teaching/learning processes and personal change in pupils (the development of beliefs/values/attitudes).

New *knowledge* and *skills* change the individual personally; to be able to *imagine* new possibilities and new horizons is also a personal change, or at least a prelude to such change. However, when the words ‘personal change’ are used, the usual meaning is that there has been change in one or more ‘personal’ aspects such as beliefs, emotions,
attitudes, values, commitments and behavior. Briefly, we can describe these various personal aspects as follows:

**Beliefs**: these are principles believed to be true; may be religious beliefs and inspired by religious faith; may be inspired by people, significant others, science, etc. For ourselves, in our Augustinian Catholic schools, even if not all the students or faculty are members of the Church, we need to teach the content of the Catholic faith, and to demonstrate through word and example the rich system of beliefs that are a part of our Catholic identity.

**Emotions**: fundamental visceral feelings such as joy, euphoria, zest, fear, depression, sexual feelings etc.

**Attitudes**: abiding dispositions to think, feel and behave in particular ways with reference to an issue, person or things.

**Values**: these are the guiding principles which the individual holds as important and which can have an orienting influence on behavior. Values show the personal direction of an individual’s life.

**Commitments**: values/beliefs to which the individual adheres and to which he/she is prepared to be accountable. To speak of commitments would indicate the concrete or specific ways in which the individual and the community are prepared to act upon the values and beliefs that they have truly adopted.

**Behavior**: what people do; those actions that can have ethical or moral implications.

Personal change is complex, and in some ways mysterious. It occurs in response to a combination of internal and external factors, that cannot always be clearly delineated. It is
not just a ‘stimulus – response’ sort of change. It can be initiated by a free, thinking individual; to interpret personal change only in terms of causal factors implies a mechanistic view of the human person that neglects important spiritual capabilities like free will.

To go any further in depth regarding these processes of change is beyond the scope of this presentation. However I do believe that one of the greatest challenges that we all face is precisely in “connecting” with our students, with our “audience”, in order to find effective ways of encouraging them to integrate these “Augustinian values” (as well as other values) into their lives.

During the coming days, we will all have the opportunity to reflect upon a number of those “Augustinian values” that have come to be clearly identified as significant pillars in the promotion of an Augustinian educational community. Here, I offer to you some of the principle elements of our Augustinian spirituality, with a brief reflection on each of them.

SEARCH FOR TRUTH

In a very real way, this is the objective of all education: to discover the truth. And from the very beginning, in a world in which many if not all things are called into question, it is important for us to understand that there is truth, absolute truth, and that part of our mission in life (not only in our schools) is to learn what is true, and ultimately, to discover the One that is Truth.
In 1952, a philosopher by the name of Josef Pieper published an article in which he stated “Man’s ability to see is in decline”. He was not referring of course to the physiological sense of sight, but rather to the spiritual sense – the capacity to see reality as it really is. Today, pragmatism and consumerism oftentimes are the determining systems for making significant decisions, resulting in a kind of relativism that needs to eliminate and even destroy those values that protect and promote the value of human life and the ethical standards that are necessary to guide all of us in making right decisions.

As Augustinians, and for all those who share our Augustinian mission of education, we need to develop a deeper understanding of Augustine’s own search for truth. At the end of the Apostolic Letter Augustinum Hipponensem, John Paul II wished to ask Saint Augustine what he would want to say to the people of today. The first answer Augustine would offer would be this: "It seems to me that the hope of finding the truth must be restored to humankind" (Epistulae, 1, 1); that truth which is Christ himself, true God, to whom is addressed one of the most beautiful prayers and most famous of the Confessions (X, 27, 38): “Late have I loved you…” “Late did I love you, o beauty so ancient and yet so new, how late! You were within me and I outside, misshapen, seeking you by bumping into these beautiful things you have made. You were with me; I was not with you. And things that would not have existed without you have kept me away from you. But you shouted, called and shattered my deafness; you blazed, shone and put to flight my blindness; you smelled sweet and I took it in and now I gasp for you. I tasted you and now I am hungry and thirsty for you. You touched me, and I was on fire for peace with you.” (Conf. X, 27).

Saint Augustine once asked: “Quid enim fortius desiderat anima quam veritatem? – What does man desire more deeply than truth?” The human face of a society depends very
much on the contribution of education to keep this irrepressible question alive. Education, indeed, is concerned with the integral formation of the person, including the moral and spiritual dimension, focused upon man’s final end and the good of the society to which he belongs. Therefore, in order to educate in truth, it is necessary first and foremost to know who the human person is, to know human nature.

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON

From this understanding of the search for truth, we are immediately led to examine the relationship that exists between faith and reason as we search for understanding. Pope Benedict XVI has spoken on numerous occasions on this topic, and I paraphrase here from one of the talks he gave on St. Augustine:

As a child, Augustine learned the Catholic faith from Monica, his mother. But he abandoned this faith as an adolescent because he could no longer discern its reasonableness and rejected a religion that was not, to his mind, also an expression of reason, that is, of the truth. His thirst for truth was radical and therefore led him to drift away from the Catholic faith. Yet his radicalism was such that he could not be satisfied with philosophies that did not go to the truth itself, that did not go to God and to a God who was not only the ultimate cosmological hypothesis but the true God, the God who gives life and enters into our lives. Thus, Augustine’s entire intellectual and spiritual development is also a valid model today in the relationship between faith and reason, a subject not only for believers but for every person who seeks the truth, a central theme for the balance and destiny of every human being. These two dimensions, faith and reason, should not be separated or placed in
opposition; rather, they must always go hand in hand. As Augustine himself wrote after his conversion, faith and reason are "the two forces that lead us to knowledge" (Contra Academicos, III, 20, 43). In this regard, through the two rightly famous Augustinian formulas (cf. Sermones, 43, 9) that express this coherent synthesis of faith and reason: crede ut intelligas ("I believe in order to understand") - believing paves the way to crossing the threshold of the truth - but also, and inseparably, intellige ut credas ("I understand, the better to believe"), the believer scrutinizes the truth to be able to find God and to believe.

INTERIORITY

As followers of St. Augustine, we have a truly important message to teach to others, especially in today’s world of superficial communications, instant gratification and avid materialism. We have oftentimes heard the word “interiority”, but to discover its meaning and to allow our lives to be changed by giving time and energy to this particular dimension of human consciousness requires a specific commitment on our part. On the one hand, it is really quite simple. Augustine’s famous prayer in the Soliloquies, “let me know you, O God, and let me know myself so that I may know you…”, expresses very well how important Augustine’s insight into his own humanity is. In various places, Augustine invites us to go back “into yourselves”, do not go outside, if you are looking for truth, if you are looking for God. (On true religion, 39, 72). Only by looking into oneself can a person arrive at the capacity of understanding who he/she is, and then, who he/she is in relationship to God and with other people. It is fundamental in the life of each one of us, and therefore in the lives of our students, that we find the time and the space to ask ourselves the basic questions of the meaning of life: who am I? Does my life make sense,
and how? Where am I heading in this life, and what do I need to do in order to achieve my goals? It is from this perspective that we can begin to understand the famous refrain that we so often quote from St. Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” (Confessions I, 1).

The Gospel dimension of this pillar of our spirituality can be found in the request made by the disciples to Jesus, when they said to Jesus: “Teach us to pray”. The essence of prayer is not the rote repetition of words, but rather our opening our lives to a relationship with the Father. For this reason, Jesus’ response to the request was “do not pray as the pagans do.” And of course he taught us all the “Our Father.”

EDUCATION FOR FREEDOM

Only in Christ can the human being find authentic freedom. In his talk on the World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI expressed very clearly what we can also call an authentically “augustinian” understanding of human freedom:

"Only in relation to God does man come to understand also the meaning of human freedom. It is the task of education to form people in authentic freedom. This is not the absence of constraint or the supremacy of free will, it is not the absolutism of the self. When man believes himself to be absolute, to depend on nothing and no one, to be able to do anything he wants, he ends up contradicting the truth of his own being and forfeiting his freedom. On the contrary, man is a relational being, who lives in relationship with others and especially with God. Authentic freedom can never be attained independently of God.” (Pope Benedict XVI).
COMMUNITY

While there are many other values or “pillars” of Augustinian education that could be presented, I want to conclude my presentation to you this morning with the dimension that is considered by the Augustinian Order to be the fundamental element of our charism, of our identity as followers of St. Augustine – what we could call the “window” through which we understand and interpret the message of the Gospel.

An important experience that Augustine returned to frequently in his reading of Scriptures was the early Christian community, that held all things in common, reflected together on the Word of God, and broke bread together. They shared life together. While this model is the key to understanding Augustinian religious life, it also provides insight into what Augustine understood, and what Augustinians understand to be in terms of the particular challenge to bring about authentic human community, through dialogue, friendship, sharing of faith, and searching together to find the answers to whatever challenges come before them. If we were to ask young people to identify those particular experiences of life that are most important to them, without a doubt friendship would be high on their list. Augustine and therefore our Augustinian school communities, have much to say in this regard, and our human attempts to find “true friendship” can only benefit by learning from the experience of Augustine. Augustine tells us that the one who truly loves a friend, loves God in the friend, either because God is actually present in the friend or in order that God may be so present. This is true friendship, this is authentic Christian love. If we love another for another reason, we hate them more than we love them.
Beginning with the personal experience of friendship, our school communities can build up a strong sense of the meaning of human relationships, encouraging students to understand the world around us in solidarity with others, and thereby coming to an understanding of the commitment that all Christians are called to as members of the one Body of Christ (another important theme in Augustine), to promoting justice and peace throughout the world. And ultimately, friendship, authentic friendship, will lead all true searchers to God and to his Kingdom.