

Father Atanasio Gonelli Celebrates – 80 Years

14 February 2003



Fr Atanasio with the Guardian, Br. Michael O'Dwyer (left) and two other octogenarians - Br. Peter Tullis and Fr. Hugo De Maria

Father Athanase Gonelli celebrated his eightieth birthday on the 11th February and the Leichhardt Fraternity put on a special lunch for the occasion. Friars from Plumpton joined in on the festivities along with Fr. Placido, a guest friar from Slovenia.

Fr. Atanasio was born in the Diocese of Pontremoli, in the town of Cattognano di Comano (Massa Carrara), Italy, on the 11th February 1923. He made his first profession as a Capuchin on the 8th of September 1940 at Fidenza and was ordained a priest on the 1st March 1947 at Minozzo (Reggio Emilia).

Father left the December chill of Italy in 1949, arriving in warm Australia on the 29th January, 1950 on the good ship SS Giovanni Cabotto.

Since his arrival in 1950 he has ministered to Italian Communities in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Harvey in Western Australia. Sydney, however, is the place where he is better known and Leichhardt in particular where he has lived since 1964. Father has been given many positions of responsibility and leadership and probably breaks the record for the number of times he has served as Guardian of Leichhardt (at least four terms) in the many years he's lived there. He was Guardian in Adelaide during his time there, and also at Plumpton in 1962. Father Athanase has served a few terms as a Councillor of the Australian General Custody before it became a Province. And when Australia became a Province in 1981 he was appointed one of the Definitors, a post he's held a few times since then.

In the earlier days (1950-1954) Father worked at the Italian newspaper "La Fiamma" and directed "L'Angelo della famiglia." then from 1964 until 1970 he directed the entire operation at "La Fiamma". For services rendered to the Italian Community, he was created a Cavalieri (Knight) della Repubblica Italiana in 1988.

As can be plainly seen, Father Athanase has made a most valuable contribution to the work of the Order here in Australia and is a tremendous asset to the Church and our Provincial fraternity. In his quiet, modest way, Father expressed gratitude to God and thanked the friars for their expression of congratulations. All the friars in the Province offer you their sincere best wishes and pray that God will continue to bless you, Father Athanase, so that you may continue to witness to His Spirit in the living of your Capuchin life.

CONGRATULATIONS!