

Seeds

July / August 2021

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine
United Church

The unconditional love that surrounds us

Revd Fiona Bennett



Ancient Greek had a number of different words which we translate into English today as “love”, but they all had slightly different meanings.

One of those words was “Agape”. (It’s pronounced “a-ga-pay”.) This is the love God has for us and which God desires we have for each other – or so it suggests in 1 John 4:7 (“let us love (*agape*) one another for love (*agape*) is of God”).

This *agape* love is an unconditional love; it persists regardless of all circumstance, and is more than a feeling – it is an utter commitment to seek the best for another. No matter what we do or feel, God’s *agape* love for us and for each and all life is unshakable, beyond breakable.

Agape love is also more than a benign affirmation; it is an active state in which the Spirit moves and works. Sometimes, truly seeking the best for ourselves or another in the sense of *agape* love, can be pretty tough, but it is the foundation of being and building God’s Realm on earth.

Coming out of lockdown is hitting many people hard. We battled through the pandemic, but the new normal is still shifting.

We are all changed people, and many are weary. Just as people who travel in countries with great poverty often find their biggest culture shock is coming home (to wasted clean water and supermarkets full of food), so our arrival back into the new normal may well be trickier and more traumatic than girding ourselves to cope with the crisis.

Whatever is going on in our lives and world, it is helpful to remember and trust that whatever we feel and worry about, God’s unshakable and unconditional *agape* love surrounds and fills all things; it is for us, and is longing to be released through us towards ourselves, others and all life on earth.

“agape love is an invitation to find hope and resilience even in the most difficult times”

In the same passage in 1 John 4, the writer also says: “Perfect love casts out fear.” I think choosing to focus and trust God’s *agape* love is an invitation to find hope and resilience even in the most difficult times, which help to overcome our deepest fear.

This Month

PROTECTING OUR PLANET

Katrina Tweedie offers ideas for Plastic-Free July



THE WORLD IS MORE

TLC Youth discover so much that we never knew



THE BIGGER PICTURE

Previewing this month’s URC General Assembly



MOVING THOUGHTS

Laurence Wareing on the journey of moving house





Augustine United Church,
George IV Bridge,
Edinburgh, EH1 1EL
0131 220 1677
www.augustine.org.uk
facebook.com/AugustineUnited
Scottish Charity no. SC000385

CHURCH SECRETARY

Linda Harrison
secretary@augustine.org.uk
or via the church office

MINISTER

Revd Fiona Bennett
minister@augustine.org.uk
07552 162 717

ASSOCIATE MINISTER

Revd Maxwell Reay
associateminister@augustine.org.uk
07957 543 359

CHURCH CENTRE MANAGER

Rachel Fitzgerald
centre.manager@augustine.org.uk
0131 220 1677

WEBSITE

Thomas McPolin
web.editor@augustine.org.uk

FACEBOOK

Eilidh Carmichael
eilidh.carmichael@augustine.org.uk

SEEDS EDITORIAL TEAM

Laurence Wareing and
Denis Mallon
newsletter@augustine.org.uk

Getting Involved

Within AUC there are Ministry Teams which are responsible for different areas of Church Life. If you would like to know more or get involved with one of these please email the contact person.

CENTRE, PROPERTY & FINANCE

Ewen Harley
treasurer@augustine.org.uk

CHILDREN

Kirsty Murray
juniorchurch@augustine.org.uk

COMMUNICATION

Denis Mallon
denis.mallon@augustine.org.uk

OUR TRIBE (LGBT MINISTRY)

Revd Maxwell Reay
associateminister@augustine.org.uk

PEACE & JUSTICE

Katrina Tweedie
katrina.tweedie@augustine.org.uk

PASTORAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Anne MacKenzie
anne.mackenzie@augustine.org.uk

WORSHIP

Revd Fiona Bennett
minister@augustine.org.uk

YOUNG PEOPLE

Matt Baines
youth@augustine.org.uk

SAFEGUARDING COORDINATOR

Alex Peden
safeguarding@augustine.org.uk
07747 300897

VISITOR MINISTRY

Thomas McPolin
thomas.mcpolin@augustine.org.uk

To get involved volunteering within AUC or the local community:

AUC VOLUNTEERING

Thomas McPolin
thomas.mcpolin@augustine.org.uk

LOCAL COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

Kathleen Ziffo
kathleen.ziffo@augustine.org.uk

Local and Global

News from the United Reformed Church

FAIR AND EQUAL BLOOD DONATION

The rules for blood donations in Scotland have changed, allowing gay and bisexual men to donate for the first time. AUC members Tyler and Steven were featured as the “faces” of this announcement in a number of national newspapers. The new rules, which took effect on World Blood Donor Day (14 June), removed the deferment period for some gay and bisexual men from donating blood and replaced it with an individual risk assessment regardless of sexual orientation. This means that Tyler will be able to donate blood for the first time in his life.

Steven added, “I am looking forward to giving blood for the first time in 17 years. It is right in a fair and equal society that the ability to donate blood should be based on an individual’s behaviours and not the gender of their partner.”



HUNGER INCREASING WORLDWIDE

Over 30 million people in 20 countries are teetering on the brink of famine. That’s why Christian Aid has launched its Global Hunger Appeal.

“The Covid-19 pandemic, violent conflict and the climate crisis have



all increased global hunger. Now, people in countries including South Sudan, Afghanistan and Burkina Faso are facing the very real threat of starvation.

“We need your help to raise emergency funds to support those worst affected. Please give in love for your global neighbour in extreme hunger.” More information at www.christianaid.org.uk.

CWM APPOINTS REV DR JOOSEOP KEUM AS THE NEXT GENERAL SECRETARY

The Council for World Mission (CWM), of which we are part, has appointed the Revd Dr Jooseop Keum as its next General Secretary.

CWM is a worldwide partnership of Christian churches, committed to sharing their resources of money, people, skills and insights globally to carry out God’s mission locally.



Jooseop is no stranger to Scotland, having studied at New College in Edinburgh where he gained his PhD and MTh degrees. He was also part of the planning group for the Edinburgh 2010 World Mission Conference.

WALKING TO COP26

Inspired by the ancient Christian tradition of pilgrimage as well as the long history of Christian activism for environmental and justice causes, the Young Christian Climate Network (YCCN) has organised a relay that began at the G7 summit in Cornwall in June and will end at COP26 in Glasgow in November.

YCCN is an ecumenical network of young people aged 18–30 from all around the UK who are passionate about issues of climate justice and creation care. Journeying with a boat (not full size!) to symbolise their hope for a future of greater worldwide climate justice, the young people of the network are calling upon the UK Government to:

1. Reinstate the foreign aid budget to 0.7%.
2. Secure agreement from rich countries to double their annual commitment for climate finance.
3. Collaborate with other governments and international organisations to develop a new regulated climate loss and damage mechanism that saves both livelihoods and lives.
4. Push for the debts of the world’s poorest countries to be cancelled so they can better confront the climate crisis and other urgent priorities.

Worship Update

Fiona Bennett summarizes our worship plans and hopes for the next few months.

You will notice that gradually our worship is being offered not just online but also with opportunities to worship from within the building.

Over the summer, the plan is that we will offer services on 11 July and 8 August when people can come and worship from the building. There will also be two more of our activity services for Junior Church families on 27 June and 22 August.

Currently (in accordance with guidelines), there is still no congregational singing or socializing that involves moving about within the building. However, we can now have two live singers behind a screen and, as Covid levels drop, more restrictions will lift.

“a word of thanks to the dozens of people who have contributed to producing our worship”

Whatever happens, our services will continue to be streamed online so that people anywhere can join in and share in our community worship.

There will be no Church Meeting in July, but at the Church Meeting on Tuesday 10 August (7.15–7.45pm social time; 7.45–9pm business) we will



review how we want to move forward regarding worship in September, in line with guidance and congregational appetite. I hope you can join in and share your views in the discussion.

In the meantime, a word of thanks to the dozens of people who have contributed to producing our worship over the past year plus.

Readers, musicians, preachers, prayers, technical operators, photographers, emailers... It has involved about ten people most weeks to pull together all of the elements that have been making up our worship services and, on behalf of all of us, I express my sincere thanks to each and every one.

Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic - and Beyond

David Townsend introduces reading for September's online book group

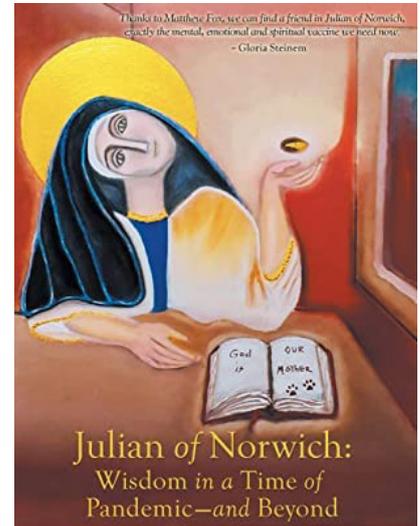
“**Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic – and Beyond**” is the sub-title of a recent book by Matthew Fox about Julian of Norwich.

We are planning to run an online book group, starting in early September, in which we will explore Julian's teachings together. The idea is not to approach Julian in an intellectual way but to read reflectively, using such spiritual practices as *lectio divina*, whereby we ask what she might be saying to us, both as individuals and collectively, in our own time and context.

Perhaps Julian's most famous saying, “All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well”, is understood as some sort of positive thinking. But hopefully, we will discover the deep inner spirituality that undergirds her conviction.

From the back cover of Matthew Fox's book: ‘Julian of Norwich lived through the dreadful bubonic plague that killed close to 50 per cent of Europeans. Being an anchoress she “sheltered in place” and developed a deep wisdom that she shared in her book, *Showings*, which was the first book in English by

a woman. A theologian way ahead of her time, Julian develops a feminist understanding of God as mother at the heart of nature's goodness. Fox shares her teachings in this powerful and timely and inspiring book.’



The book is currently available for less than £10 from Blackwell's and, when I looked, there were several slightly cheaper 'like new' and 'very good' copies available through Biblio UK.

Living and learning the life of Jesus

There is a range of learning opportunities offered through the wider United Reformed Church. Here are two of them.



Stepwise is the discipleship development programme from the United Reformed Church: for “all ages, shapes and sizes – including you!”

“If you are keen to reflect on, and develop, your Christian faith, are ready to be stimulated and challenged, and want to make a difference in your own life and the lives of others, then Stepwise is what you're looking for.

“Stepwise is shaped around your strengths and needs, in the context of your own community and church. It emphasises the importance of learning from your daily life – wherever you are and whoever God might be calling you to be.”

If you would like to know more, visit www.urc.org.uk/stepwise.html.

Church Leadership Programme

Transforming leadership from the inside out

The Church Leadership Programme (CLP) is a comprehensive programme to refresh experienced lay and ordained leaders in authentic leadership, “helping church leaders to develop external skills from their core sense of being”.

A mix of physical and virtual learning, the course threads from September to June every academic year. Each year, participants form into a faith community, committed to each other for encouragement and support. Participants learn in joint sessions and become part of smaller learning groups with a dedicated tutor. Each participant has an individual spiritual accompanier throughout the academic year.

If you would like to know more, visit www.urc.org.uk/education-for-ministry-phase-3.



Nick Fewings on Unsplash

Protecting our planet against plastic

Katrina Tweedie offers ideas for the first five days of AUC’s Plastic-Free July. Other ideas will follow in AUC mailings.

1 July

Plastic assessment: make a quick note of any plastic in your ordinary bin and in your plastic recycling bin. Empty your plastic recycling bin. The aim is to keep it empty! Put your note somewhere visible so you can look back on it at the end of the month.

2 July

Disentangling ourselves from the web of plastic waste is very challenging so let’s help each other. If you have any ideas or questions, email me at katrina.tweedie@augustine.org.uk. I will put them into Not Notices and other people could respond. For example, I can’t think of a way to get round the plastic bin liner we use, especially as we have an outside bin shared with the other three flats in the stair. Any suggestions?

3 July

The obvious (but easily forgotten):

- take your own shopping bag
- take your own coffee cup
- take your own refillable water bottle

Put a reminder on the inside of your door/by your purse.

Watch the short video “Plastic-Free July - It’s as easy as this!” at www.plasticfreejuly.org/resources/videos/

4 July

Only 9% of plastics from recycling bins are recycled. The remaining 91%:

- is sent to poorer countries without proper regulated means of recycling it (but all plastic sent by the UK is certified as ‘recycled’)
- is put into landfill where it leaches out causing environmental degradation, releasing methane and synthetic oestrogen
- becomes litter, which kills animals, for example by strangulation or ingestion
- disintegrates into microplastics, which are ingested by living creatures that are part of our food chain
- is incinerated, a process which is carbon intensive, releasing toxins

AND plastic can only be recycled a limited number of times (most plastic between once and three times). So, my virtuous fleece made from recycled plastic solves nothing! Plastic will ALWAYS end up as waste.

Recycling plastic is not sustainable.

Watch “UK plastic waste being dumped and burned in Turkey” – a BBC video at www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57139474

5 July

Psalm 104: 24 – 30

How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small.

There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

By 2050, we could have more plastic than fish (by weight) in the sea.



Moving thoughts

The process of moving house has been a discipline as well as a journey, Laurence Wareing has discovered.

I was speaking to AUC member Andrew Owens one day, as I was sat surrounded by boxes in preparation for our house move.



I said that the sorting process – which still had far to go – was something like a cross between a counselling session and a Lenten discipline.

It was, as it happened, the season of Lent at the time.

We hadn't moved for over twenty years and our old house had a big loft. We found items that hadn't moved from there in all the time we lived in Penicuik. It's not an unfamiliar experience, I guess.

But quite apart from the practical need to sort and sift and cull and learn to grow a streak of ruthlessness, there was an emotional need too. A felt need to encourage a fresh start – which meant letting go of things that meant something once, but less now.

Not just books we probably would never pick up again or half used sticker books that our daughter once enjoyed then discarded – but letters from our younger selves who we no longer recognised.

Is it possible that is who we were? We weren't dismissive, but we feel so different now – different to ourselves and different with each other.



It's true, what L.P. Hartley wrote: the past *is* a different country.

It was also at this time that I was reading Ann Patchett's novel, *The Dutch House* – I'd recommend it unreservedly for a whole host of reasons, including her reflections on what our past looks like from our present.

Maeve talks to her brother: "I see the past as it actually was", Maeve said. . . "But we overlay the present onto the past. We look back through the lens of what

we know now, so we're not seeing it as the people we were, we're seeing it as the people we are, and that means the past has been radically altered."

"sorting was something like a cross between a counselling session and a Lenten discipline"

As we shifted boxes around the house, deciding what and what was not a treasure to be kept, our past stepped out every now and then to challenge our memories and feelings.

Sometimes we laughed; sometimes we felt a little sad; several times, we simply felt embarrassed.

But we understood that this is OK – to know that the past is different. We've not thrown it out, but we've been gifted the opportunity to step forward with and from it.

We wish we'd stepped forward sooner but have been reminded of this: consciously aiming to live lighter may (paradoxically) involve some effort but the discipline is worth embracing – and not just in Lent.

The bigger picture

Augustine United Church has evolved out of a network of relationships – with other congregations and across the wider United Reformed Church (URC). General Assembly, which takes place in July, is just one reminder of that ‘bigger picture’.

The United Reformed Church’s 50th anniversary is just one topic that will be on the agenda of the denomination’s General Assembly this year.

The gathering will take place 9-12 July online.

Other subjects under discussion will include the new URC learning hub, action towards an anti-racist Church, the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, the future of Pilots (a non-uniformed organisation for children and young people), ministerial disciplinary process, safeguarding, and the pension scheme.

first Synod, and am beginning to think about the second. I am beginning to get my head round the committees and structures – and to learn not to say too often that ‘we did it like this in Eastern.’



We live in challenging times – and we need to find ways of speaking to the moment. At the Episcopal Synod we were asking ourselves whether Church would be missed if it didn’t exist and what is its distinctive contribution?

Those are equally good questions for the Scottish Synod of the United Reformed Church. What do we bring to the party?

We may see ourselves as small, and rightly so – but tiny things can make a huge difference. If you don’t believe that, you have never met a mosquito.

“We may see ourselves as small, but tiny things can make a huge difference”

When we lived in Panama I was once up-country and returned to Panama City where I told my wife that I had at least fifty mosquito bites. She told me not to be so ridiculous, so I counted, and stopped at fifty. Mind you, I didn’t get any sympathy, just a scolding for not taking the right anti-mosquito measures – but I can assure you that tiny things can have a big effect!

With God’s help and blessing, may we discover just how we might do that.



General Assembly is the URC’s key decision-making body, which meets annually to celebrate, discuss, worship and make decisions about the life and work of the denomination. You can find out more, and read reports for this year’s Assembly, on the URC’s web pages.

Six months into the job, the Revd Canon Paul Whittle, Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland, talks about strange times, mosquitoes and coming home.

Thanks to the pandemic, it has been a strange start to this new ministry – but these early months have confirmed the sense of excitement I felt as I approached this new role. It’s a long time since I left Scotland for London, back in 1983, but I have felt a real sense of coming home.

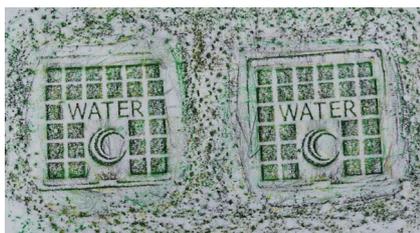
I have managed to lead worship in a few places, some in person and some by Zoom. I have chaired my

The world is more

TLC Youth members have been exploring how we live in a 'More Than _____ World', says Matt Baines, and discovered so much that they (and we) never knew.

We began with a quiz about objects from around the world, and through history, that might be fairly commonplace to the people who used them, but were unfamiliar to our eyes. Here is just a selection of the objects that made us say, "I didn't know I didn't know that!"

Can you guess what they are and what they are for? I won't tell you because I hope to be able to share the video quiz with the wider church soon, and I wouldn't want to spoil the fun!



Manhole cover rubbings



Paper lotus for Buddha Vesak day



Pride artwork

We are very grateful to all our church friends who contributed their items to the video.

We continued our journey in discovering each other's local worlds from Colinton to Virginia Beach. We took a walk around our neighbourhoods to look for overlooked details like manhole covers and took rubbings of their diverse and often detailed designs.

We also travelled further afield to explore a 'More Than Western World' in learning about Vesak, a special day when Buddhists celebrate the birth, enlightenment, and nirvana of Buddha. To celebrate we made paper lotuses, a richly meaningful symbol in Buddhism.

During June, we celebrated a 'More Than Straight World' as we learned about LGBTQ history with special guests Alex and Jo Clare-Young, and made our own Pride artworks in the garden of St Columba's by the Castle.

We've travelled so far, and discovered so much. Where will we go next? The only thing that is certain is that we are sure to be amazed by the wonders of this 'More Than _____ World'.

*Artifacts from other cultures,
Instruments from around the world.
Simple ideas with everyday uses,
Clever inventions to make life easier.
Hidden details from the past,
And animal helpers who make the world of difference.*

*This world is more.
More than you have seen.
More than you have experienced.
More than you expect it to be.
More than you have ever imagined.
More than you have ever dreamed.
This world is more.*



Thanks for giving – a letter from the URC Finance Committee

The following extracts are from a letter being shared with all members and adherents of United Reformed Churches and Local Ecumenical Partnerships across the UK. In difficult times, its message is encouragingly upbeat.

The writers begin by acknowledging that the period since March 2020 has been ‘different’.

Our world, they say, has been transformed, and they speak of the many losses and absences that all of us have experienced in one way or another. They continue:

Financially, things have been extremely tough too. Plate offerings have collapsed; some regular givers have had to reduce or entirely stop giving to support God’s work; and those churches which hire out their premises have seen income from that source disappear.

At denominational level, we feared that these financial troubles would spell disaster for the URC’s Ministry and Mission (‘M&M’) fund. For almost 49 years, the M&M fund has provided stipends, pension contributions and training for all our stipendiary ministers and Church Related Community Workers: paid for according to each congregation’s ability to contribute. We feared that, because the need was less visible than the other calls on your diminished resources, payments to the M&M fund would have stopped first.

We are sorry if we ever doubted you.

It quickly became apparent that, although some congregations had to reduce their pledged giving to the M&M fund, many more of you were continuing to meet the 2020 commitments you had made during better times, despite the struggles that required. By the year end, we had received all but half-a-million pounds of the £18.5 million we’d originally planned for.

Since Church House staff and committees managed to reduce their budgeted expenditure by almost £1 million, your money enabled us to meet the full costs of our Ministries, Education & Learning, Children’s and Youth Work and Mission departments in 2020 as well as covering amounts spent on safeguarding, denominational governance and communications.

What is perhaps even more amazing is that, collectively, you have pledged to give £17.3 million during 2021 despite the financial problems caused by the pandemic being fully apparent well before your offers for this year were made.

We are always grateful for the financial support given each year to the M&M fund by all of you; but this past year has been phenomenal. Of

course, our giving for God’s work is in response to the amazing generosity and love of God which we see in Jesus.

Nonetheless, it is important for us to thank every one of you for what you do for God, your congregation and its and our denominational finances.

Thank you to those of you who have been able to maintain or increase financial support for your church congregation.

Thank you for all your previous financial support to those of you who, after prayerful consideration, have had to reduce or stop giving in response to your changed financial circumstances.

Thank you for the pledges your congregation has made for 2021, in full awareness of the pandemic’s impact.

Yours in Christ,
Ian Hardie (Treasurer) and John Piper (Deputy Treasurer)

on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church Finance Committee

(For more detailed information, you can contact our own AUC treasurer, Ewen Harley.)

A prayer for the summer



Pause to look around



Pause to reflect and create



Pause to bake

For moments of pause this summer, we offer this prayer of the French Jesuit priest and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It is accompanied here by images from Jayson Mannings, a good friend of AUC whose new life on Shetland is inspiring moments of pause, great creativity – and the space to bake!

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress

that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—

and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;

your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,

let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time

(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)

will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit

gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself

in suspense and incomplete.

What's On?

Most of our gatherings and resources are currently online. You can find out details on our website www.augustine.org.uk.

STAYING IN TOUCH

If you wish to receive weekly updates of AUC events please register to receive the Friday email by contacting our Centre Manager (centre.manager@augustine.org.uk).

Find us on 

Check our daily posts on the AUC Facebook page.

Worship

SUNDAYS, 11AM

Join services through the zoom link (see Friday emails), AUC website or Facebook page. Junior Church activity sheet on the website. The Post Service Social Time is a valuable way of keeping in touch with each other 11.45-12.30pm. Link in the Friday email.

TLC Youth

SUNDAYS, 1.30 - C.3.00PM

Inclusive youth group for all young people from S1 up. Email Matt for more information. (See pg. 9)

Our Tribe

FIRST THURSDAY OF THE MONTH, 7.30 – 9.00PM

LGBTQI+ ministry at Augustine United Church.

Contextual Bible Studies

TUESDAY 12-1PM, WEDNESDAY 7.30-8.30PM, THURSDAY 12-1PM

Email our minister, Fiona, to join in.

Midweek Social Time

WEDNESDAYS, 1-2PM

Drop in and chat for 10 mins or the hour. Link in the Friday email.

Church Meeting

SECOND TUESDAY OF THE MONTH, 7.45-9PM

Open to all. Link in the Friday email. Social time from 7.15pm

Church dates in July

Tuesday 6 – Church Council

Sunday 11 – Blended worship

No Church Meeting this month

Church dates in August

Tuesday 3 – Church Council

Sunday 8 – Blended worship

Tuesday 10 – Church Meeting

Sunday 22 – Activity service (Junior Church families)

Seeds deadline

Seeds is published on the Sunday prior to the beginning of each month. The copy deadline for the September edition is **Friday 20 August**.