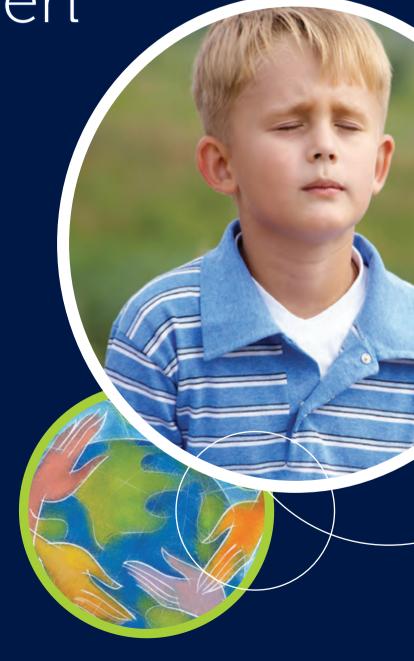
WCCM-CANADA

Christian Meditation with Children

The Canadian Christian Meditation Community Supporting the teaching of meditation in schools



Acknowledgements

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www.trustformeditation.org

What is Christian Meditation?

Meditation is a way of becoming present to God and entering into the prayer of the heart. Learning to pray means much more than memorizing prayers by rote, and/or learning the theory or doctrine of prayer. Christian meditation helps us enter into the actual experience of praying and enables us to fully attend to God while we pray.

Through repetition of the prayer word or mantra, **ma-ra-na-tha**, which means "Come Lord" or "Come Lord Jesus", we become present to God and experience God in the depths of our hearts. It is a meaningful and authentic way to pray and helps children on their faith journey.

Christian Meditation does not replace the Religious education lesson or other forms of prayer. It is ONE form of prayer and it is a discipline that requires practice, concentration and commitment.

Christian Meditation is not a relaxation or visualization activity (although one of the benefits is that we feel more relaxed as we rest in the arms of God). Christian Meditation is different from *mindfulness*, which is also a form of meditation. Mindfulness is a meditative practice which originates in Buddhism, but has gained worldwide popularity as a distinctive method to improve emotional control, self-regulation and increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. Christian Meditation, on the other hand, focuses on God and not a mental reflection on oneself. When we meditate, we move from mental prayer (prayer of the mind) to a deeper level, the heart (the prayer of the heart). It is an acknowledgement that the Spirit dwells within us and that we need to be quiet and still to listen to the Spirit (Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God").

Christian Meditation is a practice that is used worldwide by individuals who seek to deepen their relationship with God. The practice has generated an established network of Christian Meditation groups, including school boards, through the World Community for Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org). Throughout the world, Christian meditators follow a common practice of **Silence, Stillness** and **Simplicity.** It is not meant to be interpreted or modified (e.g., playing nature CDs or soft background music during meditation), so it stays true to its original purpose and intent.

Christian Meditation through the Ages - A Historical Background

Christian Meditation is not new and it is not a fad! Christian Meditation is an ancient form of prayer that we are rediscovering in the western world.

As our lives become frantically busy and driven by consumerism, many people in North America are being drawn to eastern religions with meditative practices such as Buddhism, the Kabbala, Kundalini Yoga and Sufi Islamic mysticism. Recently, Christians have rediscovered our own tradition in meditation through people like Thomas Merton, John Main and Thomas Keating.

Christian Meditation dates back to the 3rd and 4th centuries. In 313 A.D., the ruler Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire through the Edict of Milan. Christians who were previously persecuted found new freedoms and became part of the Roman Empire's power base. They lived in a hectic, commercial world, similar to ours today, and soon bought into the status quo. There was a group of Christian men and women who fled this lifestyle and a collapsing empire to seek God. They entered the desert to seek a life of solitude, simplicity and community. St. Anthony of the Desert was the first we know of to do this. Others began to follow his way.

In the 4th century, St. John Cassian went into the desert of Egypt to sit at the feet of the Christian Hermits to learn about prayer and living an authentic Christian life. Eventually, he became a Desert Father and wrote instructions to his followers to repeat a mantra during prayer and throughout the day so that "one's whole life becomes prayer". Cassian stressed that this practice led to the silence of "pure" prayer, contemplative prayer, without words and images.

John Main was an Irish Benedictine monk who helped laypersons discover the ancient tradition of Christian meditation in the 1970s. Prior to entering the order, he was a diplomat who was introduced to meditation while he was serving in the Far East. During his duties there, he met a swami who lived a life of immense generosity and depth dedicated to serving others. The swami spoke with John about prayer, especially about the swami's way of repeating a mantra throughout his whole meditation. John asked if he could learn to pray this way as a Christian and the swami told him, laughingly, that it could only make him a better Christian. Later in his studies, Fr. John discovered John Cassian's practice of teaching others to use a mantra to meditate.

In 1977, Fr. John Main was invited to Montreal by the Archbishop of Montreal to establish a small Benedictine community dedicated to the practice and teaching of Christian Meditation. This became the origin of an ecumenical network of Christian meditation groups that eventually became the World Community for Christian Meditation. Fr. John Main passed away in 1982, but his work and leadership has been carried on by one of his former students, a Benedictine monk from England. Fr. Laurence Freeman is the current director of the World Community for Christian Meditation. He is committed to continuing John Main's vision of restoring a contemplative dimension to the everyday life of the Church and Christians around the world.

The Fruits of Christian Meditation - Benefits for Children and Adults

- Research shows overwhelming evidence that 80-90% of children have experienced the
 presence of God. This confirms that children have the capacity for contemplation and
 that they are capable of experiencing the presence of God in simple ways.
- Children can meditate and like to meditate! Meditation deepens children's personal relationship with God. It can initiate deep faith conversations that bring children closer to God.
- We are bombarded with an ever-expanding fast-paced world that demands immediacy. We run on the treadmill of busyness. However, meditation provides an antidote to balance this fast-paced, often non-reflective digital era.
- Meditation improves the ability to maintain single-focused attention, even in the face of internal and external distractions. This has implications for students with inattention challenges like ADHD.
- Meditation can improve problem-solving and decision-making skills (e.g., issues from the playground between students are quickly diffused during meditation).
- Patience is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. "Patience is a fruit of meditation, not a skill we work at developing." (Laurence Freeman)
- Meditation leads to increased self-knowledge and self-acceptance.
- Meditation increases the desire to build community with others. Children are more considerate and loving. They are kinder to friends and more compassionate.



- Children learn to sit still for longer periods. They are calm, relaxed and more ready to learn.
- Children who engage in Christian Meditation at school often share their faith with their parents. They bring home their meditative practice and teach it to their parents. For families who do not go to mass, Christian Meditation helps bridge faith between home and school in a simple and experiential way.
- Meditation is having a positive response in local communities. It is a public witness of
 who we are as Christians. There have been cases of inquiries and new registrations of
 students because of the positive sense of community that it helps build.
- Meditation reduces stress and increases children's sense of wellbeing and harmony. Dr. Shanida Nataraja explores extraordinary research that shows practices such as meditation are not only helpful in reducing stress, they may actually be crucial for good health and optimal brain functioning. For example:
 - The frontal cortex of the brain contains the circuitry responsible for screening incoming information for relevant thoughts and images. This becomes especially significant during meditation.
 - By giving the mind a single focus, meditation uses innate neural circuitry to filter out external noises and internal thoughts.
 - Using a mantra to focus attention during meditation triggers activity in the attentionassociation area in the prefrontal cortex of the brain.
 - Long-term meditation is shown to increase the activity in the mid-brain where sensory information travels from the body's sensory organs to the forebrain.
 - Long-term meditation increases activity in the limbic system, thus improving emotional outlook and motivation.
 - During meditation, the thalamus (the gateway for sensory inputs traveling into the cerebral cortex) gets triggered to refocus attention inwards. Distracting thoughts are reduced and attention becomes stronger and stronger until attention can be effortlessly sustained.
 - Meditation has been shown to decrease cortisol levels. Cortisol is a hormone released during periods of stress, so a decrease in cortisol levels reflects a decrease in a person's stress. Cortisol has also been known to suppress the immune system. Both heart rate and blood pressure rise during periods of stress, so it is not surprising that meditation can lead to notable reductions in the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Meditation has been associated with a number of subjective psychological effects.
 Regular meditators report some or all of the following:
 - o a boost in energy levels an increase in productivity, creativity and physical stamina;
 - increased self-acceptance and a gradual release from the tendency to attribute selfblame:
 - o a greater ability to express emotions (both positive and negative);
 - o fewer bouts of irritability or emotional or behavioural outbursts; and/or
 - o an improved and expanded sense of identity.



Christian Meditation with Children ...

Feels Like . . . Sounds Like . . . Looks Like . . . Children and adults sitting discipline Open Our Hearts playing completely still gathered in a on a CD at the start and hard work to avoid prayer circle or community with children joining in singing distractions their: lots of effort and hard work a few deep breaths at the eyes gently closed start in the beginning, but an backs straight easy form of prayer with continued silence while shoulders back more practice repeating the mantra feet flat on the ground if using • a special form of prayer 'ma-ra-na-tha' in your mind chairs or legs crossed if sitting a special time with Jesus We Call on You playing on on the floor CD at the conclusion and calming to be in the hands relaxed comfortably on presence of the Spirit and children joining in singing lap with palms facing up or For some classes, there Christ down may be a soft singing of the songs at the start and conclusion **DOES NOT Feel** DOES NOT Sound Like... DOES NOT Look Like... Like... Children and adults sitting around a visualization of a beach or noises from movements just anywhere with their: other scene and fidgeting whispering voices or talking wasted time eyes open continued loud deep backs and shoulders slouched breathing heads down throat-clearing noises arms or legs outstretched repetition of the mantra out hands fidgeting or playing with loud items that are distractions





Practical Guidelines

Preparing Children for Stillness

- Before beginning, you may wish to try some slow relaxation exercises stretching, breathing, gentle rolling, etc.
- Remind children of the starting position (hands on laps, straight back, breathing naturally). Ask a child at the start to model the position.
- Have words to the songs Open Our Hearts and We Call on You visible for children to join in singing.
- Explain / review why we use the mantra.
- If children are fidgeting, they are not meditating. Teach them to keep coming back to the
 mantra when their mind strays. It may be helpful to remind them to practise by saying
 "maranatha" in their heads. This strategy will also benefit the children who are sitting
 quietly, but are not really engaging with the process.
- Remind children that meditation is a gift to them and that we need to respect others' rights to enjoy it by being still and not distracting others.
- A worthwhile debriefing activity is to have children share the things they feel interfere
 with being able to meditate. Discuss how moving about, looking around, making noises
 and fidgeting with items is distracting and makes meditation harder work and less
 enjoyable.
- Guide the children to focus inwardly and on God, not on what others are doing.
- Place children who have difficulty settling near good role models, or change where they meditate (e.g., sit on a chair instead of on the floor).
- Discuss why we meditate and also the benefits. Emphasize that meditation is a great life skill and they need to try their best so they can experience the benefits.
- Allow students to take ownership by taking turns to do special jobs (e.g., setting up the prayer space, bringing in a sacred object for the prayer space from home, saying a prayer, setting up the CD, blowing out the prayer candle).
- Make Christian Meditation a very special part of the day and establish a daily routine.
 Pick a time with minimal interruptions and one that will benefit children the most in your
 busy schedule (e.g., every day after recess to help calm children and diffuse conflicts
 that occurred on the playground, before instruction, as a natural break between lessons
 in a 100-minute block, etc.).

Not Comfortable With Silence?

- For children who are struggling to close their eyes, encourage them to look at the candle to help them maintain some stillness and quiet.
- In lieu of that, some children might initially need some specific modification with the intent of eventually drawing them back into the full circle (e.g., sit in the circle and turn facing outward, wear headphones, or find a personal spot in the classroom for that child).
- Incorporate the songs from the CD at the start and end. You can also try singing without the CD sometimes.



- If the children are restless during the first days of meditation, do not stop the meditation
 to attend to these issues. Wait until afterwards to gently respond to any questions or
 concerns the children may have and allow them to tell you what would help them
 maintain the quiet.
- If a child is unable to participate due to behavioural or other needs and chooses to remove himself/herself from the meditation, then let the child leave the circle. Provide time and encouragement for the child to join in when ready to meditate.

Other Ideas

- If children claim they are tired or nodding off, remind them that sleeping is not meditating, as meditation is hard work. It is a discipline.
- With respect to children not engaging fully in the process, try not to intervene as it
 interrupts the experience for members of the group. Modelling meditation as their
 teacher will help signal student expectations during this time. Sometimes it may be
 necessary to intervene depending on the particular behaviour. If children are quiet, but
 not engaged, discuss this during debriefing.

Questions young people may raise:

Can we lie down while we meditate?

Response: When we lie down, our bodies may feel it is time to rest or sleep. That is why we sit upright, so that we can stay alert, repeat the mantra, and pay attention to God's presence.

Why do I have to keep my eyes closed?

Response: Keeping our eyes lightly closed helps us to keep from being distracted by things around us.

Why do we have to be so still?

Response: When our bodies are still, it helps our minds to be still too, so that we can pay attention to saying the mantra.

Why do we say 'maranatha'?

Response: The word 'maranatha' is from the language that Jesus spoke, and it was considered a special word. It means "Come Lord Jesus".

What if someone makes a noise and I have to see what's going on?

Response: There will always be noises of some sort, so you just have to keep your eyes closed even if you are curious to see what's going on. What's going on will usually just end up being a distraction.

What should I do if someone (or something) distracts me?

Response: Keep saying the mantra; really listen to it inside your heart, and try not to give the distraction any of your attention.

What if I can't help making noises or moving around while we're in the meditation circle?

Response: Well, see if you can remember that you are a friend to the others in the circle, and friends help each other. When we meditate together, it is important that each person be still and quiet, not just for themselves, but for the others too.



How to Do Christian Meditation

Meditation is not something we do solely in our head. It involves the whole person - body, mind and spirit. Meditation can be described as living in the present moment. It is only in the present moment that we can find what we are looking for. The only place we will find God is here and now. Meditation is letting go of the past and future and coming into the reality of the present moment that is also called the kingdom of God, which is within us. The Spirit prays within us, but we have to do our work.

We need to get rid of our distractions. The early Desert Fathers suggested you take a single word, a mantra, prayer word, sacred word. During meditation you repeat this word through the entire meditation, letting go of the past, future, and your imagination.

It is recommended to use "maranatha". It is the oldest Christian mantra. Say it in four syllables of equal length: ma-ra-na-tha. You say your word faithfully with attention and love. Saying it with attention means you are taking attention away from yourself.

The mind races from one thought to another. We meditate to calm the mind and to bring the mind into the heart. The real stillness is the stillness within. (The above is adapted from a talk by Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB.)

- 1. Sit still and upright with your back straight. This helps you stay alert and awake.
- 2. Place both your feet flat on the floor.
- 3. Place your hands on your lap facing either upwards or downwards.
- 4. Close your eyes lightly.
- 5. Be aware of your normal breathing pattern for a minute or two as you relax.
- 6. Silently, interiorly, begin to say your single word.
- 7. Listen to the sound of your mantra as you say it, gently and continuously.
- 8. Do not think or imagine anything spiritual or otherwise.
- 9. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation; keep returning to simply saying the word.
- 10. Maintain this stillness for the entire period of the meditation.

(Adapted from the Canadian Christian Meditation Community). http://www.wccm-canada.ca/)

Christian Meditation with Children - Debriefing Questions

Open-Ended Questions

- 1. How did you feel while you were participating in Christian Meditation?
- 2. How do you feel after you meditate?
- 3. What do you like about meditating?
- 4. What do you find challenging about Christian Meditation?
- 5. What do you find easy about Christian Meditation?
- 6. What do you find helpful about Christian Meditation?
- 7. What does Christian Meditation mean to you?
- 8. When do you feel is the best time for our class to meditate?
- 9. What could you tell others about Christian Meditation?

Guiding Questions

- 1. How does Christian Meditation help you learn more about yourself?
- 2. How does Christian Meditation help you learn more about your faith?
- 3. How does Christian Meditation help your relationship with God?
- 4. How does Christian Meditation help your relationships with your family and friends?
- 5. How does Christian Meditation help you with your school work or other activities?
- 6. How does Christian Meditation reduce stress or make you feel better?
- 7. How has Christian Meditation helped or changed your class?
- 8. How has Christian Meditation helped or changed your school community?
- 9. How does repeating the mantra help you meditate?





Role of the Principal: Introducing Christian Meditation with Children

Context: Pope Benedict XVI (2006) reminds us in his address to a meeting of Bishops in Switzerland, that it is a fundamental task of pastoral care to teach people how to pray and how to learn to do so personally, better and better. We must show people once again not only that this spiritual dimension exists, but that it is the source of all things.

- As you would for any new program in the school, introduce the concept to the various stakeholders within your community before you begin Christian Meditation with Children (CMWC).
- Start by introducing the program to your staff by way of a staff meeting. Begin by asking
 if anyone has any prior knowledge or experience with Christian Meditation. Draw on the
 experience from your lead teacher and view the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic
 District School Board (BHNCDSB) Christian Meditation video found at
 www.wccm-canada.ca under 'Meditation with Children'.
- After introducing Christian Meditation to your staff, invite those staff interested to begin
 the prayer process with their class.
- Send home a letter (see sample below) and introduce it to your parent council. It is
 easier to introduce meditation to children when other adults in the community are
 supportive.
- To set the tone for its importance and to help staff and parents feel more comfortable
 with Christian Meditation, begin using the practice regularly to open staff meetings and
 council meetings (e.g., begin with two minutes of Christian Meditation and increase over
 time).
- Have a discussion with the staff involved around the consistency of the experience in your building (e.g., timing, setting, resources, prayer centre, etc.). Take the pulse of what is working well and offer suggestions / support to your staff so they can make adjustments that will enhance the routine and experience for students.
- Encourage staff to share their experience with their colleagues (e.g., formally at a staff meeting or bring it up in conversation in the staff room).
- Invite interested teachers to visit the lead teacher's classroom to experience CMW C.
 Principals should be willing to cover a class for this to occur.
- Participate in classroom meditations regularly. Let the students see your willingness to be with them as they pray. Ask them questions to demonstrate your heightened interest in the experience. If possible, be a part of the debriefing process.
- Check in with staff regularly to see how the experience of CMWC is going. Celebrate and encourage the practice.
- Invite Resource Teachers from the Christian Meditation Community to offer Workshops, retreats and presentations at staff meetings.



Response to Parent or Community Inquiries:

- A misconception exists that meditation is Eastern, Oriental or Buddhist. It is a universal spiritual practice. Historically, it is a Christian tradition that dates back as far as the Desert Fathers and Mothers meditating in the fourth and fifth centuries.
- It does not replace other forms of prayer or reading scripture or sacraments. It can, however, offer clarity to reading scriptures more richly and gratefully.
- Students will not experience altered states of consciousness. They are fully alert and enter the present moment. What they do is discover the presence of God within them.
- Christian Meditation aligns with the Ontario Religious Education Curriculum (For Grades 1 through 8, it falls under one of the six Curricular Strands - PRAYING. In Secondary, it falls under one of the five Course Expectations - Prayer and Sacramental Life.) www.iceont.ca/ontario_catholic_curriculum.aspx
- Meditation is experiential. We need to experience meditation to start to understand it.
 Invite parents to ask their children about their personal experiences with Christian Meditation and to try to meditate with their children at home (their children make excellent teachers!).

Songs

Open Our Hearts

Words & Music: Michael Mangan

Jesus, open our ears to hear your voice,

Open our eyes to see your face,

Open our mouths to speak your words,

Open our hearts to your love,

Open our hearts to your love.

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We Call on You

Words & Music: Michael Mangan

We call on you, O God,
And on Jesus Christ your Son,
Through the power of the Spirit,
Who makes us truly one.
We ask you bless us,
And lead us in your ways,
As you guide us on our journey
Every day.

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School Letterhead



Date

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

In our busy world, children are bombarded at an early age with noises, stimuli, and a message to keep busy. Our consistent fast pace can detract from our ability to be discerning believers. One of the ways to achieve this is by teaching students the practice of Christian Meditation.

Christian meditation is a simple way of silent prayer practiced by Christians as early as the fourth century. Children are natural meditators and readily open their hearts and minds to God's abiding presence within and around them.

Meditation is not about getting into altered states of consciousness or seeing and experiencing anything out of the ordinary. It is about entering more fully into the ordinary and discovering there the absolute wonder of the presence of God.

Over time, meditation changes us as we develop a daily practice. The change can best be described in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22)

Staff from _____School attended a workshop on Christian Meditation with Children led by educators and resource teachers from the Canadian Christian Meditation Community. CCMC is a part of the World Community for Christian Meditation whose Director is Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB. The workshop provided resources and practical approaches to introducing meditation in a classroom setting.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Townsville, Australia have been teaching Christian Meditation to students for 12 years. Their experience is showing that children and adolescents enter more easily into Christian Meditation than adults. Their results are showing that Christian meditation is proven to:

- make children calmer and more relaxed
- help create a sense of wonder in children
- help create a sense of God in those who meditate
- help create a sense of community
- allow children a chance to be silent and experience God's presence in silence
- allow children a chance to enter into the present moment

As part of introducing Christian Meditation to children, several of our teachers will be bringing this prayer into their respective classrooms.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. I encourage you to speak with your children about their experience as they begin Christian Meditation prayer in their classroom.

Sincerely,	
Principal	

Useful Resources Related to Christian Meditation with Children

Websites

www.wccm.org - The World Community for Christian Meditation International Centre

<u>www.wccm-canada.ca</u> _ - Canadian Community of The World Community for Christian Meditation.

<u>www.wccmmeditatio.org</u> – Outreach of The World Community for Christian Meditation

<u>www.theschoolofmeditation.org</u> – The School of Meditation – includes helpful PDF documents and tips for practicing CMW C

<u>www.cominghome.org.au</u> – Coming Home website focused on Christian Meditation for children and young people

Blog - www.wccm-eb.ca

Publications

Ryan, Gregory. *My Happy Heart* – A picture book and CD to facilitate CMWC in the classroom. Christie, Ernie. *Coming Home – A Guide to Teaching Christian Meditation to Children (2008)*Book and DVD

Battagin, Jeannie. A Child's Way: How to Teach and Practice Christian Meditation with Children.

Simon, Madeline RSCJ. Born Contemplative

Posnett, Charles & Patty. Meditation with Children

Meditatio: Journal on Education

Meditation and Education

Freeman, Laurence. Meditation with Children

Freeman, Laurence. Your Daily Practice: A practical little manual on meditation.

Harris, Paul. Silence, Stillness and Simplicity - Daily readings from John Main

DVDs

Christian Meditation with Children – An Introduction

Christian Meditation – A Spiritual Practice for Our Modern Times (Townsville, Australia)

The School Journey – The story of Christian Meditation in UK Primary Schools

CDs

Freeman, Laurence & Cathy Day. Meditation with Children

Meditatio. *Time for Prayer.* MP3 on CD. Periods of silence with opening and closing chimes and music. Sheet music and lyrics for songs.

Freeman, Laurence. Like a Child.

For descriptions, prices and ordering information please see www.wccm-canada.ca

Or contact; Canadian Christian Meditation Community Bookstore.

P.O. Box 52, Station NDG, Montreal, QC. H4A 3P4

Tel: 514-485-7928. Email: christianmeditation@bellnet.ca



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The Canadian Christian Meditation Community National Resource Centre

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