

CCMC

Group Leader Resource Manual



The Canadian Christian Meditation
Community

WCCM Canada 2012

Revised July 2015



Please read, use and enjoy this revised edition of Canadian Christian Meditation Community Group Leader's Manual developed for leaders of Christian Meditation groups across Canada. This resource is a response from the National Council to meditators requesting more support for local groups.

We hope this resource will encourage groups to share their experience of Christian Meditation and provide a guide for teaching and planning.

- **Find** the Handbook on our Canadian web site, www.wccm-canada.ca in the "More" menu under Group Leaders.
- **Print** any updated information and add it to your existing binder or download the entire PDF. Alternately use it as an online resource.
- **Request** a Handbook via post. A donation of \$30 covers the costs of copying and mailing. Please send your cheque to CCMC at 734 Hamlet Road, Ottawa, ON K1G 1P8.
- **Send** suggested revisions, additions or corrections to Colleen Donald, cmdonald@telus.net

Thank you to the many Community volunteers who created this resource. The Manual is the result of many hours of creative work and years of experience in sharing our Mission.

Canadian Christian Meditation Community Mission Statement

“To communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of John Main in the Christian tradition, in the spirit of serving the unity of all.”



The Two Doves, Symbol of The World Community for Christian Meditation

The dove is a Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit. Christian art often portrayed the gifts of the Holy Spirit as doves drinking the waters of wisdom and Eternal life.

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Founding Teachers

Founding Teachers

John Main OSB



John Main was born in England in 1926. As a young man serving in the diplomatic corps in the Far East, he was introduced to meditation. A Hindu monk taught him to pray in silence by the repetition of a single word or mantra. As a Christian, he incorporated the saying of the mantra into his daily prayers. Gradually John Main says he realized that his twice-daily meditation times were becoming "the real axis" of his life. He decided to enter a Benedictine monastery and some years later, John Main discovered that his experience of the mantra - the repetition of a single word or verse as a way of entering into silence and becoming present to Christ within our heart, was a deeply rooted part of Christian tradition.

In 1975, John Main, OSB (1926-1982) opened the first Christian Meditation Centre at his monastery in London. He had recovered a simple tradition of silent, contemplative prayer from the teachings of the early Christian monks, the Desert Fathers. It soon became clear to him that this tradition had relevance today not only for monks. He saw it as a way for the renewal of the church and the world. He formed a new monastery in Montreal in the late 1970's and from there the teaching of Christian Meditation has spread around the world. John Main died in Montreal in December 1982.

Having at first been introduced to meditation through its universal tradition in the East many years before he had become a monk, he was experientially prepared to recognize the essential Christian expression of the teaching when he encountered it in the Conferences of John Cassian and the Christian medieval tradition in the late sixties. It was not, however, until a few years later that he realized how deeply enriching and universal this approach to contemplation could be in the church at large.

At first, he had seen it as a way of monastic renewal. However, through his experience of teaching lay people of all ages and walks of life, at his monastery in London, he understood that here was a simple yet transforming practice of the prayer of the heart that could be

followed as a gentle and daily discipline by all disciples of Jesus. John Main's theology of meditation is both Christocentric and profoundly Trinitarian as this prayer shows. He has been aptly called a 'Trinitarian mystic'. Many individual meditators and meditation groups around the world today begin their silent meditation with this short prayer that takes them beyond all words and comprehends the mystery of silence in the experience of the God who is communion in love.

In 1976, shortly after he had begun his public teaching on meditation, John Main composed this prayer for his first set of tapes. Later it was published in his first book "Word into Silence." In few words, it expresses both the essence of the Christian understanding of prayer and the sense that we do not pray in isolation but also as members of the community of the Body of Christ.

Opening Prayer

***"Loving God, open our
hearts to the silent
presence of the spirit of
your Son***

***Lead us into that
mysterious silence
where your love is
revealed to all who call,
'Maranatha...Come, Lord
Jesus'."***

John Main OSB

The mantra, 'maranatha', that was John Main's preferred recommendation to people beginning meditation is the oldest Christian prayer. It means 'Come, Lord', in Aramaic, the language of Jesus. It is found at the end of St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. (16:22) It has become evident in recent years that meditation, as a way of tolerance and compassion, builds a bridge of the spirit between peoples of different faiths, between rich and poor, and between all those suffering conflict or division. The great social and psychological distresses of modern society call for a deep contemplative response. John Main believed that each human being, whatever their lifestyle, is called to this contemplative path.

His teaching continues through the World Community for Christian Meditation, and his books, letters and recordings.

John Main Books

Sacrament - New Edition

Word Into Silence

The Heart of Creation

Word Made Flesh

The Way of Unknowing

*Moment of Christ- New Edition**Door To Silence*

Christian Meditation- The Gethsemai Talks

The Hunger for Depth and Meaning - John Main

Silence and Stillness in Every Season

Community of Love

Laurence Freeman OSB



Laurence Freeman is a monk of the Olivetan Benedictine Congregation of Monte Oliveto Maggiore and Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation. He was born in England where he was educated by the Benedictines and studied English Literature at Oxford University. Before entering monastic life, he had experience with the United Nations, banking and journalism. In the monastery, his spiritual teacher was John Main with whom he studied and whom he helped in the establishment of the first Christian Meditation Centre in London.

In 1977, he went with John Main at the invitation of the Archbishop of Montreal to establish a Benedictine community of monks and laypeople dedicated to the practice and teaching of Christian meditation. Fr. Laurence studied theology at the Université de Montreal and at McGill University. He made his solemn monastic profession in 1979 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1980. After John Main's death in 1982, he continued the work of teaching meditation that had now begun to develop a global community. In 1991, Fr. Laurence returned to England to establish the International Centre of the newly formed World Community for Christian Meditation that is now present in about a hundred countries.

Laurence Freeman is the author of many books and articles, the editor of John Main's works, and a member of the Board of Medio Media, the publishing arm of the World Community. Freeman is also the founder and director of the John Main Centre for Meditation and Inter-religious Dialogue at Georgetown University.

He has conducted dialogues and peace initiatives, such as the historic Way of Peace with the Dalai Lama and is active in inter-religious dialogue with other faiths. Freeman is active in

encouraging the teaching of Christian meditation to children and students and in the re-appropriation of the contemplative wisdom tradition in the Church and society at large.

In 2009, Fr. Laurence was appointed Officer of the Order of Canada “for his contributions as spiritual leader and director of the World Community for Christian Meditation and as a proponent of peace and inter-religious dialogue and understanding.

His current work focuses on secular outreach through the WCCM Meditatio Program, which was established to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of WCCM. This initiative comprises a series of Meditatio Seminars (2010 on Meditation and Children; 2011 Meditation and Mental Health; 2012 Meditation and Inter-Religious Dialogue), the networking of young meditators in the global community and the development of web-based technology to spread a contemplative message

Fr. Laurence Freeman Books

Why Are We Here?

The Goal of Life

First Sight – The Experience of Faith

A Short Span of Days

The Selfless Self

A Pearl of Great Price

Christian Meditation- Your Daily Practice

The Inner Pilgrimage

Monastery Without Walls – John Main

Light Within

Jesus the Teacher Within

A Simple Way

Common Ground

September 11th

Web of Silence

Closing Prayer

At the opening of the first Christian Meditation Centre in London in 1984 Laurence Freeman composed this prayer a few minutes before the people attending the blessing of the house arrived. The prayer grew out of this particular group's experience that meditation, the practice of contemplation, creates and nurtures the growth of community into the full human maturity of peace and justice. Although meditation is a solitary practice, it reveals solitude as the recognition and acceptance of each person's eternal uniqueness and the eternal and unique value we share with every creature in the cosmos. From this, naturally flows the power of compassion, which is the pure fruit of meditation and the most powerful force in the world for the transformation of darkness into light, for the healing of human wounds and the relief of suffering. Groups throughout The World Community have adopted the Closing Prayer for Christian Meditation.

Closing Prayer

By Laurence Freeman OSB

"May this community be a true spiritual home for the seeker, a friend for the lonely, a guide for the confused.

May those who teach here be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to serve all who come, and to receive them as Christ Himself.

In the silence of this Community may all the suffering, violence, and confusion of the world encounter the Power that will console, renew and uplift the human spirit.

May this silence be a power to open the hearts of men and women to the vision of God, and so to each other, in love and peace, justice and human dignity.

May the beauty of the divine life, fill this community and the hearts of all who pray here, with joyful hope.

May all who come here weighed down by the problems of humanity leave giving thanks for the wonder of human life.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen."

The Essential Teaching

The Essential Teaching

From "Jesus the Teacher Within" Laurence Freeman, OSB

Meditation is as natural to the spirit as breathing is to the body. Deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, it is an ancient spiritual discipline, a simple way into peace within oneself and union with the Spirit of Christ. This is not to say that meditation is "the only way" to pray or the only way to wisdom. But meditation – silence, stillness, and simplicity - does lead to the experience of wholeness that opens, in faith, to holiness. Holiness is the integration of wisdom and compassion applied to daily living. Because it is simple and yet calls for discipline, this tradition advises the following simple practice:

- Choose a quiet place.
- Sit down comfortably, with your back straight.
- Close your eyes lightly.
- Sit as still as possible.
- Breathe deeply, staying both relaxed and alert.
- Slowly and interiorly, begin to say your mantra or prayer word. Listen to the word as you say it.
- Continue repeating it gently and faithfully for the whole time of the meditation.
- Return to it as soon as you realize you have stopped saying it.
- Stay with the same word during the meditation and from day to day

You don't have to evaluate your meditation. The fruits will appear in yourself and in your life and in all your relationships. Do not be discouraged or disappointed by finding how distracted you are. That is why we meditate, to go through the distractions. So there is no need to try to repress or blank out your thoughts or images. Just let them come and go, but keep your attention on the mantra – the prayer word or sacred word.

The mantra we recommend is **maranatha**, an ancient Christian prayer from the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic. It means 'Come Lord'. Repeat the word in four equal syllables, **ma-ra-na-tha**. Listen to the word as you say it and give it your full attention, but do not think about its meaning. Distractions will come and go but do not try to repress or fight them. Simply let them pass. When you do find that you have got distracted again, some thought or daydream has hooked your attention, simply return, in faith and love, to the word. This is what the Cloud of Unknowing calls the 'work of the word'. Cassian taught "to say the word in

prosperity and in adversity.” Meditate twice a day, ideally in the early morning and early evening. The optimal length of time for meditation is thirty minutes, but you can begin with twenty and gradually increase to twenty- five minutes or the full half hour. Be patient, simple and practice.

Cassian on the Mantra

John Cassian

At the turn of the sixth century the Mediterranean world was witnessing the decline of Roman rule that had formed the bedrock of its civil order. During the chaos of those years, there arose in the deserts of Egypt and Syria monastic movements that offered men and women a radical God-centered alternative to the present society. Among the most eloquent interpreters of this new movement to western Europe was John Cassian (c.365-c435)

John Cassian-Conferences Paulist Press The Classics of Western Spirituality 1985

‘This is the verse that the mind should unceasingly cling to, until strengthened by saying it over and over again and repeating it continually, it renounces and lets go of all the riches of thought and imagination. Restricting itself to the poverty of this single verse, it will come most easily to that first of the Gospel beatitudes: for he says, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ - John Cassian (400AD), Conference 10:11

Once you have begun this as a simple daily practice, there are a few guidelines concerning your attitude to the experience that will help you to go deeper. First, don’t assess your progress. The feeling of failure – or success – may be the biggest distraction of all. Do not expect or look for ‘experiences’ in meditation. You don’t have to feel that anything should be happening. This may seem odd at first, because the experience of silence is so unfamiliar to most of us personally and so different from what we may think that prayer means.

We are not used to being simple. The silence, stillness, and simplicity, however, do have an ultimate purpose. In one of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus compared the Kingdom to a seed that someone plants in the ground. The person then goes off to live an ordinary life while the seed grows silently in the earth, ‘how he does not know’. The same thing happens to us, as the word is rooted evermore deeply in our hearts. And, as in the parable, there will, in time, be signs of growth. You will not always find them in your meditation itself, but in your life. You will begin to harvest the fruits of the spirit; you will find that you are growing

in love. And if you ever stop the practice of meditation, whether for a day or a month or a year, simply return to it with confidence in the infinite generosity of the Spirit that dwells in and among us all.

On John Main & the Christian Contemplative Tradition

"One of the essential teachings I have taken from John Main and the Christian contemplative tradition that he has helped restore is the importance of a particular kind of stability or faithfulness in the daily practice of meditation. In being faithful to and with the mantra, we are 'staying'. That relates directly to what the Desert Fathers teach about stability. The whole practice of staying with the mantra and the discipline of meditating, the saying of the prayer "formula" makes most sense within the context of the kind of life the Desert Fathers talk about. That means a life where we are always trying to put our self-preoccupation and self-dramatizing, our compulsion to be in charge to one side."

Preparing for the Meditation Period

After listening to the recorded talk or a reading, move into the time of meditation. If the people have been sitting for a long time allow a few moments to stand and stretch while keeping everyone silent. It can be useful to lead a couple of stretching exercises before sitting again if you feel comfortable in doing this. If not, allow a few moments of silence of recollection before introducing the meditation. *Do not be afraid to take a few moments to help the group to get into the best possible position for the meditation.*

Give instructions on how to sit. If you are sitting on a chair sit well into the back of the seat of the chair, then use the back of the chair to guide you rather than to prop you up. The most important rule of posture is that the spine should be upright. You need to ensure that your head, ribcage and pelvis can find their natural alignment over each other. Then you are balanced and do not need to hold yourself up. The crown of the head should be as if drawn up to the ceiling with the chin towards the chest not pointing forwards or up. This allows the back of the neck to be long and free and therefore relaxed. \place your feet flat on the floor. If you are on the floor or on a prayer stool, the same rules apply to the spine. It should be poised and upright, but not strained or tense or rigid. It is important to take time at home to find the best way of sitting.

However you choose to sit, it is important that you do not spend the time of meditation thinking about the pain you are in or any discomfort. The body should be as attuned as possible without being strained or in pain. Your capacity to sit well will grow with the practice. Remember the first step to stillness is sitting still for the time of the meditation.

Now that you are settled, take a few moments to feel your body and be aware of the points of contact with chair or ground. Feel your natural weight resting.

Become aware of your breathing. Feel the inflow and the outflow of the breath. Our breath is the breath of life. Breath is the same word as spirit in many languages, so being aware of our breathing is very helpful in becoming still. Do not alter your breath; just try to allow your abdomen to move so that the breath flows into the base of the lungs. This abdominal breathing is excellent for health as well as for meditation.

Repeat the mantra in four equal syllables. MA-RA-NA-THA. As you say the word, listen to it and allow it to sink from the mind into the heart. Do not think about its meaning. John Main observed that many people say the mantra in time with the rhythm of their breathing

or heartbeat. If you can do one or the other, that is fine. However, he said if you cannot say it naturally to either, then “just say it, as much as you are able.” It is important always to use the same word once you have chosen one, so that it can become rooted in your being and say itself there. Do not use the mantra to knock out thoughts or repress feelings. Be very gentle and simply keep returning your attention lightly but faithfully to the word every time you get distracted. Come back without self-blame or criticism.

Have a peaceful beginning and ending. Having given the lead in instruction, tell them that the meditation period will begin and end with a couple of minutes of quiet music. This is merely to help them to put aside the words that have been used up until now. It is also possible to use a chime or bowl.

At the end, give the group adequate time to come out of the meditation, especially if a question and answer period is to follow. Here it could be useful to warn people always to take some time to come out of meditation and to recommend ways of timing the meditation at home. There are CD’s available with a selection of pre-recorded music, followed by silence for the meditation time and then more music signalling the end of the meditation. You may have used one of these to time the meditation or a soft beeper to avoid the distraction of “watching the clock” during the time of meditation.

Length of time. It could be mentioned here that most people begin with 20 minutes and gradually increase it to 30 minutes, which is the optimum time. Stress the importance of regularity and twice-daily meditations if one wishes to take up this way of prayer. It is useful to point out that taking up meditation often takes people time. We are always beginning and it takes time to get started. There may be starts and stops. Commitment grows the more we persevere on the path, until it becomes central to our lives.

Recommended Meditation Guide and Readings for Christian Meditation Retreats

Fr. Laurence Freeman has developed Guidelines for Readings and Meditation at WCCM retreats. Most retreats have scripture and readings before and after meditation, but these guidelines provide structure and consistency to the meditation sessions throughout the world community.

- *If there are two meditations in the morning before breakfast, the first begins and ends without readings.*
- *Retreatants should be told to be punctual and if they arrive after the meditation has begun to meditate outside the room so as not to disturb the group.*
- *Readers should be well-chosen for clarity and confidence of speech.*
- *Chants or music can be used before the starting bell and after the ending bell of the meditation.*
- *Meditation times on retreat should normally be 30 minutes but not less than 25.*
- *Chairs and cushions should be offered.*
- *Instruction on posture as well as the essential teaching should be given at the beginning of the retreat.*
- *The other times of meditation should be framed as indicated below with the readings indicated.*

Morning Prayer and Meditation:

- **Leader:** *O God, come to my assistance.*
R: *O Lord, make haste to help me.*
All: *Glory be to the Father....*
- **Psalm** (recited or sung as appropriate)
- **New Testament reading**
- **Opening Prayer:**
Heavenly Father, open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son.
Lead me into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call call,
Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus
- **Music or bell** before meditation
- **Meditation**
- **Music or bell** after meditation
- **Reading** from the Gospel
- **Closing prayer**
_Leader: *May the Divine assistance remain always with us.*
All: *And with our absent brothers and sisters. Amen*

Midday Prayer and meditation

- **Leader:** *O God, come to my assistance.*
R: *O Lord, make haste to help me.*
All: *Glory be to the Father....*
- **Psalm** (recited or sung as appropriate)
- **New Testament reading**

- **Opening Prayer:**
*Heavenly Father, open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your son.
Lead me into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call
Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus*
- **Music or bell** before meditation
- **Meditation**
- **Music or bell** after meditation
- **Reading** from John Main
- **Closing prayer**
*Leader: May the Divine assistance remain always with us.
All: And with our absent brothers and sisters. Amen*

Evening Prayer and Meditation

- **Leader** *O God, come to my assistance.*
R: O Lord, make haste to help me.
All: Glory be to the Father....
- **Psalm** (recited or sung as appropriate)
- **New Testament reading**
- **Opening Prayer:**
*Heavenly Father, open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son.
Lead me into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call,
Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus*
- **Music or bell** before meditation
- **Meditation**
- **Music or bell** after meditation
- **Interfaith or Other Reading.**
- **Closing prayer**
*Leader: May the Divine assistance remain always with us.
All: And with our absent brothers and sisters. Amen*

The Weekly Meditation Group

The Weekly Meditation Group

Why Meditation Groups Matter Today

In any active project we usually need a team to support us with the varied talents of its individual members; so, in the work of contemplation, we need community to help us get started and to persevere. Meditation, as John Main knew, creates community because it reveals how we are all connected and how interdependently we develop. The meditation group illustrates this truth. There is nothing new about Christians coming together to pray. It is forever renewing. It was said of the small Jerusalem church that formed after the death and resurrection of Jesus that ‘the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; they joined in continuous prayer’.

We can see this in meditation groups today. In the last few decades there has been a spiritual transformation of the religious landscape, a silent revolution, a revolution in silence. It has been led not by a cloistered few but by ordinary men and women living in the world, making ends meet and working and raising families. So this has not been an academic discovery. The practice of meditation in the lives of so many people has awakened an awareness that the contemplative dimension of prayer is open to each of us and it is necessary for us all, religious and non-religious alike. Access is not restricted. It is a privilege of grace given by the Spirit to all. But like all gifts of the Spirit, we must do our part. Contemplation is a gift and like all gifts it has to be accepted. If we are to live our particular vocation in daily life with depth and meaning, we must actively receive the gift of our potential for contemplation, tending it with humble devotion and daily fidelity.

It is no news that Christianity is in a turbulent transition from a medieval to a modern mentality. If we listened only to the media and the sociologists we might even conclude that it is in terminal decline. Certainly its structures and attitudes are going through a death process, but within the Christian view of death there is a certain hope of resurrection. The Christian meditation group is one of those positive and hopeful signs of renewed life, an authoritatively silent sign that the spirit prevails over chaos and breakdown and brings about new harmony and order.

Meditation is a universal practice that leads beyond words, images and thoughts into that faith-filled and presence-filled emptiness, the poverty of spirit, that we call the silence of God. What is particularly Christian about it is the awareness that by faith it takes us directly into the prayer of Jesus himself. This means it leads us into a transformative discovery of his indwelling presence (‘Christ in you’). When we share in the human consciousness of Jesus, who is simultaneously open to each of us and to God, we begin to be more truly open to one another. We can create and experience the evolving union of persons that we call community. As the fruits of the spirit appear – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control – so also does the grace of recognizing Jesus in our deeper selves and in one another.

Laurence Freeman OSB (Extract from ‘A Pearl of Great Price’)

The Weekly Group Meeting

John Main's hope that the teaching would be shared in an organic way through small groups of men and women meeting regularly in homes, parishes and work-places has been more than fulfilled, as there are now in addition to the ones he mentioned groups in schools, hospitals, hospices, cancer centers and prisons. In Georgetown University Business School Christian Meditation was introduced as part a MBA Course there. In fact, there are now 2257 groups meeting weekly in more than 53 countries in the world.

John Main had a clear understanding of the need of a community of faith that would solidify one's own commitment to the spiritual discipline of meditation: *"In contact with others we awaken to the deeper truth of our being that we are meant to see, and so we learn to travel beyond ourselves. This is why meditating regularly, whether daily or weekly, with the same group or community is such a healthy sustenance to our pilgrimage. We cannot maintain the delusion of an isolated pilgrimage when we are present with others. And yet, this very physical and spiritual presence recalls us to a deeper personal commitment to stillness, to silence and to fidelity.....The group or community similarly signals the end to all false heroism and self-dramatization. Being in touch with the ordinary failings and limitations of others puts our resources and fidelity into perspective, which we need for balance and harmony in our life. In the presence of others we know ourselves."*(The Present Christ)

Meditators instinctively realize that this is a journey that is difficult to make alone; it is so much easier if we make it with others. It is true that no one else can meditate for us; we meditate in solitude every day, but at the same time we realize that meeting with others on a common pilgrimage can give us the support we need to carry on the journey.

The group setting also enables beginners to learn 'how' to meditate. Newcomers can be integrated into a group at any point in time. Experience has also demonstrated that when a group starts in a new geographic area, people who have never meditated before will join the group. New groups introduce new people to meditation.

The important reasons why we should meet in a meditation group once a week is therefore clear: it promotes a spiritual bond amongst the members and a mutual concern between those who have set out on a common pilgrimage. In commenting about meditating in a group, Fr William Johnston SJ, in his book, *'The Inner Eye of Love'*, says: *"For example we can sit together in silent and wordless meditation. And in such a situation we can feel not only the silence in our hearts but the silence of the whole group. Sometimes such silence will be almost palpable and it can unite people more deeply than any words."* This sharing of silence is the heart of the meditation group meeting. The power and strength of meditating together comes from the words of Jesus, *'Where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them'* (Matt 18:20).

Kim Nataraja - WCCM International School Coordinator

What are the characteristics of a Christian Meditation group?

The mission statement of The World Community for Christian Meditation is:

“To communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of John Main in the Christian tradition in the spirit of serving the unity of all.”

When does a meditation group belong to the World Community for Christian Meditation? The answer to that in a nutshell is: when the justification for the silent prayer, which is the most important part of a meeting, is founded on the teaching of John Main OSB and Laurence Freeman OSB. The weekly meeting is an opportunity to absorb the teaching more deeply. They give us a spiritual boost each week: part of the food we need for the journey.

The meditation group is different from the ordinary prayer group. Although meditation does not exclude other forms of prayer it is, for meditators, the foundation of their spiritual life. Therefore the weekly meditation group does not focus on vocal prayer, petition or praise.

Any one is welcome to join a group. Questions are never asked about their religious or spiritual affiliations. If people make it known that their roots are in another discipline they are encouraged to enter and maintain the silence in the way they were taught and are used to. But the focus of the group never wavers from John Main's and Laurence Freeman's teaching. Newcomers will soon find how universal this teaching is, an inspiration for anyone on the spiritual path.

Some people keen to start a meditation group may well start by attracting others by offering yoga and meditation or tai chi/chi kung and meditation. These disciplines are an excellent physical preparation for meditation. But it is important to emphasize that the meditation we teach is a spiritual discipline, not just a way of relaxation and dealing with stress. It is perfectly possible to use meditation purely for its health benefits as a body and mind altering relaxation technique and stop there. But that would be a missed opportunity; there is much more to meditation than its physiological effects on the body. It is a discipline on the way to personal transformation, to clarity of vision and total awareness.

Let me remind you of the format of a Christian Meditation group: There are 6 steps:

1. A short introduction – not more than 10 – 15 minutes – including a reminder of the basic discipline. Often a recording.

2. Clear indication of the start and finish of meditation by sounding a gong; perhaps some gentle music to help people to settle down.
3. The introductory prayer of the Community: *Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the silent presence of the Spirit of your Son. Lead us into that mysterious silence, where your love is revealed to all who call. Maranatha, Come Lord.*
4. 25-30 minutes of meditation
5. Final prayer
6. Opportunity for questions

Kim Nataraja WCCM International School Coordinator

Receive weekly readings by E-mail from the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM).

To subscribe, go to www.wccm.org and click on “Weekly Readings” and “Weekly Teachings”.

WEEKLY READINGS –*Wisdom Inspiration for every day.*

WEEKLY TEACHINGS –*for group formation.*

The Christian Meditation Group Leader

The qualities of a group leader

- A personal commitment to meditation as taught in the Christian Meditation Community.
- A wish to share this gift with others.
- A sense of belonging to the World Community for Christian Meditation, which this teaching has created around the world.

The responsibilities of a group leader

- To be a stable centre for the group's weekly meeting. To be there or arrange for the group to be led by another. To arrange the practical aspects of time and space for the meeting. To have the tape or talk prepared and to time the meditation.
- To welcome newcomers and introduce them to the teaching and to the other members of the group in a friendly way. To show an interest in the newcomer's questions and progress.
- To encourage the daily practice of the twice-daily commitment to meditation but also recognize that it takes people time to build up this discipline.
- To be the contact person to the wider community of meditation, locally and globally.

Challenges of leading a group

- To see that the meaning and strength of the group is found in its faith not its numbers. A group of 2 or 3 is as good as a group of 20 or 30.
- To see that people may come to the group for a while and then move on. You cannot tell what the Spirit may have done in that person through their short stay in the group.
- To deepen your own personal practice of meditation in order to be better present for others.
- To see that your experience of God is deepened by being part of the way that others come to know God.

Summary of talk by Laurence Freeman OSB in Singapore

Ten Tips on How to Lead a Christian Meditation Group

By Paul T. Harris

1. The group leader can plan and prepare for the weekly meeting in advance by listening to a John Main, Laurence Freeman, or other recorded talks distributed through the Community, in order to lead any discussion or answer any questions regarding the content of the talk.
2. As meditators arrive for the weekly meeting, the group leader can play suitable quiet music to calm members down from the busyness and stress of family/work concerns and prepare them for the contemplative atmosphere of the group meeting.
3. If a newcomer arrives at the meeting in advance of the start time the group leader can welcome the newcomer, go over the agenda of the meeting, and suggest the reading of the leaflet "What is Christian Meditation" (5 minutes' reading time) or other suitable material. This gives the newcomer at least some idea of the nature and content of the teaching and practice before the meeting starts.
4. Many group leaders prepare and make available printed hand-outs on various aspects of the teaching (e.g. the mantra, distractions, life of John Main, etc.) for members of the group, as well as other pertinent material including a variety of books for sale on Christian meditation by various authors.
5. The group leader can light a candle before the meeting begins, symbolic of the presence of Christ and the words of Jesus. "Where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them".
6. At the beginning of the meeting, the group leader can welcome any newcomers and introduce them by name. Encourage any other members of the group, who may wish to comment on the title and the nature of the talk at the meeting.
7. An optional (as are others) suggestion, is to reduce the lighting or completely turn off all lights for both the recorded talk and the meditation period itself. This semi-darkness or total darkness enables meditators to give their full attention to the work at hand of listening to the talk and meditating without visual distractions.

8. If newcomers are present and the recorded talk does not include a full explanation of "how to meditate"; the group leader can give this instruction at the end of the talk or before the meditation period itself. Another solution when newcomers arrive is for the group leader to select a recorded talk that repeats the "how to".
9. A means of timing the meditation period is important. The group leader has a number of options including the very popular timing CD's or cassette tapes. These pre-recorded timing tapes consisting of music, 25 minutes of silence and music, are widely available for sale or can be produced by group leaders who have the recording capability on their sound equipment.
10. At the end of the meditation period, depending on the time availability, the group leader has the opportunity to make any announcements pertinent to the group, ask for any questions, and/or ask for any insights or observations regarding the talk. If a newcomer is at the talk for the first time the group leader can spend some time with this person after the end of the meeting to see if the newcomer has any specific difficulty or question(s) regarding the teaching or the practice.

"In the superabundance of love we become the person we are called to be."

John Main OSB

PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

Every time we meditate we make a spiritual contribution to our community and to the world. Over time, we may find ourselves so grateful for this wonderful gift of meditation that we feel called to “give back” in some way. And in the giving, we also receive, and deepen our own commitment to this spiritual path.

We can donate a bit of our time, energy and/or financial resources in any number of ways. For example: encourage & support a fellow meditator; join a weekly group or start a group; help out at events or other community activities; attend an Essential Teachings Workshop (School for teachers) to learn how to share the gift with others; become a “Friend”; donate a book or CD to your group or to the public library; help at events; planning and organizing; activities; technical expertise; etc.

To find out more, or to volunteer, please contact your regional or area coordinator. We welcome (and need) your participation to help make our Community strong, enabling us to continue to share this path with others!

With thanks to the Ottawa Area Meditation Community

Questions and Answers

Compiled by Desmond J. Maloney

In the discussion period after the meditation session there will probably be a range of questions. Respond as best you can. If you can't think of an answer, just say "I don't know" or "I'll think about that." But more than likely, you can respond very adequately from your own experience and reading, in your own words. The following are merely some frequently asked questions with adequate answers. How would you respond using your own words?

Q. Why do we use a mantra? What is the role of the mantra and how do I choose one?

A. The purpose of the mantra is threefold: first, it helps to deal with distractions. The mind needs a point of focus, something for it to be absorbed in so distractions can be ignored. Secondly, it leads to a condition of simplicity. Thirdly and most importantly for us who meditate as Christians, the saying of the mantra is an expression of faith in Christ who lives in our hearts.

The mantra is chosen with care. It is an expression of our faith. Meditation is Christian because of the faith of the person meditating. The mantra is our expression of this. While it is acceptable to choose your own mantra, ideally a teacher gives the student a mantra. The Spirit is the inner teacher, so the inner teacher can inspire a self-chosen mantra.

The mantra that Fr. John and the WCCM community recommends is the word MARANATHA. It is an Aramaic word, the language Jesus spoke. It means "Come Lord" or "the Lord comes". As it is not in our own language it does not have any thoughts attached to it and does not encourage us to think. It is a balanced rhythmic word, with the long "ah" sound. It fits well with the rhythm of the breath and it is one of the oldest Christian prayers. Abba, the name of Jesus, the Jesus prayer, or part of any short phrase of Scripture are sometimes used as a mantra. The "formula" that John Cassian recommended was the phrase, *"O God come to my aid, O Lord make haste to help me"*. Choosing your word is important. Once you have chosen a mantra, it is important in this tradition, to always stay with the same word. Thus, it becomes rooted in the heart and becomes a way to praying always.

Q. Is it necessary to meditate twice a day? I find it possible to fit in one period, but the second is often impossible.

A. Someone once complained to Fr. John that he could not find time for the second period of meditation. He expected Fr. John to sympathize with him. While recognizing that it is not always easy, Fr. John's response was simply that if he really wanted it enough he would find the time.

The man went home, revised his schedule and found the time. However once is better than not at all, one should do what one can and the commitment will grow with continuing practice.

Q. Is the length of the meditation period important?

A. Yes, you have to give it a fair shot. You can't just take a minute here and a minute there. It's like baking bread; you have to leave it in there a sufficient amount of time for it to rise. Twenty minutes is pretty well the minimum amount of time. It takes us almost that length of time to come down to any level of stillness and peace or mental quiet. Thirty minutes is the ideal time but it may take some people a while to build up to a thirty-minute period twice a day. What is important is that you set your time and then stick to it. It is a good idea to have an external signal so that you don't have to be looking at your watch. It is also helpful to meditate with others on a regular basis. You will often find that people who begin meditation in extreme situations of their lives, tend to get there pretty quickly. A sense of urgency speeds it up because they want to waste less time.

Q. Is the way of breathing important?

A. The first aim of this form of meditation is to say the mantra continually, and that is what we have to learn to do. We should breathe naturally. Don't concentrate on your breathing. Give all the attention to the mantra. You will find that quite naturally the mantra will integrate itself with your breathing. Sometimes it coordinates with some other bodily rhythm like the pulse or heartbeat, but many people say the mantra to their breathing. A simple way might be to say the mantra as you breathe in and breathe out in silence. Or “Ma-ra” as you breathe in and “na-tha” as you breathe out. Learning to breathe well, using the abdomen is highly recommended for health not only for meditation. Proper breathing is an important aid to relaxation and goes with posture.

Father John did not stress breathing, as he was concerned to keep the discipline simple and not to emphasize the method too much, because the focus then becomes mastering a technique rather than praying.

Q. Is posture important when meditating?

A. Yes. The most important rule of posture is to keep the spine upright. If you use a chair, find one of the right height that gives your back the kind of support it needs. If the spine is held erect and relaxed, it is possible to stay alert. Slumped posture leads to drowsiness or even sleep. The ideal posture is the lotus posture as this keeps the spine automatically in its natural upright

position. This is not possible for most of us. Finding a good posture cross-legged on the floor or using a prayer stool can be almost as good. Most people will sit on a chair. The most important thing is that you are upright and alert without being in unnecessary pain or discomfort. A physical practice like yoga can help greatly with both posture and breathing. Because meditation involves the whole person, body, psyche and spirit, what we do with our body during meditation is of very great importance and learning to sit well is a vital ingredient in learning to move deeper into the silence, stillness and simplicity of meditation.

Q. I like to meditate but it is a very private thing for me. Why should I meditate with a group? It is distracting for me.

A. It is important to meditate on one's own and most of the time this is our situation. However many people find it difficult to keep up regularly on their own, especially in hard times.

John Main believed in the importance of the community that meditation creates. The silence in a group can often be deeper than when we are alone. The group gives support and encourages people to keep on practising on their own. People who meditate together find the experience bonds them to each other at a deep level even when they do not know much about each other. However, some people do practice regularly on their own without the support of a group. Whenever they meditate, although they are solitary, they are never alone as they are united to all other meditators around the world through our prayer.

Q. How is this different from other forms of meditation, such as Transcendental Meditation? How does meditation help us to relate to other people?

A. The answer to both questions is "unity". First, it is important to see what meditation, in the Christian tradition shares in common with other traditions as well as how it may differ. The unity in meditation is more important for us to reflect on. But what makes meditation different as a spiritual practice is that it is not practised as a technique. There is a world of difference between meditating as a technique and as a discipline. We are technologically conditioned and so we think that it is a great technique for self-improvement.

We think, "I will use this and see what I get out of it, improve my performance, and I can let go of it if it does not help." However, as a discipline we bring a dimension of faith and perseverance, a "poverty of spirit" to meditation. Perhaps we have to practise for some time before we really understand what that faith means. This is why it is important that meditation is taught as a spiritual discipline. With faith as your motivating force there is more reason to persevere.

What makes meditation Christian is your Christian faith. It isn't the technique that makes it Christian, Buddhist or Hindu. It is the faith you bring to it. That is why it is such a marvellous way for each person, whatever their faith, to fulfill their faith journey and personally verify the truths of their faith while at the same time sharing deeply a spiritual experience with people of other faiths. The terrible error is saying, "Well, I believe in my faith, and that means that somebody else's faith must be wrong." Logically, intellectually that is where we get stuck. But at the level of the spirit we experience unity, and unity is what meditation leads us to. This becomes quite a perceptible reality as you meditate in a group. You don't communicate through language or through the body when you meditate. But there is a deeper communication at work. You will find too that when you have meditated with someone you relate to them quite differently and more easily, from a deeper level of personal unity.

Q. Do some people come to meditation without being taught?

A. Yes, they do. In teaching meditation you can make it sound as if the mantra is something that has just been discovered. But it is a very natural growth of consciousness that people enter naturally: that we do restrict our consciousness to one word and that one word leads into full silence.

Q. When I meditate I get a tingling sensation in my hands, is this all right? (A thumping head, feelings of heat or cold or any other physical sensation)

A. When we are meditating the integration and harmonization of our whole person is gradually taking place. This is positive and sometimes it takes the form of various physical sensations. These simply need to be ignored and they will pass when they have done their work.

These sensations are connected with the movement and flow of energy through our system. The relaxation created by meditation allows the energy in us to flow more freely and this can cause physical sensations.

Q. When I meditate I see colour, this is very pleasant should I enjoy it? (This can be light or sensations of love, peace etc.)

A. The important thing to remember is that none of the experiences we may have along the way are the goal of meditation. They are all part of the integration process. The vital thing is not to become attached to them, or desire them, but to just allow them to come and go and to continue to pay attention to your mantra.

Q. I have been meditating for some time, but it seems to be making me worse! I often experience a lot of anger when I meditate. At other times, I feel very sad and cry a lot. What is happening?

A. When we meditate we have to pass through all the layers of our consciousness, as we move towards God in the depth of our being. There is no way to the depth of union with God except through the layers of our being. Actually what you experience is the healing of your emotions. It may not feel like this when you are experiencing it, but it is the release of old wounds, grief etc. Again, the important thing is to try to just allow things to release, as it were, to allow the firework display, while you gently try to keep your focus on your mantra. If at times the pain or other emotion becomes intolerable then you may need to seek some help or advice or counselling outside the time of meditation. Other outlets can also be sought such as painting, writing, etc. At times like these, the most important thing is to keep meditating. The combination of meditation and other forms of healing work can be very powerful.

Q. I find that sometimes in meditation, I am saying the mantra and I become at peace and it seems to me, at that moment that the appropriate thing to do is to stop saying the mantra and to remain at peace. If I continue to say the mantra at that moment, I am interfering with this open window of peace. I am forcing my head to keep thinking. What is your teaching on this?

A. John Main taught that at a certain point, maybe after many years, the mantra would lead us into complete silence, maybe just for very brief moments, during the period of meditation. However, this is an experience, which we should neither anticipate nor desire. What does complete silence mean? You are not in complete silence if you are able to say “I am silent”, I am resting, or I am enjoying this. Then you are already thinking. This is a very subtle, but essential part of the teaching.

Saying the mantra continuously leads to a change in the way you say the mantra. Over the weeks, months, years you will say the mantra with less effort, less force. It becomes more faithful but more gentle. John Main said that at first we say the mantra in the head, with effort, then we sound it in the head with greater ease and greater self-acceptance of the distractions; and then we listen to the mantra with wholehearted attention. When seen in this way saying the mantra is not thinking, it is listening. The fourth stage would be silence, which is something that we cannot anticipate. (This is a very important question. Any group leader or anyone teaching meditation needs to listen to this aspect of the teaching, which is fully explained in “Word into Silence”. They should test it against their own experience and then they will be ready to express it confidently in their own group or when teaching.)

Q. What is the relationship between meditation and social action?

A. It is a consequence of our prayer that we should be involved in the world. Every action we do should be a consequence of our prayer. In meditation, we are purifying our inner life in order to go out to others. The one should flow from the other.

The end of our prayer is communion with the Body of Christ. To be in union with the Body of Christ is to be with our brothers and sisters throughout the world because that is where the resurrected Christ is present. If prayer does not help this outreach, then it is not true prayer. Love of God and love of neighbour are the essential truths and all prayer should lead us to that community that is the world. Prayer leads to loving action. We follow Christ, in union with His liberating presence in the world.

We must be careful not to think that our meditation is a passive occupation. It is a very active act, to sit down, to practise meditation, to spend that time. Everything that it includes is active. It is about attention, not inattention. If we really meditate, whatever we do in our life, we do it differently because we meditate. We do it with more attention, at a deeper level—with more sensitivity and compassion. It doesn't necessarily mean that we all are called to go out and do certain things that come under the umbrella of social justice. Everyone serves humanity in different ways; sometimes what appears to be inaction may at the same time be very deep and meaningful.

If we are doers, once we start meditating, we find that we are called to be very discriminating about what we do, how we spend our time. It can also lead to a deeper understanding of why we make the choices we do with regard to service.

Meditation changes our whole attitude to action. The fruits of meditation become quite apparent as you live your life. You become more compassionate, more loving, and gentler.

Q. Sometimes when you are on holiday, family members may be together in one room and it can be difficult to get the time or quiet for meditation. Do you have any suggestions on how to handle that situation?

A. How many of us are intimidated or reluctant to say, while we are socializing or on holiday with someone, that we have to go aside to meditate. How do you approach that? Do you feel free enough to say that this is your way and for them to accept that you are not being antisocial? That this is your discipline and you need to take the time?

We have to do what is possible. Not meditating should in no way be another reason to feel guilty! While strongly stressing the importance of regular meditation, John Main, was equally strong in stressing the importance of not letting meditation become another thing to feel guilty about.

If your audience is largely Roman Catholic, these are the type of questions that may arise:

Q. Does the Church approve of meditation?

A. Yes. In the documents of Vatican Council II it is made clear that Christians are called not only to pray with others, but to *“enter into their rooms to pray to their Father in secret”* (Mt. 6:6). It cites St. Paul and his exhortation that Christians are to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5: 17). The practice of Christian meditation, faithful to the ancient tradition of the Church, is a way that fulfills the Christian prayer vocation. The Council encourages the deepening of prayer in contemplation. Later documents stress the importance of recovering lost or neglected Christian traditions of contemplation.

Pope John Paul II, in November 1992, stated, *“Any method of prayer is valid insofar as it is inspired by Christ and leads to Christ who is the Way the Truth and the Life.”* The one who meditates enters the stream of Jesus' prayer that always flows, to the Father in the power and love of the Holy Spirit.

Q. Does Christian meditation accord with the general teaching of the Church?

A. Of course, the Church always sees prayer as the fount of wisdom and compassion in the Christian life.

It is a pilgrimage in faith of being wholly attentive to the presence of God. It involves leaving the self behind, going beyond ourselves to God, who is always beyond us, yet closer to us than we are to ourselves. Prayer is always a gift of God. It leads those who meditate to look for the fruit of prayer in love.

(“Contemplative Christian prayer always leads to love of neighbour, to action and to the acceptance of trials, and precisely because of this it draws one close to God” from “The Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation”, 1989, p. 18)

Q. How does this relate to the Mass/Sacraments?

A. The spiritual life, as Vatican Council II explained, is not limited to participation in the liturgy. In this light Christian meditation forms part of the whole of one's spiritual life. Meditation clearly

does not replace or substitute for other forms of prayer but, by making us more aware of the centrality of the prayer of Jesus, enriches all forms.

As faithfulness to Christian meditation is of the Holy Spirit, so through the Spirit we can expect participation in the Mass and sacraments generally to be all the richer.

Q. Doesn't meditation mean "Ignatian" Meditation?

A. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (16th Century) contain certain methods of mental prayer, and since the time of their composition many religious congregations have adopted the spirituality taught and practised by the Jesuits. The Ignatian way has come to be known and practised as a method of "discursive meditation". Other schools of spirituality have also emerged in the life of the church, for example St. Francis de Sales in "An Introduction to the Devout Life". St. Ignatius also, however, taught the importance of contemplation as the goal of all prayer and action.

Contemplative prayer has a long history in the Western and Eastern Churches. St. Benedict (c.480 - 547) has been called the Father of Monasticism in the west.

In writing about St. Antony (c.250 - 356) of Egypt, "the father of all monks", St. Athanasius wrote that, "He prayed frequently, for he had learned that one ought to pray in secret, and pray without ceasing."

Q. What about reason?

A. Meditation is not antirational. The clarity and insightfulness of reason and imagination are enhanced by the practice of meditation, (See Pope John Paul II's letter on Faith and Reason)

In Christian meditation the mind is alert, yet not aiming at anything other than being still and silent in God's presence. Recall the psalmist says, "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps. 46)

Q. Where does it say that Jesus meditated with a mantra?

A. It doesn't. Jesus taught no "methods" of prayer but his teaching on prayer directs us to the condition of interiority, trust and simplicity. We know from Jesus' teaching on prayer that he instructs us not to, *"...heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."*

"Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name” (Mt. 6: 7-9)

In Christian meditation, there is an implicit recognition that the Father knows what we need before we ask. St. Augustine said, “We say nothing that is not found in this prayer of the Lord, if we pray properly and fittingly”, and “We have Christ within us as our Teacher”.

Q. Is meditation the same as contemplation?

A. Now and then, we will find these words with a different meaning. However, we note that in the general introduction to “Word into Silence” Fr. John Main chooses to use the term meditation synonymously with such terms as contemplation, contemplative prayer, meditative prayer, and so on.

Then he adds, *“The essential context of meditation is to be found in the fundamental relationships of our lives, the relationship that we have as creatures with God, our Creator.”* Meditation could be said to be the work we do in faith and love to receive or enter fully into the gift of the state of contemplation already present in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

If your audience is predominantly Christian from various denominations, these are the type of questions they may well raise:

Q. Isn't this Buddhist?

A. Quite mistakenly, meditation can very easily be identified as the preserve only of the Oriental traditions, including Buddhism. We have come through the teaching of Fr. John Main and others in the 20th Century to appreciate afresh the place of meditation in the Christian tradition.

Q. What makes meditation Christian?

A. It is our faith and love that makes meditation Christian.

With reference to St. Paul, Romans 8: 26, the Spirit is pleading for us (in our inmost being beyond words, beyond thoughts, beyond images) with sighs too deep for words.

The Spirit is with us in our prayer, praying within us, and as Fr. John Main tells us in “Word into Silence”, *“Prayer then, is the life of the Spirit of Jesus within our human heart.”*

Attentiveness and receptivity are the qualities that enable us to become more completely incorporated with the Word within us, who is the Son, spoken by and returning to the Father.

Q. Does the Devil enter the empty mind?

A. In Christian meditation the work is to bring the mind and one's whole being to stillness and silence. Jesus refers to the primacy of "poverty of spirit" as the condition for entering the Kingdom of God.

The stillness of both mind and body to which the mantra guides us is a preparation for entering into our own silence, and for our progression through the spheres of silence.

Q. Where is it mentioned in Scripture?

A. Scripture provides the inspiration and purpose of all prayer. A study of the history and the tradition of the early Church will show that this way of prayer was indeed familiar to the Jewish Christians of this period.

We recall that John Cassian draws us back to the Beatitudes (Mt. 5: 1 - 11) arising from "the poverty of the single verse". He says this poverty will bring us with ready ease to the first of the beatitudes: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* In addition, the goal Cassian proposes throughout his Conferences is purity of heart, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*

Q. Isn't it self-centered?

A. No. It is all about leaving self behind and turning to the Other.

Q. Isn't it just Self-Hypnosis?

A. The mind is alert, and engaged in the art of attention. The conscious mind is never shut down but expanded beyond its habitual self-fixation.

Q. If I concentrate on the mantra am I locking out the Holy Spirit?

A. Meditation brings us to a state of openhearted receptivity to the Spirit of Jesus who dwells in our hearts. The mantra keeps us open to the Spirit in poverty and simplicity.

Q. Isn't this just Catholic?

A. Meditation becomes an expression of unity in a particular way for Christians. People of Christian faith can freely discover a shared faith heritage as something ancient, yet ready to come alive

If your audience is largely secular, they may well raise these questions:

Q. Why do we have to bring religion into meditation?

A. Meditation purifies religion and restores it to its true purpose of teaching and inspires the spiritual unity of humanity.

Q. Do I need faith to mediate?

A. In the first place, we may not be aware of what brings us to meditate. We may feel we have little or no faith. Fidelity is needed to keep meditating.

Q. What are the physical benefits?

A. Medical evidence shows for example that meditation lowers blood pressure and enhances the immune system. But the greatest significance of meditation is enhancing the sense of our human wholeness in the harmony of body, mind and spirit.

Q. Is this the same as Centering Prayer?

A. There is an essential harmony in these two approaches to meditation. Centering Prayer places a different emphasis on the mantra.

Meditation is essentially the experience of deepening and expanding relationship. From self to the friends we are attracted to. From friends to strangers. From strangers to enemies. From enemies to all.

Laurence Freeman [2014 Monte Oliveto Retreat, "Health, Healing and Wholeness"](#)

Handling Distractions

The Role of the Mantra in Dealing with Distractions

From *Christian Meditation: Contemplative Prayer for a New Generation* by Paul T. Harris

“I want now to address a particular question that we all encounter. It is the question of distractions. What should you do when you begin to meditate and distracting thoughts come into your mind? The advice that the tradition has to give us is to ignore the distractions and to say your word and to keep saying your word. Don’t waste any energy in trying to furrow your brow and say, ‘I will not think of what I’m going to have for dinner’, or ‘who I’m going to see today’, or ‘where I’m going tomorrow’, or whatever the distraction may be. Don’t try to use any energy to dispel the distraction. Simply ignore it and the way to ignore it is to say your word.” Moment of Christ John Main, OSB

The problem all of us have in coming to inner silence in meditation is that our minds are full of thoughts, images, sensations, emotions, insights, hopes, and regrets ... a never-ending array of distractions.

St. Teresa of Avila once said the human mind is like a boat where mutinous sailors have tied up the captain. The sailors all take a turn at steering the boat and of course the boat goes around in circles and eventually crashes on the rocks. That is our mind, says Teresa, full of thoughts taking us off in every direction. She also says ‘Distractions and the wandering mind are part of the human condition and can no more be avoided than eating and sleeping’.

An Indian sage, Sri Ramakrishna, once said the human mind is like a great tree with monkeys jumping from branch to branch chattering away. Fr. Laurence Freeman in commenting on this story says there is a path that leads through this forest of chattering monkeys and it is the practice of reciting the mantra in our daily periods of meditation.

There is another wonderful story, which illustrates the capricious human mind. In India, the mind is often compared to the trunk of an elephant, restless, inquisitive, and always straying. In India, if you watch an elephant in a parade you will see how apt this comparison is. In Indian towns and villages, elephants are often taken in religious processions through the streets to the temple. The streets are crooked and narrow, lined on either side with fruit stalls and vegetable stalls. Along comes the elephant with his restless trunk, and in one quick motion it grabs a whole bunch of bananas.

Eknath Easwaran, a teacher of meditation, says you can almost see the elephant asking, 'What else do you expect me to do? Here is my trunk and there are the bananas.' He just doesn't know what else to do with his trunk. He doesn't pause to peel the bananas either, or to observe all the other niceties that masters of etiquette say should be observed in eating a banana. He takes the whole bunch, opens his wide mouth, and tosses the bananas in--- stalk and all. Then from the next stall, he picks up a coconut and tosses it in after the bananas. There is a loud crack and the elephant moves on to the next stall. No threat can make this restless trunk settle down.

But the wise trainer, if he knows his elephant well, will simply give that trunk a short bamboo stick to hold on to before the procession starts. Then the elephant will walk along proudly with his head up high, holding the bamboo stick in front of him like a drum major with a baton. He is not interested in bananas or coconuts anymore, his trunk has something to hold on to. The human mind is very much like this trunk of an elephant. Most of the time it has nothing to hold on to. But it can be kept from straying into the world of thoughts, imagination and fantasy by simply giving it something to hold on to – the mantra.

The mantra is a help towards concentration, enabling us to go beyond distractions, including words and thoughts, even holy thoughts. We say the mantra slowly, steadily, with attentiveness. When we find our mind has wandered we simply come back to the mantra. We cannot force this way of prayer through sheer will power. Do not try too hard. Let go, relax. There is no need to fight or struggle with distractions. Simply return to the repetition of the mantra.

John Main also reminds us that we cannot attempt to force the elimination of distractions. In fact we must let go of goals and trying to achieve anything. The mantra will become rooted in our consciousness through the simple fidelity of returning to the mantra each morning and each evening. Meditation is centering ourselves on our inner core and allowing God to pray within us.

But a word of caution. The repetition of a mantra does not bring instant peace, harmony, the absence of distractions or silence. We must accept where we are on the pilgrimage of

meditation. We should not get upset at continual distractions. Our aim is not to be free of *all* thoughts. Again, this would be a goal and we do not want to have goals. John Main constantly advises us not to come to meditation with *any* expectations. So do not struggle and fret over distractions. The mantra simply expresses our *openness* to God and God's indwelling presence.

Simone Weil, the French author, who died in 1943 at the age of 33, was an apostle of the spiritual life and defined prayer as *attention*. The mantra leads us to this attention. Another French spiritual writer, Pascal, felt the greatest enemy of prayer was the 'Gethsemani sleep' --- when the apostles slept instead of watching Jesus.

Pascal felt that inattention and drowsiness were the enemies of prayer. Again, the mantra helps us with this problem by bringing us to attention.

Do not get mad at distractions – meditation is a non-violent way of prayer. Ignore distractions by continually returning to the mantra. If we are distracted with thoughts 50 times in a period of meditation, when we return to the mantra that is 50 times we have chosen God over the distractions.

A problem often observed by those meditating is that the thinking process continues even while saying the mantra. There is even a term for this. It is called *double tracking*. Again this is nothing to be concerned about. With perseverance, the mantra will become stronger and our thoughts will diminish as the pilgrimage of meditation continues.

It is important to remember that when we are bombarded with thoughts and images at our time of meditation our will is still tuned in to the presence of God. To handle distractions we do require gentleness and patience. We have to wait in patience and hope. Gentleness and patience indicate the Spirit is working silently within us. While we are aware of distractions we should never let them disturb us. We can even see the good in distractions: they keep us awake and on the journey. They come in one door and leave by another.

Despite all our efforts thoughts will come. Good thoughts, bad thoughts, 'urgent' reminders. Ignore them all. We just keep saying our word silently. We try to let go of thinking. We try to keep saying our word. We repeat the mantra silently and continuously in our hearts. The mantra will lead us to discipline, to concentration, to silence, to God.

The Fruits of Meditation

The Fruits of Meditation

The Harvest of the Spirit The personal, inner change in us, as we meditate, can best be described in what St Paul called the harvest of the Spirit. (Gal 5:5) *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity gentleness and self-control.*

LOVE is placed first, “the highest gift.” In its path, we also find a new joyfulness in life, even in times of stress and suffering.

JOY is deeper than pleasure. It is found in a new taste for the simple and natural things in life.

PEACE is the gift Jesus gave us in the Spirit. It is the energy of his own deep inner harmony with himself, with the Father, and with all creation.

PATIENCE is the cure for our bursts of irritability and intolerance, and all the ways we try to possess others.

KINDNESS is the gift of treating others, as we would like them to treat us.

GOODNESS is not “ours” but we are essentially good and our human nature is godly because we are created by God and because God lives in us.

FIDELITY is the gift that comes through the discipline of the daily meditation and the mantra. For every relationship to be human and loving, we have to deepen it with fidelity.

SELF-CONTROL is necessary if we are to enjoy life in the full liberty of the Spirit. It is the fruit of the balance of meditation, the middle way between all extremes.

The Integrating Power of Meditation

“It is my personal conviction that meditation can add a dimension of incredible richness to your life. I wish that I had the persuasive powers or the eloquence to convince everyone that I meet of the importance of meditating.

Once you begin, and it takes lots of us months and years to begin, but once you begin you will find that your meditation is the great integrating power in your life, giving depth and perspective to everything you are and everything you do.

And the reason for that is this: that you are beginning to live out of the power of the love of God, that power that is present in our hearts in all its immensity in all its simplicity in the Spirit of Jesus. The integrating power of meditation affects every part of our life. All our life is, as it were, aligned on Christ. And his life and presence makes itself felt in every part of our life. And the way to that is the way of humility of simplicity the way of the mantra.”

John Main, OSB.

In meditation, we are sanctified because we are healed. The source of our being is also the source that heals us and makes us whole. The fruits of the Spirit grow gradually in us because we begin to turn to the power of love at the centre of our being.

Learning to Be We meditate to “be”; to be the person we are called to be. The person we are called to be is a person fully accepting the gift of our own creation, accepting and responding fully to the gift of the fullness of life given to us in Jesus. More than that, we meditate as our response to our own nature as temples of the Holy Spirit. When you sit down to meditate each day, remember that the purpose of it all is to lose all *self*-consciousness.

Meditation helps us to “be” because in meditation, we learn to let go of insecurity, our images, our thoughts, and we learn to be openhearted. Meditation teaches us to respond to life without demands, without expectations.

Learning to be means:

- not wearing any “masks” to hide our real feelings; not having to act
- not responding to people in a pre-programmed way such as prejudices, the desire for attention and approval
- letting others be; letting God be

Our capacity to be, our confidence in being, comes from the experience in meditation that we are loved, loved unconditionally by God as his unique creation.

Learning to Live Fully in the Present Moment

By Peter Ng

Meditation teaches us to be fully conscious in the present moment. This is because in meditation, we give our undivided attention to the saying of the mantra. We are fully present to the mantra, with no thoughts of the past or the future. Unless we learn to live fully in the present moment, we are living on the surface of life. The past is gone, the future is uncertain, and so all that we have is the present moment. Living a full life requires us to treasure every moment and live it consciously. This can also be described as maintaining a state of mindfulness in everything we do.

If we are living in the present moment

- the most important moment is NOW
- the most important person is the person you are with NOW
- the most important thing is what you are doing NOW

Becoming more rooted and centered: To be more rooted, more centred means to be steadier, more consistent in the way we approach life, especially problems in life. We are less flappable, less volatile. We are less likely to swing between extremes in our moods and actions. We are guided by certain core values. We develop a better understanding of:

- what is truly important in life
- what is trivial
- what is passing
- what truly endures

In the daily discipline of meditation, we gradually become more rooted and centered in the depths of our being through the faithful saying of the mantra.

John Main puts it this way:

“More and more men and women in our society are beginning to understand that our personal problems and the problems we face as a society are basically spiritual problems. What more and more of us understand in this world is that the human spirit cannot find fulfilment in mere material success or material prosperity. It isn't that material success or prosperity is bad in themselves but they are simply not adequate as a final or ultimate answer to the human situation.

As a result of the materialism in which we live, so many men and women are discovering that the spirit is stifled, and much of the frustration of our time is due to the feeling that we were created for something better than this, something more serious than just a day-to-day survival.

To know ourselves, to understand ourselves, and to be able to start solving our problems, to get our problems and ourselves into perspective, we simply must make contact with our spirit.

Our spirit is rooted in God. Meditation is just this way of making contact with our own spirit, and in that contact finding the way of integration, of finding everything in our experience coming into harmony, everything in our experience judged and aligned on God.

Everything that we are, everything in our life, becomes aligned on God and everything falls into its proper place. Meditating is powerful because it leads us into this right order, into this tranquillity, into this peace.

This is because our order of values has changed. Instead of our value system being based on the self, on the ego, on personal success or self-promotion, or whatever limiting factors. Our value system is based on God.

We discover in the revelation that takes place in our own hearts, as we discover the presence of Jesus there, that GOD IS LOVE. This brings us to the conclusion that unleashes great power: that there is only one thing that matters ultimately, which is that we grow in love. Everything else is secondary. Everything else is inconsequential. Once this insight becomes powerful enough, our lives are altered and we then see the greater reality of “other-centered” values such as compassion and understanding. We begin therefore to become truly spiritual people in touch with life at its center. We remember God is the centre, God is love, and Jesus is the revelation of his love.”

Learning to Abandon Desire and Practise Contentment

One thing we learn in meditation is to abandon desire. We learn it because we know we are called to live wholly in the present moment. This sounds very strange to an achieving society, to people who have been brought up to practise so much anxious striving. The real tragedy of our time is that we are so filled with desire, for happiness, for success, for wealth, for power, whatever it might be, that we are always imagining ourselves as we might be. So rarely do we come to know ourselves as we are, and to accept our present position.

Prayer and the Social Dimension of the Gospel

God's reign in our world is dependent upon the conversion of the human heart. Without this necessary conversion, the structural changes brought about by “good works” eventually erode into evil systems that perpetuate different forms of injustice. Conversion of the human heart and structural change must be worked for simultaneously. Structural change remains the complement of the foundational change that creates systems of true peace and justice, namely, the conversion of the human heart. For our world to become a place where brothers

and sisters are not deprived or ravaged economically, socially, and emotionally, the human heart must be turned from its propensity for egocentricity, which has produced the injustice and the lack of peace experienced in our world.

Contemplation is a path to this necessary conversion of the human heart. The works of peace and justice become the activity of those who know the experience of authentic prayer, because love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable truths.

Peter Ng serves on the International Guiding Board of the WCCM and is the National Coordinator of WCCM-Singapore. He edited, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning—Learning to Meditate with John Main*. His talks are available on video at www.wccm.org and *The Contemplative Executive* CD.

MINDFULNESS

“The great spiritual teachers of all religions have themselves practised and taught mindfulness. To be mindful is to live in the present moment, not to be imprisoned in the past, nor anticipating a future that may never happen. When we are fully aware of the present, life is transformed and the strain and stress disappear. So much of modern life is a feverish anticipation of future activity and excitement. We have to learn to step back from this into the freedom and possibility of the present.”

Bede Griffiths OSB

***Outline of a Six Week
Introduction to Meditation***

Outline of a Six-Week Introductory Program to Meditation

The following outline is intended to help group leaders to introduce meditation to newcomers over a six-week period. It will help you help others to get going and how to persevere. It may be used continuously or periodically during the year or as a refresher for more experienced meditators.

At the Beginning: Be especially welcoming to newcomers who may be finding the silence of the group a little strange. Whenever possible meet personally with them and explain the basics of how to meditate and tell them they can raise any questions with you personally as well as in the group. It may help to suggest that they “check in” monthly at first. Help them understand the importance of the weekly meeting is to strengthen their daily practice and help them come to a deeper understanding of the way of meditation. Remind them it will take time for regular practice to get established in their daily life and not to give up. If they do, just start again. Explain the general structure of the group meeting and the centrality of the meditation period together. Help them to sign up (and contribute to the cost!) of the Canadian Christian Meditation Community (CCMC) Newsletter. Share a little of your own journey when this seems helpful.

Each Week:

- Emphasize the simplicity of meditation.
- Review the basic “how to meditate”.
- Review briefly the contents of the previous week before explaining the theme of the week and a short summary of the recorded talk to which you will listen.
- Recommend specific reading as outlined below.
- Have the basic introductory books and CD’s available for sale or loan.
- Offer handouts such as the Canadian and World Community Brochures.
- Have printouts available of the Weekly Readings from the web page. (www.wccm.org)
- Encourage questions afterwards to which the group can respond.

Outline of a Six Week Introduction to Meditation

Week One Theme: What is Meditation

Explain how meditation is a universal practice also found in the Christian tradition. It is a discipline with no difficult theories or techniques to master. Emphasize the stillness of the body and the importance of the twice-daily practice. Prepare them for the encounter with the monkey-mind and distractions. Remind them that meditation is the prayer of the heart so all thoughts, including holy ones are to be left aside. Play one of John Main's talks from his "In the Beginning" series.

Recommend Laurence Freeman's books: Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice; The Journey of Meditation.

Suggested New Testament reading: Matthew 6: 5-6

Week Two Theme: John Main

Briefly, in your own words, tell the story of his life. He found meditation first in the East then rediscovered the Christian monastic tradition of it and then went on to teach it to lay people. This led to the worldwide community of which the group you are meditating in this evening is part. Meditation creates community. Tradition is a personal discovery. Each of us has to rediscover it "in our own experience". Play one of the "In the Beginning" talks.

Recommend John Main's book: Christian Meditation: The Gethsemane Talks

Suggested New Testament reading: Matthew 6: 7-15

Week Three Theme: The Roots of our Tradition

Pick up on John Main's rediscovering the mantra in John Cassian's Tenth Conference and the meaning of poverty of spirit - simply letting go. Explain how Cassian, as in The Cloud of Unknowing and the Orthodox tradition of the Jesus Prayer in the Philokalia, emphasizes the continuous saying of the word. Distractions are to be let go of, not fought or repressed. This gradually leads into the present moment. All this is discipline but the fruit is liberty of spirit. Use another talk from the "In the Beginning" series.

Recommend John Main's book: Word into Silence

Suggested New Testament reading: Matthew 6: 25-34

Outline of a Six Week Introduction to Meditation

Week Four Theme: The Wheel of Prayer

Now that they have been meditating awhile, they have been introduced to the prayer of the heart, which may be a new experience for most people. So ask, “*What is prayer?*” in the light of this experience. All forms of prayer are valid and meditation does not replace them although it may simplify them along with everything else. In the Christian tradition, all prayer leads back to the prayer of the Spirit in the heart. Choose a talk from John Main's “Being on the Way” or one of the Communitas series. Remember to repeat the ‘how to meditate’ instructions as the introduction may not be on those talks. Refer to the two articles by Laurence Freeman “Meditation & Christian Prayer (1) The Seven Teachings of Jesus on Prayer; and, (2) The Wheel of Prayer”. Refer also, to items 5, 6 and 7 relating to prayer from the nine articles by John Main entitled “Meditation and Christian Faith”.

Recommend a re-reading of books by Laurence Freeman: *Christian Meditation Your Daily Practice* or *The Journey of Meditation*.

Suggested New Testament Reading: Romans 8: 26-27

Week Five Theme: Leaving Self Behind

This is what we are really doing as we meditate. It is a selfless activity. All spiritual traditions describe this as the basic way to find who and why we are. Meditation is a universal and personal quest for truth. Leaving self behind is not a violent or repressive process. It is learning simply to be and let go of desire and fear. Play a talk from the “In the Beginning” series.

Recommend Laurence Freeman's book *Selfless Self*

Suggested New Testament reading: Matthew 7: 13

Week Six Theme: Meditation as a Way of Life

The early Christians said that the way you pray is the way you live. The fruits of the daily practice appear in life situations and relationships as we live from a deeper inner centre. Our religious tradition appears in a new light as well, along with a greater respect for other traditions. Wisdom and Compassion are the greatest gifts.

Recommend John Main's book *Moment of Christ* or Laurence Freeman's *Aspects of Love*

Suggested New Testament Reading: Philippians 2: 1-11

Meditation and Christian Faith

JOHN MAIN OSB

1. Meditation and Christian faith
2. Meditation and our Relationship with God
3. Meditation and Following Jesus
4. Meditation and Union with God through Jesus
5. The Aim of Christian Prayer
6. Meditation on the Journey of Prayer
7. Meditation and the Prayer of Jesus
8. The Significance of the Mantra
9. The Purpose of the Mantra

1. Meditation and Christian Faith

I would like to share with you what I have experienced in my own life of the truths of our religion through the sort of meditation I spoke to you about. God is our Creator and Father. Jesus is our Redeemer and Brother. And ***the Holy Spirit dwells within each of us in such a way that we are all of us, quite literally, “temples of holiness”***. Meditation is how we come to terms with these truths.

Most of us are familiar with these truths. But the great weakness of most Christians is that, although they know these truths on the level of theological theory, these truths do not really live in their hearts. In other words, we have not realized them as the grounding truths of our lives. ***The aim of meditation is to turn to our own nature with total concentration, to turn to and experience the living Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts.***

In meditation, we do not seek to think about God nor do we seek to think about His Son, Jesus, nor do we seek to think about the Holy Spirit. We are trying rather to do something immeasurably greater.

By turning aside from everything that is passing, we seek not just to think about God, but also to be with God, to experience him as the ground of our being.

John Main OSB, The Gethsemani Talks, to the Trappists of Gethsemani Abbey, Kentucky, USA, November 1976

Outline of a Six Week Introduction to Meditation

2. Meditation and Our Relationship with God

Meditation is based on our faith, as Christians, that ***the fundamental relationship of our lives is our relationship as creatures, with God our Creator.*** Each one of us is created by God, and therefore each one of us has a Divine origin. To appreciate the full wonder and glorious mystery of this fundamental relationship, most of us have to get into touch with ourselves first, to get into a full relationship with ourselves. We have first to find, expand, and experience our own capacity for peace, for serenity, and for harmony, before we can begin to appreciate our God and Father who is the author of all harmony and serenity.

Meditation is the very simple process by which we prepare ourselves to be at peace with ourselves so that we are capable of appreciating the peace of the Godhead within us. This is the reason for the Psalmist's saying: "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps 46:10)

John Main OSB, Word Into Silence

3. Meditation and Following Jesus

The great task of our life, and of prayer, is the realization of our intimate union with God, our Father through Christ in the Spirit. ***The foundation of our journey to God is the self-giving of God in Jesus. In the Incarnation, God has emptied himself out, into Jesus,*** pouring the Divine essence into the person of Jesus Christ. This is the extraordinary mystery of God, ***reduced to almost nothing as he takes on human form.***

The Incarnation is about God in Jesus taking on all our human limitations and accepting them by becoming a human person like us. The Incarnation is about the reduction of God to man, so man may enter into Godliness through Jesus Christ. ***The whole purpose of Christian meditation is to follow in the way of Jesus.*** We have to be reduced to the single activity of being. ***We must be reduced to nothing so that we may pass through, to become all.***

John Main OSB, The Heart of Creation

4. Meditation and Union with God through Jesus

The life and teaching, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his sending of his Spirit to dwell within us, have radically transformed the potential for the development of human consciousness. Because of what Jesus has done, we are no longer cut off from the full experience of God. We are called to share in God's own nature and being, through Jesus. ***We can reach God the Father through the human consciousness of Jesus, the Son. His human***

Outline of a Six Week Introduction to Meditation

consciousness (his body, mind, and spirit) is to be found in our own hearts. That's what the In-dwelling of the Holy Spirit means.

In meditation, we open our human consciousness – with all its limitations and faults – **to the human consciousness of Jesus**, unlimited and glorified in the Divine life. Thus, the human consciousness of Jesus leads us to the fullness of being, to God. That's why Jesus said: "I have come that you may have life, life in all its fullness." (John 10:10)

John Main OSB, The Heart of Creation

5. The Aim of Christian Prayer

Prayer is the process wherein we discover who we are and why we are. So prayer, **meditation, is not just a way of 'doing' some-thing but it is a way of 'becoming' someone – becoming yourself**, created by God, redeemed by Jesus and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, dearest brothers, in meditation we go beyond thoughts, even holy thoughts. Meditation is concerned not so much with thinking as with being. We seek to become the person we are called to be, not by thinking about God but by being with Him. Simply to be in His presence is all-sufficing. **Simply to be with Him is to be drawn into being the person He calls us to be.** This is the message of Jesus' injunction to seek the Kingdom first and then all else will be given.

Our aim in Christian prayer is to allow God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality, but the reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are.

And so, prayer is not the time for words, however beautifully and sincerely phrased. All our words are wholly ineffective when we enter into mysterious communion with God whose Word is before and after all words.

The Gethsemani Talks, John Main OSB to the Trappists of Gethsemani Abbey, Kentucky, USA, November 1976

6. Meditation on the Journey of Prayer

The essential message of Christianity is that ***our call and our potential is to enter into the life of God through Jesus, through his Spirit present in our hearts.*** The journey of prayer is simply to find the way to open our human consciousness to the human consciousness of Jesus. In prayer, the way we travel is to become wholly absorbed in Jesus and to travel with him in his return to the Father.

The question however remains; how do we open our human consciousness to the human consciousness of Jesus? What stops us from recognizing the presence of Jesus in our heart is our own egoism.

We are thinking about ourselves; we are locked into ourselves. It is here that we turn to meditation. *In meditation, we seek to disassemble the barriers that we have set up around ourselves, and we start the process of dismantling the ego that cuts us off from the consciousness of the presence of Jesus within our own hearts.*

John Main OSB, The Heart of Creation, 'Being On The Way'.

7. Meditation and the Prayer of Jesus

As far as our tradition is concerned, ***there is only one prayer, and that is the prayer of Jesus. He is the universal mediator.*** There is no way to the Father except through Jesus. St Paul tells us that, "We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit prays within us." (Rom.8:26) The prayer of Jesus is his communion of love with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Meditation is our total openness to and oneness with this prayer of Jesus. Christian prayer is in essence disposing ourselves so that the murmur of the prayer of Jesus may arise in our hearts. The theology is that the prayer is the prayer of Jesus.

We have to stand back and allow his prayer, as it were, full power within us. As soon as we realize that the Way is the prayer of Jesus, then ***our only challenge is to stand back sufficiently enough to allow his prayer to become super-eminent.*** The requirement is total selflessness, a total abandoning of our own thoughts, imagination, insight, and above all abandoning of our own prayers and openness to the prayer of Jesus in our heart.

John Main OSB, The Heart of Creation

8. The Significance of the Mantra

The journey of prayer is simply to find the way to open our human consciousness to the human consciousness of Jesus. How? It is here that we turn from theory to meditation. What stops us from recognizing and entering the presence of Jesus in our heart is our own egoism. We are thinking about ourselves; we are locked into our self.

In meditating, we start the process of dismantling the ego and its persistent attempt to place ourselves at the center. Saying the mantra is like unlocking the door of our heart. The mantra is like the key unlocking the door to allow the pure light of love to flood in.

Jesus says, "No one can be a follower of mine unless he leaves his self behind." In meditating, we seek to leave self behind and to be open to the powerful personal presence of Christ in our hearts. The mantra is like a sacrament, the outward sign of our faith in his presence. In saying your mantra, you are letting go of your own thoughts, your imagination, fears, and daydreams.

We must learn to be disciplined, and we must learn to leave our thoughts and imagination entirely behind. The faithful recitation of the mantra is the way.

John Main OSB, The Heart Of Creation

9. The Purpose of the Mantra

All Christian prayer is basically the experience of being filled with the Spirit. In Romans 8:26-7, St Paul puts it this way: "We do not even know how to pray, but through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us, and God who searches our inmost being knows what the

On the spiritual journey, it takes more energy to be still than to run. Most people spend their waking hours rushing from one thing to another, often because they are afraid of stillness and silence. If we can find the courage to face this silence and be still, we enter the peace beyond all understanding.

John Main OSB

On Meditation and Christian Prayer

LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

The Seven Teachings of Jesus on Prayer

Jesus was a teacher of contemplation. We see this very clearly in his teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in St Matthew's Gospel.

1. Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father's house in heaven. (Matt 6:1)

HUMILITY Prayer must not be merely outward. It is not about looking holy or winning other people's admiration.

2. When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in synagogue and at the street corners for everyone to see them. I tell you this: they have their reward already. But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you. (Matt 6:5-6)

INTERIORITY Prayer must be interior. The 'secret place' is a metaphor for the heart.

3. In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard. Do not imitate them. (Matt 6:7-8)

SILENCE In prayer we must not 'babble on'. More words do not make God hear us better. Prayer is not about quantity 'prayers', but about quality – 'attention'.

4. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matt 6:8)

TRUST Prayer is not about asking God for things, because he 'knows what we need before we ask him'.

5. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break into and steal it. Store up treasure in heaven where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be so. (Matt 6:19-21)

SPIRITUALITY *We must give priority to the spiritual treasures of the Kingdom rather than material well-being.*

6. I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely, life is more than food, the body more than clothes. Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds! And why be anxious about clothes? Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not work, they do not spin; and yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendor was not attired like one of these. But if that is how God clothes the grass in the fields, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, will he not all the more clothe you? How little faith you have! Do not ask anxiously, what are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear? All these are things for the heathen to run after, not for you, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (Matt 6:25-32)

PEACE *We must learn to stop worrying about the future and to trust in God. Anxiety is not conducive to prayer. Anxiety makes us too self-centered and prevents us from realizing the gift of love already deposited in our heart.*

7. Set your mind on God's Kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well. (Matt 6:33)

ATTENTION *Prayer is about 'setting the mind on God's Kingdom first.' In other words, be attentive and mindful of the one thing necessary.*

THE SEVEN TEACHINGS OF JESUS ON PRAYER can be summarized as humility, silence, trust, attention, interiority, spirituality, peace. These are the qualities of meditation. And so, when we meditate, we put into practice the teaching of Jesus on how to pray.

The Wheel of Prayer

LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

Prayer is the movement of our life, our journey, towards God. A good symbol of prayer is the Wheel because it suggests movement, turning our whole life towards God. There are many forms of prayer. We pray in different ways, at different times, and according to how we feel. Each of us has our own preferred ways of prayer. **The spokes of the wheel could represent these different forms of prayer – the Eucharist, the sacraments, the prayer of Scripture, petitionary and intercessory prayer, charismatic prayer, devotions, the rosary, etc.**

But what makes all these different forms of prayer Christian is that they should be centered in Christ. All these different spokes, all these different forms of prayer, converge in the hub, in the center of the wheel. What do we find at the center? In Christian terms, we find the prayer of Christ, the mind of Christ. The spokes are the forms or expressions of prayer, which fit into the hub of the wheel where we find the prayer of Jesus himself.

In this understanding of prayer, all forms of prayer flow into and out of the spirit of Jesus worshipping God on behalf of creation. His prayer is his communion of love with the Father in the Holy Spirit, and his love for the world. Therefore, our own forms of prayer are less important than his prayer. His prayer contains and completes all forms of prayer.

St Paul says; “I live no longer, but Christ lives in me.” This is a great expression of the relationship of the Christian to the person of Christ. In other words, we move beyond and out of our own little ego-world and we move into the spirit, into the mind, into the person of Christ. There we find our own identity completed and expanded.

We could paraphrase St Paul and say: “I pray no longer but Christ prays in me.” This means that **our prayers are like little prayers flowing into the great ocean of the prayer of Christ.** **How do we find our way to the hub of the wheel?** In the tradition of the early Christian monks, and in our tradition taught by John Main, we find a very simple method, a very simple form of the prayer of the heart. **It is the form of the mantra.**

We take a single word or a short phrase, sacred in our faith, and we repeat this word or phrase continually in the mind and the heart. We listen to the word as we say it; we pay attention to it.

We allow the word to guide us through our thoughts, concerns, anxieties, and distractions in order to lead us gently along the path of silence and simplicity to that stillness that we find at the center of our being.

At the hub of the wheel, at the center of prayer, you find stillness. Without the stillness of the hub, the wheel cannot turn. Without stillness at the center, there could be no movement or growth at the circumference. The quality of our activity – of our busy, active lives – depends on the stillness we find at the center. Meditation is the work of finding and becoming one with this stillness. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10)

The more deeply we enter into the prayer of Christ, into the silence and stillness at the center of our being; we find that the other forms of prayer at other times become enriched. Our reading of Scripture, our prayer in community, our celebration of the sacraments, all these different forms of prayer, are transformed and deepened, and the spiritual meaning of them is enhanced by our practice of meditation.

Laurence Freeman OSB, Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice

There is no part-time or partial prayer, as if the Spirit were not always alive in our heart. But there are times, in our twice-daily meditation, when we make a complete turn of consciousness towards this ever-present reality. There comes a level of awakening...when our awareness of this reality is constant throughout the most diverse activities or concerns.

John Main OSB

Handouts for New Meditators

Handouts for New Meditators

“Be still and know that I am God” Psalm 46:10

This is a synopsis of the teaching on Christian Meditation by the late Benedictine monk, John Main OSB (1926-1982).

Meditation involves coming to a stillness of spirit and stillness of body. The extraordinary thing is that, in spite of all the distractions of the modern world, this silence is perfectly possible for all of us. To attain this silence and stillness we have to devote time, energy and love.

The way we set out on this pilgrimage is to recite a short phrase, a word that today is commonly called a mantra. The mantra is simply a means of turning our attention beyond ourselves, a method of drawing us away from our own thoughts and concerns. The real work of meditation is to attain harmony of body, mind and spirit. This is the aim given us by the psalmist: *“Be still and know that I am God.”* In meditation, we turn the searchlight of consciousness off ourselves.

In meditation, we are not thinking of or imagining God at all. In meditation, we seek to do something immeasurably greater: we seek to be *with* God, to be *with* Jesus, to be *with* his Holy Spirit. In meditation, we go beyond thoughts, even holy thoughts. Meditation is concerned not with thinking, but with *being*. Our aim in Christian prayer is to allow God’s mysterious and silent presence within us to become *the* reality, which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are. The task of meditation, therefore, is to bring our distracted mind to stillness and concentration.

To meditate, seek a quiet place, and find a comfortable upright sitting position. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly, begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer phrase, “Maranatha.” It is utterly simple. Say it in four equally stressed syllables, like this: “MA-RA-NA-THA.” Some people say the word in conjunction with their calm and regular breathing. The speed should be fairly slow and rhythmical.

Maranatha is Aramaic, the language that Jesus himself spoke. It means “Come Lord”. It is probably the most ancient Christian prayer. St. Paul ends Corinthians with it and St. John ends the Book of Revelation with it. Listen to the word as you say it, gently but continuously.

You do not have to think or imagine anything, spiritual or otherwise. Meditation has nothing to do with quiet reverie or passive stillness, but with attentive wakefulness. If thoughts or images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so return to saying your word. Don't use any energy trying to dispel the distraction. Simply ignore it, and the way to ignore it is to say your mantra. Return with fidelity to meditation each morning and each evening for between twenty and thirty minutes.

Meditation is a pilgrimage to your own center, to your own heart. However, we need faith, simplicity, and we need to become childlike. To enter into the simplicity of it demands discipline and even courage. If one is patient and faithful, meditation will bring us deeper and deeper realms of silence. It is in this silence that we are led into the mystery of the eternal silence of God. That is the invitation of Christian prayer, to lose ourselves and to be absorbed in God. Each of us is summoned to the heights of Christian prayer, to the fullness of life. What we need, however, is the humility to tread the way very faithfully over a period of years, so that the prayer of Christ may indeed be the grounding experience of our life.

Meditation is a gift of such staggering proportions we must respond to it gradually and gently. When we begin, we cannot fully understand the sheer magnificence and wonder of it. Each time we return to meditate, we enter into that reality a little more deeply, a little more faithfully. Because meditation leads us into the experience of love at the center of our being, it makes us more loving people in our ordinary lives and relationships. Not only is meditation the necessary basis for contemplative action, it is the essential condition for a fully human response to life.

The wonderful beauty of prayer is that the opening of our heart is as natural as the opening of a flower. To let a flower open and bloom it is only necessary to let it be. If we simply *are*, if we become still and remain and silent, our heart cannot but be open, and the spirit cannot but pour through into our whole being. It is for this we have been created. For more information or to find a meditation group near you please contact:

Visit our Canadian website: www.wccm-canada.ca or our International website: www.wccm.org

The Way of Meditation

In a world that is growing increasingly aware of its need for stability and depth, Christian Meditation is speaking to more and more people. It is rooted in Christian tradition and experience, and is available to all. This is a path beyond thought and imagination into the presence of the risen Christ who dwells in our hearts. The way is one of simplicity and discipline.

1. Find a quiet place.
2. Sit upright, relaxed and alert. Sit as still as you can.
3. Be aware of your normal breathing pattern for a minute or two as you relax.
4. Close your eyes lightly.
5. Silently, interiorly, begin to say a word or short phrase (mantra). The Aramaic prayer phrase “Ma-ra-na-tha” is recommended. Say it slowly in four equally stressed syllables.
6. Listen to the sound of your mantra as you say it, gently and continuously.
7. Do not think or imagine anything – spiritual or otherwise.
8. If thoughts or images appear, simply return to saying your word.
9. Meditate each morning and evening for 20 to 30 minutes (20 minutes is minimum, 30 minutes optimum).
10. Resist the temptation to judge the “quality” of your meditation.
11. Persist in your daily practice and attend a weekly group.

Preparation for Meditation

Christian meditation is a daily spiritual discipline, a path of faith in which we open our hearts in silence and stillness to the indwelling presence of Christ.

However, from a human standpoint, it is advantageous to know a little about the process of meditation. Meditation is essentially a process of stilling the mind – slowing down the rush of thoughts until the mind comes to rest. We often call meditation “resting in God”. For the vast majority of us this process is long, demanding, and frustrating.

The mind does not like to meditate; it wants to wander. When we first begin to meditate and try to concentrate, the mind is hyperactive. An Indian sage Sri Ravakrishna once said, “The mind is like a forest of trees with monkeys chattering away and jumping from branch to branch.”

The repetition of a sacred word or mantra is the primary means of slowing down the mind. But saying the mantra is a discipline. Here are a few tips to help the process:

† Try to meditate at the same fixed time each day. If you have regular times for meditation each morning and evening, even the mind knows these are times to quiet down. And come to meditation even if you have had a restless night or have not slept well. Meditation will help make up for the restless night.

† It is important in the beginning to get into the habit of keeping the spinal column erect in meditation. Head, neck and spine should be naturally in a straight line. This doesn’t mean making your body tense. On the other hand, try not to let the body slump. Your hands should be relaxed. But aside from this, try not to give too much attention to the body.

† What to do at the beginning of meditation offers a personal choice. Some people will ask a blessing of God, or say a short vocal prayer in an effort to focus their attention and remind them of the purpose of their meditation. Some meditators will read a passage from scripture. Others will simply repeat the mantra a few times in preparation for their period of meditation. Some people spend a few minutes relaxing and getting into a comfortable sitting position. Some people will splash cold water on their faces before their meditation period in an effort to be wide-awake and attentive. Some people take off their shoes. All of these are personal choices.

Never allow anything to come in the way of your meditation period. Meditation cannot be done in fits and starts. A simple decision will have to be made: “I’m going to put meditation first.” Be faithful to the daily discipline of meditation.

Set aside a room or place in your home to be used only for meditation and spiritual reading. After a while, the room or place will become associated in your mind with meditation so that simply entering it will have a calming effect.

To ensure quiet, explain to family members that this time of silent prayer is important to you and ask that they refrain from excessive noise during your meditation time; and don't forget to turn off your phone.

A question you will have to face is how to time your period of meditation. Many meditators use pre-recorded timing tapes or CDs, which begin with 2-3 minutes of music, follow with 25 minutes of silence, and end with 2-3 minutes of music. Timing tapes or CDs offer an advantage over many electronic timers in that they do not shock you out of meditation with a loud alarm sound. One thing you do not want to do is keep looking at your watch – a major distraction.

The best time to meditate is before a meal. The digestive process slows down our ability to be attentive and concentrate. And of course in meditation we want to be totally alert.

If you find yourself falling asleep during your meditation it probably means you really need to sleep. Take a 15-20 minute nap, then begin your meditation again.

Also, consider your posture: an upright, alert-but-relaxed sitting position is important to maintain wakefulness as it allows you to breathe more air into your lungs and therefore more oxygen will reach your brain – and keep you awake. Choosing a time of day when you are most awake is also helpful (i.e. not just before bedtime or after a big meal when we are more likely to nod off).

Christian Meditation: The Teaching and the Practice

In 1975, a Benedictine monk, John Main, opened the first Christian Meditation Centre at Ealing Abbey in London, England. He had recovered a simple tradition of silent, contemplative prayer in the teachings of the early Christian desert monks in the English spiritual classic, “The Cloud of Unknowing”. It became clear to him that this tradition had relevance today not only for monks but for all people. And so, weekly meditation groups began to form at the Centre composed of men and women, young and old and of diverse backgrounds.

Meditation is simple and practical. It is about *experience* rather than theory, a way of *being* rather than merely a way of doing. Indeed, because of the profound change meditation can work in one’s life, it is even more than a way of prayer – it is a way of life, a way of living from the deep center of one’s being.

The focus of meditation is Christocentric. This means that it is centered on the prayer of Christ, which is continuously poured forth in the Holy Spirit in the depth of each human being. Deeper than all ideas of God is God himself. Deeper than images of God is the reality of God. Thus, in this way of “pure prayer” we leave all thoughts, words and images behind in order to “set our minds on the kingdom of God before all else”. In this way, we leave our egotistical self behind to die and rise to our true self in Christ.

Meditators therefore undertake an inner journey of silence, stillness, and simplicity. They embrace poverty of spirit, a radical letting go. The way taught by early desert monks such as John Cassian, and by John Main in our own day, is to go beyond all distractions of thoughts, words and images. One takes a single sacred word or phrase (a “mantra”) and simply and faithfully repeats it during the period of meditation. John Main recommended the ancient Christian prayer “maranatha” which is Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, and means, “Come Lord”. It should be repeated silently, interiorly as four separate syllables (ma-ra-na-tha). Whatever thought, image or feeling comes, simply and faithfully return to the mantra. Two periods of meditation of about 20 to 30 minutes are advisable, each morning and each evening. A quiet time and place, an upright posture, fidelity and perseverance are all that is required. The silence and stillness of meditation is the missing contemplative dimension of much Christian life today.

In 1977 Father John Main and his student, Laurence Freeman, also a Benedictine monk, were invited by the Archbishop of Montreal to found a small meditation community of monks and lay people in that city. From then on, a global spiritual family of meditators has come into being.

The Christian Meditation Community has grown steadily and there are now meditators in over 115 countries.

Since John Main's death in 1982; the Community has been led by Father Laurence Freeman, under whose direction, in 1991, the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) was formed.

In order to support their personal daily commitment people frequently attend a weekly meditation group. The weekly meditation groups form the spiritual foundation of the community and meet virtually everywhere: in churches, religious facilities, private homes, offices, prisons, hospitals, universities, colleges, and schools. The group meeting usually lasts less than one hour and a simple format is followed: a teaching on meditation (often one of the over 200 recorded talks of John Main), a meditation period, and a time for questions.

To many, meditation may be an unfamiliar way of prayer, despite its ancient place in Christian tradition. John Main's teaching allows ordinary people to recognize the seeds of contemplation within themselves. Meditation acknowledges the potential "holiness of all the people of God." In this renewal of a Christian tradition of prayer, there is also great potential for Christians of all denominations to meet in common faith and indeed for people of all religions to meet in their common humanity and shared experience. The World Community for Christian Meditation is ecumenical and serves a universal spiritual unity both within the Christian tradition and with other faiths. In recent years, the Community has participated in interfaith dialogue, particularly with Buddhists and Muslims.

John Main's legacy is found in his teaching Christian meditation as part of the great work of our time of restoring the contemplative dimension of Christian faith in the life of the Church. A Benedictine monk in India, the late Dom Bede Griffiths, has called John Main "the most important spiritual guide in the Church today" because of the way he has given modern people a simple contemplative practice with which to deepen their spiritual life.

The international office of the World Community for Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org)

is located in London, England. The community also has Centers in many other countries. The Canadian Christian Meditation Community Resource Centre is located in Montreal. (www.wccm-canada.ca)

The community is always the context in which our teaching happens. We do not use the franchise model: the whole community is present, supporting and guiding, everyone who passes on this teaching. Those who teach with us are not just spiritual entrepreneurs but members of a community that is part of the Body of Christ.

Laurence Freeman OSB

Resources for New Meditators

The following short list will help guide you as new meditator in selecting resource material as you begin your journey. The books have been recommended as “first reads” by the Canadian School for Teachers of Christian Meditation. Remember John Main’s counsel, however: we cannot learn to meditate by reading about it or hearing about it through someone else’s experience. We can only learn to meditate by meditating, by entering into the experience ourselves.

❖ Books by John Main:

- Word Into Silence
- The Gethsemani Talks
- Moment of Christ
- The Way of Unknowing

❖ Books by Laurence Freeman:

- Christian Meditation – Your Daily Practice
- A Simple Way – the Path to Christian Meditation
- Light Within
- Jesus, the Teacher Within
- First Sight

❖ CDs

- The Heart of John Main’s Essential Teachings 3 CDs comprising 10 talks of 15 to 22 minutes each)
- In the Beginning – John Main 12 selected introductory talks of about 20 minutes each, 3 CDs
- Being on the Way - John Main
- The Essential Teaching (2 CDs forming the first set of John Main’s recorded teaching – a basic introduction to the tradition and practice.
- Twelve Talks for Meditators John Main 5-6 min talks, CD

Going Deeper

Going Deeper

The International School for Meditation

The “School for Teachers” is a major new development in the World Community for Christian meditation since the founding meeting in Florence, Italy in 1997.

The School's aim is to enhance and foster the Community's mission: “To communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of John Main in the Christian tradition in the spirit of serving the unity of all.”—by creating and facilitating an ongoing “School for Teachers” in various countries.

It is a resource of spiritual friendship arising from sharing the contemplative experience. It is a way of learning to nurture the spiritual unity among all people.

The School prepares experienced meditators who are already familiar with “The Essential Teaching” and are committed to the twice-daily practice, to share this teaching with others.

The School will empower experienced meditators to teach by:

- deepening their knowledge
- increasing their confidence
- developing their communication skills
- providing them with the resources and experiential models needed

The School is composed of three phases, which will run concurrently throughout the Community:

1. The Essential Teaching

Meditators will be prepared to communicate the essential teaching of Christian Meditation. They will be trained to give the “Coming Home” seminar as a primary teaching tool.

2. Seminars

Seminars will be provided for teachers on a variety of topics that develop a contemplative approach to all aspects of modern life (e.g. social/political, economic, medical, psychological, scientific, artistic and religious).

3. Retreats See www.wccm-canada.ca for listings of retreats in Canada and www.wccm.org for events worldwide..

The National School: Workshop on the Essential Teaching

The purpose of the School is to guide and support those who feel called to share the gift of meditation, be it one-to-one, as a group leader or by giving talks to newcomers. A resource team organizes and conducts Schools across the country. During the weekend, a Resource Team will help participants to:

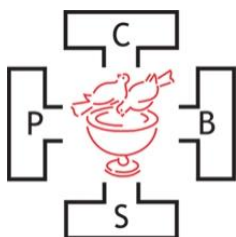
- deepen their understanding of John Main's teachings
- gain an overview of the history of meditation in the Christian tradition
- learn to recognize the stages of the spiritual journey
- practice how to respond to frequently asked questions
- gain confidence in their ability to share the gift

A School retreat is one of the important ways we learn to share and strengthen the Christian meditation tradition in Canada. The Essential Teaching Workshop is a high priority for Fr. Laurence Freeman because it helps us to gain experience in sharing the gift of meditation with others. As well, participants have an opportunity to practice giving a talk or having a friendly chat about meditation with another person. The sessions are interactive and informal with meditation periods at the heart of our time together

"...Jesus, the teacher within"

"Teachers are needed. But teachers cannot be produced for the spiritual pilgrimage of prayer as we can teachers for our schools within two or three years. The teaching involved is not comparable to any other form of teaching or technique of training. It is not a question of taking a course in techniques of prayer, or attending seminars on spirituality. The means, context, style and presentation are all in the power of the Lord Jesus, the Teacher within. But the teachers-in-community are in a real sense the channel for this power in the initial stages of growth. What they need is the actual experience and knowledge of being on the pilgrimage themselves and being led thereon by a power within and beyond themselves. It is rather expressed as an absence rather than a possession, an unlearning rather than a skill."

John Main – Community of Love



WCCM Oblate Community

Meditation creates community and unity flourishes in diversity. Meditators who begin to experience the personal transformation brought about through the daily practice may seek to express this in different ways.

Some feel attracted to the wisdom of St Benedict and his 1600-year-old “Rule” as a way of deepening and stabilizing the process of personal ‘conversion’.

The World Community is ecumenical but recognizes a special relationship to the Benedictine vision, which was the first in the Church to form a stable form of religious life and has adapted in succeeding generations to the needs and qualities of the age.

The Rule describes a form of daily communal life, which sustains the monk in a daily seeking of God. Prudent and practical, its wisdom recognizes the need for balance in body, mind and spirit and reflects this in the time-management of work, reading and prayer. More than a book of rules, the Rule distills a wisdom born of love, nourishing discipline and expressing itself in compassion.

The meditating oblates of the World Community find a way to express and deepen their commitment to this inner journey through this ancient and contemporary wisdom. It is a unique form of oblation however as it is oblation not to a physical local monastery but to a global monastery without walls.

Monastics in the World

Laurence Freeman OSB

A Short description of Oblates in the Christian Meditation Community

Unlike other religious leaders, Benedict wrote only one rule of life, not one for men, one for women, and another for lay people. He wrote one rule that can be lived by men and women inside and outside the monastery as monks, nuns, and lay people.

Benedict's Rule is eminently flexible, allowing each monastery to find its own charism. In "MONASTICS IN THE WORLD" Father Laurence recalls his friend and teacher, Dom John Main O.S.B., who placed the tradition of Christian Meditation at the center of the monastic life of

the contemplative community he founded. Before his death in 1982, John Main spent his years as a mature Benedictine monk teaching the practice of meditation to all.

John Main's conviction was that Saint Paul's direction to "pray always" was not meant just for specialists -- Cistercians, Benedictines, or Carthusians-- but for all believers. Out of that conviction sprang what he called a "Community of Love." Today, there are meditation groups and meditation centers around the world following his teaching. Many of these meditators have become Oblate members of the Community.

This guide presents Father Laurence's thoughts on the Oblate tradition, discerning a calling to Benedictine Oblation, the process for becoming an Oblate, and the hallmarks of the commitment an Oblate makes to his/her community.

The Tradition of the Benedictine Oblate Today

"The Oblate community is an exploration, made in the vision of the Benedictine Tradition, of an integrated, spiritual form of life appropriate for men and women today."

1. The Tradition of Monasticism

Monasticism is one of the oldest human institutions. It testifies to the unquenchable thirst of the human soul to awaken to its origin. The first Christian monks appeared early in the Church's history as an attempt to recover the primary experience of faith. They began as hermits in the Near East, flowered in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century AD and then spread to Europe. John Cassian brought the Desert Tradition to the west and it strongly influenced both Celtic and Benedictine forms of monasticism. Early Christian monasticism had a strong lay character and developed in contrast to the clerical state. Monks were free spirits seeking God through Christ, alone or in community. By the 6th century St Benedict, who was not a priest, inherited a diverse set of Christian monastic forms. In his famous Rule for Monasteries he simplified and synthesized this tradition and produced a vision of life that has inspired Christians of all walks of life down to the present day.

2. The Rule of St. Benedict

Benedict began his monastic life as a young man as a hermit. Later he became the spiritual father of a number of monasteries for which he wrote a short Rule, which he described as a "little rule for beginners". It is about 9000 words and is mostly concerned with the practical

details of community life. But the way it deals with these details allows it to transcend its time and culture. His essential question for entry into the community is "does the monk truly seek God?" The vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life are supplemented by disciplines of mindfulness and self-harmony aimed to bring the monk to the experience of the love of God. Prayer is central to the daily life and provides the framework in which the other two essential elements; work and Lectio Divina (sacred reading) are integrated.

The spirit of the Rule is one of moderation, tolerance, respect, discipline and the liberty of love. It is not a theological treatise; Benedict recommends Cassian and earlier monastic teachers for that. But Benedict testifies to a truly incarnate and daily spiritual life, which has a universal and timeless relevance.

3. Oblates

Originally, oblates (from the Latin "oblatus" - offered) referred to children placed in the monastery by their parents. They would choose whether to remain as monks once they reached the age of reason. Later, as the monastic institution became more formalized under church law, oblates were resident members of the community who for various reasons did not take officially binding vows. In time, the term oblates also covered people who lived outside the monastery but who had a special relationship with it.

4. John Main

John Main founded a new kind of Benedictine community based on the Rule and on the practice of meditation as taught in the Desert Tradition. From its beginning, he gave equal value to the forms of commitment made by monks or oblates. Oblates in his vision were not merely "attached" to a monastic family; they were fully participatory and contributing members. This represented both a return to an ancient tradition and an important new development.

Today the community formed around the world through meditation testifies to John Main's belief that the "contemplative experience creates community." Meditation takes us to the essence of the monastic identity: the single-minded search for God. Then it naturally awakens our sense of sharing this search with others.

Of course, not all meditators become oblates. The World Community for Christian Meditation represents, along with diverse other inspired groups a contemporary form of

Christian contemplative life. John Main believed that meditation offered a path for all people into the deepest faith-mystery of Christian experience. His great contribution was "the way of the mantra"; a simple discipline that could be practiced daily by people in any walk of life. For some meditators the monastic roots of this tradition offers them in a particular personal way a context and vision for their pilgrimage.

5. Why People Become Oblates

Practising meditation every day does not mean one has to become an oblate. Why then do some meditators do so? Because they feel the value of expressing in a visible, human way the sense of community they feel with others seeking God on this path. Because we all need support, encouragement, inspiration and the challenge of others to deepen our commitment. Because the sense of tradition needs to be made real in a living community and the Benedictine tradition is deep and wide enough to give hospitality to a very broad spectrum of people.

Also because they see that modern life can lack meaning, spiritual focus, and balance. In the Benedictine vision as developed for 1500 years they see the elements of a healthy style of life: a balance and harmony of body mind and spirit. A context for the study of scripture and spiritual thought which the way of meditation naturally encourages and makes a source of delight.

The oblate vision integrates the twin forms of monastic life, solitude, and community. Basic to this vision is the centrality of prayer - the different forms of prayer, which lead us into the "pure prayer" of simplicity and oneness as taught by the Desert Tradition. It offers a liberating sense of spiritual discipline appropriate to one's temperament and state of life.

6. The Commitment

Being an oblate is not a legalistic undertaking. The Rule of St Benedict itself is a highly flexible document that demands to be interpreted and has received very diverse interpretations throughout its history. In the same way, the life of an oblate is not bound to a set of rules and regulations.

The Rule is a yardstick, a way of seeing the straight in the crooked. It is not in the Benedictine spirit of valuing the root virtue of 'discretion' to have a book of rigid rules.

The three basic vows of the Benedictine Rule are principles of life to which the oblate makes a commitment of heart and mind:

STABILITY: This does not mean merely physical stability but an inner fidelity to the community one has joined. But this stability is given meaning by the commitment to the deeper stability of one's inner being, calmness and peace of mind, an ever-growing rootedness in the Spirit.

OBEDIENCE: All groups require a structure of obedience however informal. Benedict emphasizes the importance of mutual obedience and consultation. But the essential obedience here is that of the spiritual ear attuned to the Word of God, which resonates in all peoples and all situations, and a quick responsiveness to this Word.

CONVERSION: Dramatic experiences of conversion may have their value but their meaning is in opening a new phase of life. This vow is a commitment to be always a pilgrim, living an ongoing conversion of one's way of life by an ever fuller harmony with the principles of peace, tolerance, selflessness and generosity and the courage to say the truth about injustice.

These general principles are lived out in personal ways. There are, however some particular elements of the oblate commitment, which also highlight its meaning:

- i. A commitment to the twice-daily practice of meditation in the tradition which John Main handed on.
- ii. Some form/part of the Divine Office/Liturgy of the hours as morning and evening prayer.
- iii. A short reading of Scripture; *Lectio Divina*
- iv. A sharing, in some way, in the work of the community "to pass on the tradition of meditation".

7. Community

There are many different forms of monastic life and community. Today's "Monastic" - another possible term for "Oblate" - may live singly, in marriage or in one of several forms of shared life with others. All these ways of life are livable in the Oblate Community. We recognize today both the need for a pluralism of forms and for a spirit of adventurous experimentation as this ancient tradition evolves.

The basic element of the Oblate Community, however, is the "cell." This word has a long monastic tradition referring originally to the monk's cave or room. With us, it is used to

describe presence, not only physical space. Therefore an oblate cell can exist where there is even one oblate living alone with rare contact with other oblates.

It also refers, more usually, to a group of oblates living close to each other. This cell will agree and arrange to meet with regularity, to meditate, to share the Word and to consider their ways of sharing in the work of the wider community.

There is also a newsletter and occasions like retreats, the John Main seminar and other events in the meditating community at which oblates can meet and share the strength of their common bond.

8. Entering the Community

As the Rule describes, entering a community is a process and requires discernment. This is not because the community is any kind of elite. But because the full benefit of entering demands the clearest possible understanding of one's reasons and of the call to which one is responding.

The first step is to make contact with an oblate or cell and make an expression of interest. Then a period of Postulancy can begin for which there is the simplest of ceremonies. During this period, of about six months, the postulant would benefit from attending the meetings of the cell and other events in which meditators meet. (The meetings of the cells are never "closed"). One can also use this period to develop a clear understanding of what the oblate community is about and what it is not. A reading of John Main's "Community of Love" would be helpful at this stage, along with an initial reading of The Rule of St Benedict.

Secondly, the Oblate Novitiate begins, where possible, with a short ceremony of welcoming and prayer for the fruitfulness of this step. The oblate novitiate lasts a year and may be extended. During this time, the oblate novice begins a study of the Rule, the Benedictine tradition and the teaching of John Main and other teachers of the Christian contemplative tradition. Although this formative year is not primarily about reading, it is important to set aside time for this work. The real formation is in the deepening of awareness that takes place as one continues to meditate day by day with a quiet sense of the community of meditators near and far.

The third stage is the Final Oblation, which is made at the expressive moment in one's spiritual journey as a step into a community and the living tradition it embodies. It is not a step that should be rushed and there should be a period of discernment, such as a retreat, during which

one can reflect upon the meaning of the Benedictine "vows" as they apply in one's own particular circumstances.

9. The Form of Oblation

Oblation is made both to and within community. The context of oblation is to The Community of Christian Meditators, a monastery without walls, The World Community for Christian Meditation.

SUMMARY

Meditation is about the journey to the Center - one's own Center and the Center, which is God. Christian Meditation is the spiritual journey into this center by 'becoming centered' in the heart and mind of Christ by a way of silence, simplicity, and stillness.

Becoming an oblate in this community is an assent and a commitment to the re-centering of one's life and of one's awareness in this mystery of Christ and of God. It is one way, among others, in which this universal human journey is given meaning and focus and is enriched, no less for the good of others as for our own, by joy and peace.

10. How Do I Become An Oblate?

- An informal meeting is arranged to prayerfully proceed with a 6-month postulancy. Suggested reading: John Main's Community of Love, Monastery without Walls and the attached 4-page article Monastics in the World by Laurence Freeman, OSB.
- Upon completion of the 6-month postulancy, a local gathering will be arranged where you will be received as a novice of the community. This will commence a 12-month novitiate during which time; the novice studies the Rule of St. Benedict, the Benedictine tradition and the teaching of John Main and other teachers of the Christian contemplative tradition.
- During the times of postulancy and novitiate, you are encouraged to attend Benedictine Spirituality gatherings, Oblate Retreats, or other WCCM events, either locally or nationally.
- The Quarterly publication, 'Via Vitae' is sent to all oblates and Friends by the Canadian National Coordinator of Oblates – Polly Schofield. Once you have established contact with Polly you may request your name be added to the mailing list.

- Final Oblation - arrangements will be made through the Oblate Coordinator at the appropriate time, preferably when Father Laurence Freeman is in the community.

The Canadian Oblate Community is coordinated by Polly Schofield. When you feel you are ready, send a brief introductory letter to Polly Schofield telling her about your meditation journey and why you would like to become an oblate. The email address is wccm.oblates@bell.net

Meditation with Children

Meditation with Children

Introduction

Meditation is found in all religious traditions. In Christianity it is the heart of the contemplative teaching of Jesus on prayer. In recent years its recovery in the mainstream of the church's life at all levels, has led to the formation of a strong global community. One of the most significant developments in the world of Christian Meditation is the way in which children and young people are embracing this form of prayer.

It may seem a paradox to many that children can be still and silent and enjoy it, but like adults, children also yearn for the experience of meeting God. Young children have a great openness to the presence of God in their lives and a real readiness for prayer. If they are taught when they are young to be still and silent so that their heart can be opened to the movement of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus and the embrace of God, they will have a gift which will continue to bring them great blessings throughout their life.

It is important that even the smallest child learn to be still and not just be quiet. Being still is very different from being quiet. It is in their stillness that God can speak to their hearts and they can discover the love of God for each of them personally.

Respecting children as human individuals in their own right is still a novel idea. The idea, that children may have deep spiritual awareness before they are taught a religious faith, is only now starting to be acknowledged. At times, we underestimate children.

We strongly recommend the use of MARANATHA from age 5 and then to use the same word throughout life.

"Children are born contemplatives and so contemplation is not only the goal of the Christian life but in a sense its starting point too," Fr. Laurence Freeman, writes in a foreword to the Like A Child series of books - a program for teaching Christian meditation to children in primary schools.

Children are saying that they do not want merely to learn about Jesus and God in their religion lessons: they wanted to experience God in their heart. Christian meditation provides your child with an opportunity to start a journey of silence and stillness where they will experience the presence of Jesus within.

The CCMC is committed to supporting Meditation with Children. In Canada, we are encouraging educators both in Church and School communities to bring the gift of meditation to their students. This is also a way of praying within a family, whether you are a parent or grandparent meditating with your child.

Resources

[Christian Meditation with Children-Something is Growing](#). YouTube video. Students, teachers and parents share their experience of Christian Meditation. Subtitles in French, Spanish & Polish.

[Resources for Christian Meditation with Children](#). Canadian web page.

[WCCM-Canada Educators' Blog](#) A collaborative learning environment in a community of faith. Educators share classroom experiences, challenges on this spiritual journey.

[Christian Meditation for Children and Young People](#) offers useful resources for educators teaching Christian Meditation to Children and Young People. Australian Educational website.

[Meditation With Children](#) – Supports the teaching of Christian Meditation to children – Read weekly letters for meditating with your children.

[Christian Meditation Books, Cds & Dvds](#) CCMC Canadian Resource Center

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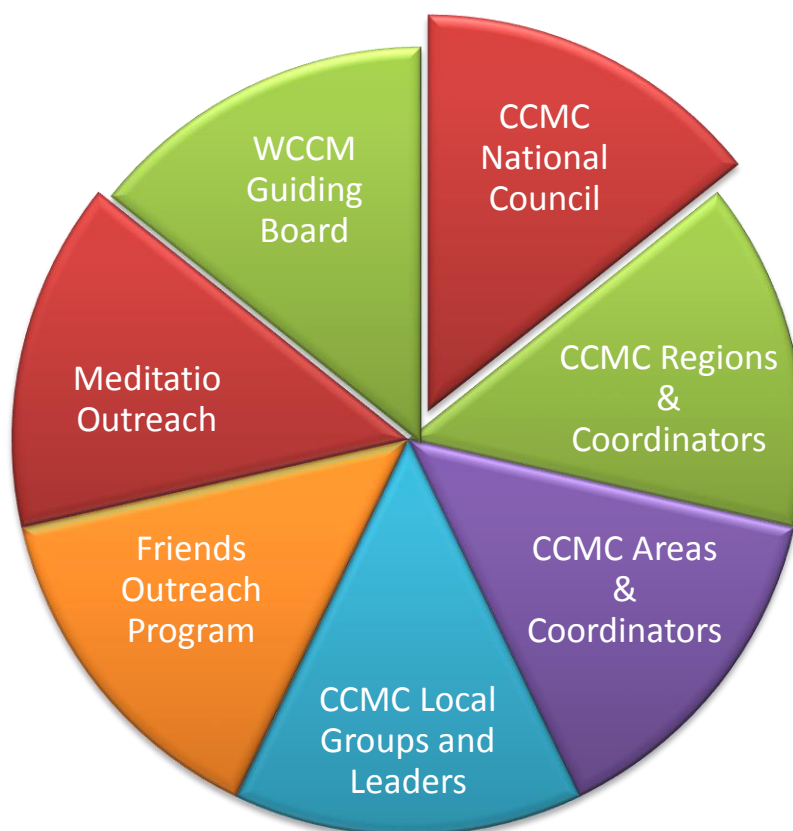
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The Community

The Wider Community

The CCMC and the WCCM



CCMC National Council The Council exists to serve the individual meditator in their personal spiritual journey in the spirit of the Gospel. It supports and encourages group leaders, area coordinators and other leaders who share in the work of the Community. Headed by the National Coordinator, it includes six regional members plus the Coordinator of Meditation Chrétien du Québec. The Council meets every two months by teleconference call and in person at the National Biennial Conference.

Council members lend their encouragement and direction to the many activities held throughout Canada, including:

- Coordinating national/regional events, retreats, conferences, and seminars.
- Visiting the various regions to meet with local meditators.
- Organizing and leading Schools.
- Editing and distributing the quarterly newsletter.
- Coordinating national tours by Fr. Laurence and other teachers

CCMC Regions British Columbia/Yukon, Alberta & Saskatchewan, Manitoba/Northwest Ontario, Eastern and Central Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces.

CCMC Areas Area coordinators work with groups within the larger regions.

Local Groups and Leaders Groups are the heart of our community. They meet on a weekly basis “to nurture and communicate meditation as passed on in the Christian tradition through the teachings of John Main in the spirit of serving the unity of all.”

Friends Outreach Program A Friend provides financial support to The World Community for Christian Meditation for its international work that is coordinated from the International Office in London and overseen by the WCCM Guiding Board. The CCMC conducts an annual appeal for this purpose.

Meditatio Outreach Meditatio is the outreach of a contemplative community that brings the fruits of meditation to the aid of the many problems and crises of our time.

The Meditatio Centre in London coordinates the seminars as well as the development of our internet presence and use of contemporary media.

Training programs will be created to share the insights of these seminars with national coordinators and group leaders in the different regions of the community. What is learned at the global level will be shared at the local level. Meditatio will also train young meditators for future leadership in the community. They will come from different parts of the world as interns or as part of the Oblate year formation programme.

WCCM International Guiding Board The Guiding Board of the WCCM is responsible for articulating a vision to sustain and share the development of Christian meditation around the world and to oversee the Community's life and growth.

The International Guiding Board consists of the Director, Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB and up to seventeen other Community members. Four of these members are National Coordinators selected to represent the concerns and issues affecting national communities in four geographic regions, i.e., Asia/Pacific, Europe/Africa, North America, and South America. The Guiding Board meets twice a year. The responsibilities include the International Office, the WCCM Website, Medio Media, the format and distribution of the International Newsletter, the School, the Director's schedule, the planning of major annual events - the John Main Seminars, the retreat at Monte Oliveto, the Way of Peace events.

The Two Doves Logo of the WCCM



In the Logo of the World Community for Christian Meditation the evocative image of a pair of doves perched on the rim of a chalice-shaped dish, as adopted by the World Community for its logo, is heir to an ancient pictorial and symbolic tradition, that was disseminated through the Byzantine and early-Christian channels via bas-relief, pottery, textile and mosaic.

There are surviving representations of this theme from Greek as well as Roman times, but its ultimate origin is probably Phoenician, connected with the cult and worship of Astarte. The famous mosaic of four drinking doves from the Emperor Hadrian's Villa, built after 124 at Tivoli, near Rome, was probably the model for the less sophisticated representation found in one of the early Christian churches of Ravenna, the tomb of Galla Placidia which served as inspiration for the logo.

The ultimate origin of the image is one by Sosus of Pergamum made at Delos in the last centuries before the birth of Christ. It was much acclaimed, celebrated and copied throughout the ancient world. The Roman historian, Pliny, admired and wrote about it. A Hellenistic representation, this mosaic displays extraordinary skill and technical ability in its execution and the pictorial representation of a variety of difficult surfaces and textures, such as polished metal with diffused highlights and hard, detailed contours, soft feathers and a slab of marble on which the vessel stands. It is achieved by intricate laying of minute glass and stone tesserae that denies the medium. There is an excellent copy of this work in the Palatine Museum, Rome.

The iconographic conjunction of water and doves, represents a complex, sacred, and very ancient pre-Christian funerary symbolic tradition that has been embraced by, and survived within the Christian Church, with representations of the type found in the decorative programmes of baptisteries and martyria.

The symbolism here is as profound as it is archetypal. It is a trans-cultural metaphor for the universally sacred that can be apprehended not through empirical information, but through personal experience. Symbols by nature are energy releasing and directing signs, sacraments of an inner reality -one we all share. A poetic reading, therefore is appropriate to the character and function of a symbol, which is of no value as a fact, but only as an awakener of the soul.

An emblem of universal matrix, water always illustrates the mystical symbolism of the cycle of death- birth -regeneration; i.e. Purification. Informed by its ritual function, this archetype, always denotes fecundity and resurrection. Traditionally, it is the female principle in nature, connected to the phases of the moon and life-giving waters. In funerary symbolism it served to reflect hope of immortality. ⁱ

In Roman funerary monuments the deceased is often shown as a woman, identified with Aphrodite Urania (heavenly, of the spirit), as she is represented upon the sarcophagus, with her special bird, the dove. By thus identifying with the archetype of life in perpetual renewal, the deceased is ensuring his/her resurrection. Therefore, one can say that the drinking doves of the logo are iconographically akin to the veneration of the mother goddess of pre-Christian religions, having survived within Christianity via Greek and Roman pictorial representations and the writings of the neo-Platonists.

'... for it is she we know to be planted deep in our fabric, she it is by whom men are impelled to have thoughts of love and perform works of peace...'

(Lucretius)

'You alone can give men the serene benefits of peace'

(Lucretius)

This is Aphrodite, the sacred feminine principle (one of her sacred shrines was at Delos, decorated by drinking doves of Sosus') not the debased vulgarised Venus of erotic love most of us are familiar with.

'Such numinous symbols of our inheritance of myth as these', Joseph Campbell says, 'become integrated within the Christian Church -images of transformation opening outward to combine with their non-Christian, pagan, oriental counterparts and thereby become transformed into non-sectarian, psychologically significant symbols, revealing a sacred timeless event going on within man/woman always'. Carl Jung, in his Symbols of Transformation credits the Logos for filling our understanding and desires with meaning'.....makes it drunken as if with nectar'. Nectar, in classical literature, is the drink

of fertility and immortality. The soul thus fructified is called the Heavenly Aphrodite (Urania). Yet, it knows the pangs of birth as earthly Aphrodite (Pandemos). It is not without reason that the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit ⁱⁱⁱ.

In popular mythology, winged creatures represent spiritual messengers or simply, the Spirit itself, as in angels, the myth of Eros and Psyche (love and the human spirit). The dove of love and peace is also the symbol of the soul in India. In China, it stood for marital fidelity and long life. Usually represented in pairs - male and female - they appear in the headdress of the goddess of fertility. In medieval alchemy the white dove represents the whitening of the primal matter as it is turned into the philosopher's stone - the transformation of the black raven into the white dove.

In Christian art, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are often seen as doves, perching on a tree or drinking the waters of Eternal life. Thus, we see them in our logo -a pair of doves -one drinking, the other happily standing by -on the rim of a chalice-shaped vessel filled with water. The chalice is a reference to Christ's sacrifice -as in the Eucharist, and, by the same token, offering us hope of eternal life, an assurance of the Resurrection.

This simple and beautiful representation - the logo of The World Community for Christian Meditation - enfolds a meaning that is both universal and most profoundly Christian - one held sacred through the ages, offering a subjective glimpse into what ultimately is a numinous, transpersonal symbol. A metaphor pointing to a transcendental reality.

Polly Schofield, Montreal Oblate and WCCM Archivist

i Eliade, Mircea. Images and Symbols. Princeton, 1991, p.131-132

ii Campbell, Joseph. Creative Mythology -The Masks of God. Penguin 1968, p.453

iii Jung, C. G. Symbols of Transformation. Bollinger, 1976, p.138

CCMC Council Members 2013-2015

The guidance of CCMC is facilitated by a team of Council members. The Council is composed of individuals drawn from various regions of the country. Meetings are via teleconference bimonthly.

CCMC Council Members 2013-2015

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Speakers List CCMC

The following is a list of some speakers offering a variety of retreat days/workshops on Christian Meditation as taught by John Main. They are members of the Christian Meditation Community whose spiritual leader is Dom Laurence Freeman, Director of the World Community of Christian Meditation based in London, England.

ALBERTA /SASKATCHEWAN

Engeline Piet

219-19th Ave.

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www.fcjcentre/fcjsisters.ca

Engeline has taught Christian Meditation at the FCJ Christian Meditation Life Centre since the early 80's. She is a spiritual director and a member of the FCJ retreat team. Engeline offers workshops for R.C., Anglican, and United Church parishes in Calgary and rural Alberta. She is also a member of the World Community for Christian Meditation and coordinates activities for Southern Alberta. She has taken the Teachers School.

Tom Cain

2518-5 Avenue South

Lethbridge, Alberta

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tomcain@shaw.ca

Tom has been practicing Christian meditation since 1980. He has given many introductory talks on Christian meditation to various groups on an ecumenical basis. Although his faith tradition is that of a Catholic Christian he has

many friends in various faith traditions. He has several times given a six evening course in the United Church: *What is Christian Meditation and How to do it?* He is on the Spiritual Life committee of the Lethbridge L'Arche group supporting people with developmental difficulties. He notes some people with disabilities are experienced and inspiring meditators.

Anastasia Young

103 Argyle Street

Regina, SK

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Anastasia is a Sister of Social Service and is the Director of Pastoral Services for the Archdiocese of Regina. She is the leader of a regular meditation group. She has given workshops with such themes as "Silence and Stillness", "The Holy Spirit as Energy within Us" and "Balance and Harmony in Life".

ATLANTIC REGION

Sr. Kathleen Bolger

Mount St. Mary's,

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Kathleen Bolger is a Sister of St. Martha of Prince Edward Island. She has given several introductory talks on Christian Meditation to groups of various denominations; is leader of a weekly meditation group; has animated day and weekend retreats; is a Spiritual Director and member of the Island Directors of Ignatian Spirituality and has served as Coordinator of the Atlantic Region. She considers it a gift to

be part of the World Community for Christian Meditation.

Rev. Frances Drolet-Smith

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Frances is an Anglican priest and has been practicing meditation for eleven years. She is engaged in parish ministry, offers spiritual direction, and has led retreats for various groups, including the local Christian Meditation community, the Diocese of NS and PEI, as well as parish groups. Among her recent themes has been "Practicing Resurrection", "Listening to the Desert: wisdom from the past for today", "The Task of Making Peace: transforming the world from within" and "Love bade me welcome: the gracious hospitality of God".

Jim and Louise are experienced meditators and committed leaders within the CCMC. Their talks focus on Introduction to Christian Meditation for adults and youth.

Diane Tolomeo

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Diane has been practicing Christian meditation for over 20 years. She teaches Biblical literature (among other subjects) at the University of Victoria where she is also Acting Director of Religious Studies. Diane offers retreats with a scriptural basis –as it relates to meditation or using the characters as archetypes of the human condition. She has co-authored a book titled *Biblical Characters and the Enneagram*.

B.C./TERRITORIES

Colleen Donald

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Colleen has practiced Christian Meditation for over 20 years. She has been the National Coordinator of the CCMC for three years. Colleen's areas of interest are Introducing Christian Meditation to beginners and to children.

Jim and Louise Dudar

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MANITOBA /NW ONTARIO

Phil Barnett

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Phil is an Anglican priest who retired from parish ministry in 2008. He has been a meditator since 1991 and continues to be a group leader. He has given introductory talks, workshops for group leaders, retreats, and Essential Teaching Weekends. He was the Regional Coordinator for Manitoba/NW Ontario and is the past National Coordinator for the CCMC and current Coordinator of The School of Meditation.

ONTARIO

Joseph F. Bergeron

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Prior to his introduction to John Main's teaching, Joe was committed to contemplative prayer and Zen for 20 years. He offers retreats and workshops on such themes as: "Contemplative Spirituality and Ecology", "Psychotherapy and the Contemplative Journey" and "Interconnection with Spirituality, i.e. Zen, Buddhism".

Joseph Clarkson

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Joseph recently retired with over 30 years of teaching experience at the elementary, secondary, and adult levels. Very recently, he completed a degree in Theology. Joseph has spoken to groups on topics such as mysticism, spirituality, prayer, art and contemplation, The Trinity. He enjoys integrating scripture into his presentations.

Father John Duggan, S.J.

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Massey, Ontario

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Father John has two doctorates and is an expert on the theology and spirituality of Raimon Panikkar. He led a discussion on this topic at the JMS '96 in Ascot, England. He has spoken at CMCT's monthly teaching meeting on at least a couple of occasions. He is currently working at a Native Mission on the

north shore of Lake Huron and teaches at the University of Sudbury (Laurentian). His interests are mysticism and theology.

Rev. Kevin Flynn

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Kevin has been a priest of the Anglican Church of Canada since 1983. He is currently Director of the Anglican Studies Program at Saint Paul University, Ottawa. A long-time meditator, he has founded groups in several parishes in Toronto and now convenes one at Saint Paul. He has conducted retreats and quiet days for different sorts of communities, both lay and ordained. He is a co-facilitator of "Fully Alive" retreats which include both yoga and meditation.

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Paul is a former journalist and has written extensively on the subject of contemplative prayer and Christian Meditation. Some of his books include *John Main by Those who Knew Him*, *Silence and Stillness in Every Season: Daily Readings with John Main*, and *Frequently Asked Questions About Christian Meditation*. Paul has led workshops and retreats in Canada and overseas.

Rev. Glenda Meakin

#450 McCarthy Rd. E.
Stratford, Ontario
N5A Oa1
519 273-4187
meakin@cyg.net

Glenda is an Anglican priest and has been practicing Christian Meditation for over 17 years. She is a spiritual director, retreat leader and serves on the Canadian Council and School for Teachers resource team. In the coming months, Glenda has offered retreats in Ontario and the East Coast on themes such as: "Food for the Journey", "Responding to the World Within" and "Preparing Our Hearts".

Marilyn Metcalfe

1462 Finch Ave.
Pickering, On
L1V 1J9
905-831-2945
medit8rmm@aol.com

Marilyn is a Benedictine Oblate of the WCCM, a licensed Lay Reader and Lay Anointer in the Anglican Church and a member of the Labyrinth Community network. She is available to present talks and/or lead retreat days on Christian Meditation, the Labyrinth, spirituality, healing, and interfaith friendship.

Joan McGuinness

31 Warrington Dr.
Ottawa, On
K1S 3C7
613 731-4041
jmcguin@attglobal.net

Joan has been practicing Christian meditation for over 15 years and believes it kept her centered in her career as a palliative care nurse. She attended the first Canadian School for Teachers in Lancaster and has helped to start a number of meditation groups. She walked the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in

2002 and has given talks on walking meditation.

Don Myrick

27 Costello Avenue
Ottawa Ontario
K2H 7C3
613-828-4938
dmyrick@magma.ca

Don, who is originally from Newfoundland, began meditating in the late 1970's and started a meditation group in 1980. The group is still in existence. He also started a couple of other groups. He was the first Ottawa coordinator and did the job for about eight years. He has also served as the National Coordinator for the Oblate Community.

Dr. Kathleen Russell

1 Worthington Cres.
Toronto, Ontario
M6S 3P4
416 766-9448

Kathleen is a psychotherapist and a specialist in pain management. She is one of the leaders of the Labyrinth Project in Toronto. She gave a workshop at the JMS '02 in Cornwall on the topic of "Meditation and the Labyrinth". She has also given workshops on stress management, mindfulness, living in the present moment and obtaining the still point.

Clem Sauvé

401-55 Wellesley St. East
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2T6
416 921-0367
clementsauve@gmail.com

Clem has been a meditator for 30+ years. He has given talks on various aspects of meditation in Toronto, the London Meditation Center and the former Monastery of Christ the King, Cockfosters. He has initiated and co-led three recent WCCM pilgrimages to India and is initiating a fourth for late 2015. He also oversees the annual John Main Seminar and

other international events. At the present time he is quite involved in WCCM governance and organizational matters as Chair of the WCCM Board of Trustees and as a member of the WCCM Guiding Board and its Executive Committee. He is regularly called upon to provide advice and guidance to many CM national communities on organizational, financial and other issues.

Derek Smith

120 Byron Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
613 729-4547
dereksmith1@rogers.com

Derek is a professor of Anthropology at Carleton University, a deacon at an Ottawa parish, a Benedictine Oblate, and monastic scholar who has written for *Monastic Studies*. In 1987 Derek led the John Main Seminar "On Reading" in Montreal. He has led numerous retreats and conferences across Canada.

Darrell Tessier

84B MacLaren Street
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0K6
613 234-2956

Darrell has been meditating for seven years and currently leads the group at St. Pat's Basilica in Ottawa. He also co-facilitates the groups at St. Joseph's Parish in Sandy Hill and at St. John the Evangelist Anglican Parish. He is a Pastoral Counsellor interested in Inter-Religious Dialogue and presently attends St. Paul University studying to acquire a certificate in that field.

David Walsh

173 Rosedale Heights Drive
Toronto, Ontario
M4T 1C7
416 361-1124
dwalsh@web.ca

David owns a Property and Development Management Company and leads a weekly meditation group in the Toronto business district. He was one of the movers behind the conference on "Spirituality in the Workplace" He has also spoken at the Croft Chapter House meetings. He has been meditating for 20 years and is an active member with several social justice organizations.

Sheila Watt

Pembroke, On
613 735-6651
jswatt@sympatico.ca

Shelia has been practicing Christian meditation since 1971. She leads workshops in the Pembroke area and leads retreats for local groups. She would only be interested in speaking locally.

George Zanette

21 Sara Street
Woodbridge, Ontario
Ph 905 856-1765
Fax 905 856-7165
zanette@sympatico.ca

George has been a meditator for over 20 years and has led several days of prayer in the Toronto area, as well as being a regular speaker at the Christian Meditation Community of Toronto monthly meetings. He has studied theology as part of the R.C. Diaconate program and recently studied Philosophy and Sociology at York University. He is a past National Coordinator of Christian Meditation in Canada.

QUEBEC REGION

Nusia Matura

514 769-4774

lmatura@videotron.ca

Nusia has been meditating for 20 years and would give talks to deepen spirituality by looking at Christian writers and saints (mystics) of the past. Her background is in philosophy and history. She teaches at Thomas Moore Institute in Montreal and could give talks in both French and English.

Polly Schofield

406 Beaconsfield Ave.

Montreal, Quebec

514 481-8746

polly.schofield@gmail.com

Father John Main taught Polly to meditate and she spent time with him during his years in Montreal. After his death, Father Laurence asked her to serve as the W.C.C.M.'s archivist, a job which she does to this day. She has been teaching meditation in a palliative care setting by meditating with the dying, their families and their caregivers. She has given many talks over the past 15 years.

Jean Pelletier

Quebec

819 242-4866

Jean has been meditating since 1984 and has led a number of groups. He has been a Benedictine Oblate since 1986. He attended the formation of the World Community for Christian Meditation in London.

Zita McGraw

514 334-7579

Zita has been meditating for 15 years and is now leading a group in Laval. Over the years she has set up a number of groups with a team. She is retired from a career in Social Work where her special interests were death and dying, grieving and psychology.

Lucie Legault

8 Place Neufbourg

Cantley, Quebec

Ph 819 827-1278

Fax 819 827-9179

legault.smeltzer@videotron.ca

Lucie is particularly interested in the integration of meditation and the practice of yoga. She is available to conduct portions of events that might focus on body/soul connection.

Michel Legault

8 Place Neufbourg

Cantley, Quebec

Ph 819 827-1278

Fax 819 827-9179

legault.smeltzer@videotron.ca

Michel has been practicing Christian meditation for over 15 years. He is fluent in French and English, and has given talks and workshops on various themes as they relate to Christian Meditation. Michel is past National Coordinator for the Canadian Council and a member of the National School Team. In 2001 he authored a book titled *La Route du Mantra*.

Covenant for the Christian Meditation Community of Canada

A. Purpose of the Covenant

To establish an operating framework and governance structure to ensure that the living tradition of Christian meditation continues to be shared as broadly as possible in all the provinces and territories of Canada in both official languages as circumstances warrant.

B. Community's Mission Statement

To communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of Dom John Main in the Christian tradition in the spirit of serving the unity of all.

C. The Christian Meditation Community of Canada (CMCC or simply the Community)

CMCC is composed of a number of elements as follows:

1. Member is a person who practices Christian meditation particularly as taught by John Main and is recognized by the Community as following the faithful expression of this teaching.
2. Group is a number of persons who meet on a regular basis to practice Christian meditation together, within a defined geographical area usually at the local or regional levels.
3. Area Coordinator is a member (usually but not necessarily a group leader) who in collaboration with the Regional Coordinator agrees to serve as a resource person, communicator and facilitator to a number of groups and meditators in a particular geographical area.
4. Regional Coordinator is a member of the National Council who in collaboration with the appropriate Area Coordinators agrees to coordinate all Christian meditation activities within a defined region of Canada.
5. National Council (or simply the Council) is the group of Christian meditation leaders composed in accordance with Section D.3 and charged by the Community with the responsibility of articulating a vision to sustain and share the development of Christian meditation throughout Canada and to oversee the Community's life and growth.
6. National Coordinator is the Chair of the National Council and thus will ensure its proper functioning and will see to the wellbeing of the Canadian Community as whole. He/she (or his/her designate) is a *de facto* member of the Board of Meditatio.

7. School is the specific structure within the Community that focuses on the transmission of the teaching to future generations. This 'school' will assist meditators to better accept and appreciate the spiritual gift they have received by coming to a fuller understanding of the tradition and a deepening of their spiritual life. As a result, the 'school' will help meditators to personally share the teaching with others in the circumstances of their life. The 'school' will serve the Community through the National Council under the guidance of the WCCM Director and Guiding Board.

8. Meditatio is the charitable corporation responsible for the financial and legal affairs of the English-speaking component of CMCC. Likewise, Méditation Chrétienne du Québec (MCQ) plays a similar role for the French-speaking component.

9. National Resource Centres (one for English-speaking and one for French-speaking meditators) consists of paid or volunteer persons responsible for the ongoing affairs of the two linguistic components of the Community, e.g., Newsletter, data base, Medio Media distributorship in Canada, communications, liaison, Friends' Programme, etc.

MCQ in addition assumes responsibility and assigns a high priority to the French translation of resource materials and documents as well as to the development of original materials in the French-language.

Each centre receives its direction from and is accountable to Meditatio & MCQ respectively, in consultation with the National Council as appropriate.

D. National Council (or simply the Council)

1. Mandate

To articulate a vision to sustain and promote the development of Christian Meditation in Canada.

To oversee the implementation of this vision through the coordination of national activities such as: the financing of the production and distribution of the quarterly Newsletter; the work of Medio Media in Canada; the organization of Schools in Canada and of national tours by Fr. Laurence Freeman and other teachers of Christian meditation; the provision of scholarships to allow wider attendance at important national and international Christian Meditation events by persons who could not otherwise attend; and, the organization of the biennial National Conference and General Meeting.

To facilitate communication and dialogue between Christian meditation leaders initially in Canada on a priority basis and around the world and to foster the development of leadership thereby reducing the dependence of the Canadian community on a small core of leaders and thus ensuring that appropriate structures are in place to address necessary issues of succession and continuity.

To develop a sense of community among Christian meditators by encouraging the formation of meditation groups at the local level and of regional groupings as appropriate. In this regard the link with the monastic tradition, particularly the Benedictine, is highly valued and new forms of community life, such as the oblate community, will also be encouraged and supported.

To foster and guide dialogue and meditation among Christians of all denominations as well as with representatives of the contemplative communities of other religions and sacred traditions.

To undertake in a sustained way fund-raising activities for the above-mentioned national needs and for the support of the International Centre of the WCCM.

2. Responsibilities

First and foremost the Council exists to serve in the spirit of the Gospel the individual meditator in his/her personal spiritual journey and to support and encourage group leaders, area coordinators and other leaders who share in the work of the Community.

In the conduct of its affairs the Council will be inclusive, democratic, broadly consultative and transparently accountable in its finances and otherwise to the Canadian and World communities and should report thereon on a regular basis.

The Council will make an effort to ensure that Christian meditation activities are well coordinated in all areas of the country and should maintain close links with The World Community, its Guiding Board and International Centre.

The Council will hold a General Meeting in the context of the Community's biennial National Conference.

3. Composition

The Council will be composed of the National Coordinator and seven (7) members with typically one (1) representative from each of the following regions - British Columbia/Yukon, Alberta & Saskatchewan, Manitoba/Northern Ontario, Ontario, Québec, the Atlantic region and a delegate from Méditation chrétienne du Québec.

Efforts will be made to maintain an appropriate gender balance in the membership of the Council and to rotate the position of National Coordinator among the regions.

The Council may invite non-voting supernumerary members to participate/share in the

Council's work as circumstances may warrant.

4. Appointment

Members, including the National Coordinator and *ex officio* the Chair, will be appointed by the Council in broad consultation with the leadership of the Canadian community. Members attending the biennial National Conference (and General Meeting) will be asked to express their support of the then incumbents.

5. Term

The National coordinator will be appointed for a two (2) year term renewable once.

Other members will be appointed for a two (2) year term renewable twice - efforts will be made to encourage as widely as possible the involvement of 'newer' members with leadership potential.

6. Meetings and Quorum

The Council will meet in person or by way of teleconferencing as frequently as they deem appropriate.

If the Chair is absent, the members of the Council will appoint an acting chair for the meeting.

The quorum for a meeting of the Council will be four (4) members.

E. Amending Formula

This Covenant can be amended by a unanimous vote of the National Council providing that the proposed amendment(s) is/are publicized in the Community's Quarterly Newsletter six months before a vote is scheduled and the general membership is encouraged to provide comments on the issues involved.

F. Proclamation

This covenant was unanimously approved by the voting-members attending the Community's National Conference and General Meeting held in Montréal, October 24-26, 2003.

Drafted by C. Sauvé
2003 07 26, as amended 2003 09 19 & 2003 10 26
Amended 2015 06 13

Communications

Communications

The Newsletter

Published four times a year, the Newsletter includes:

- a calendar of up-coming events
- news from meditation communities across the country
- personal reflections on a broad range of topics
- information on new publications
- The World Community for Christian Meditation International Newsletter

The National Resource Centre maintains a mailing list database, and oversees the printing and distribution of 3,000 copies to individuals and institutions throughout Canada, and to Canadian nationals in other parts of the world.

The Newsletter performs a very important function. The Newsletter is the vital link that connects us across thousands of miles, which few of us travel more than rarely. In that sense, it is what puts the "C" in CCMC, and makes us a truly Canadian community, rather than a scattering of local ones. As such, we become a more tangible seedbed for new members and new groups, especially in those wide areas where we are still few.

Part of supporting the Newsletter is submitting and encouraging the submission of material. Be attentive to the activities and initiatives of the people around you -- there may be a short report in it, or even a longer exploration. The items you share with the Newsletter may be of benefit to another meditator you have never met, in ways you cannot imagine.

Word count guidelines in general:

- Weekend Events/Special Twilight Retreats – 400-500 words
- Reports on events for News from Far and near – 150-350 words
- Personal stories for editorial consideration – 300-400 words

Photo guidelines:

Pictures are important – they add so much to the warmth and energy of the publication. Please include them if you can.

- Set cameras to the highest possible quality, then send a copy of the original file as an attachment.
- Close-up or medium-close shots (1-3 people) reproduce best. Big group photos rarely work in the space we have.
- Pictures that are not in sharp focus cannot be used.

Submit articles and pictures to:

Jeff Ewener
Newsletter Coordinator
jeff@jefferyewener.co

[Support the quarterly Newsletter for \\$20 annually](#)

There is a substantial cost in producing a print edition of the newsletter. Please consider converting your subscription to the electronic edition, and encourage others we know to do so as well. The Newsletter is funded by both our Annual Appeal and by donations received through the renewal form in each issue.

To remind you of the status of your support, your membership number and the donation year is printed above your name on the address label.

Canadian Christian Meditation Community– Newsletter

I wish to ____ receive ____ renew the Newsletter, \$20 annually

Electronic version _____ Canada Post _____

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO AND MAIL TO: **CCMC – Meditatio**
P.O. Box 52, Station NDG
Montreal, QC, H4A 3P4

The National Resource Center

The National Resource Centre was established in 1992 under the direction of Doreen Romandini to provide support to the Canadian meditation community. A small group of volunteers at the Montreal location, and others at a distance, nurture and support Christian meditation by providing the following services:

- Maintains and distributes a range of books, CDs, DVDs and other materials to individuals, groups and events.
- Accepts donations and issues tax receipts through the registered charity MEDITATIO.
- Supports communications through mail, telephone, and internet.
- Holds regular scheduled meditation group meetings at the Montreal location.
- Maintains a community database

Keeping CCMC Informed

If your address or email changes please inform Web designer ljunino@telus.net and Resource Center christianmeditation@bellnet.ca. Let us know if your group has stopped meeting or if you have started a new group. Inform our group list coordinator of any changes, Bill Meek – william_meek@bell.net.

Mail Order Bookstore

The Bookstore purchases books, tapes, CDs, etc. from Medio Media, the publishing arm of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), in order to facilitate access to resources for Canadian meditators. Many of our publications would not be available if it were not for the generous volunteers offering this service to the community. For a list of publications for sale go to www.wccm-canada.ca or contact them at:

Phone: 514-485-7928

E-Mail: christianmeditation@bellnet.ca

Mail: National Resource Centre & Bookstore
P.O. Box 52, Station NDG
Montreal, QC. H4A 3P4

Donations

<i>Annual Appeal: The Canadian Christian Meditation Community</i>	
I would like to make a donation of <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 <input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____	Tax receipts will be issued for donations of over \$25.
Name: _____	Your name will be added to the News Letter mailing list.
Address: _____	Please make cheques payable to: Meditatio and mail them to:
City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____	CCMC - Meditatio P.O. Box 52, Station NDG Montreal, QC. H4A 3P4

What do your donations support?

- The Canadian National Council
- The National Resource Centre
- The School
- The Newsletter
- The Website
- International outreach

In recent years, the Canadian Community has helped support communities in the Caribbean, through the supply of publications and organized speaking tours. Funding is provided from both individuals and in the past a small grant from the Trust for the Meditation Process. Individual donations are always welcome.

MEDITATIO - CANADIAN REGISTERED CHARITY (La communauté meditation chrétienne)

Tax receipts are issued for donations of \$20 or more.

The Friends Program

A separate annual appeal is made through **The Friends Program** in the spring of each year. Pledges of \$130 are encouraged. This program supports the work of Fr. Laurence Freeman and the WCCM. friendswccm@bellnet.ca

The CCMC Website

The website provides easy access to information about Christian Meditation in Canada, including

- A complete listing of meditation groups and contact information across Canada.
- A calendar of events
- The latest issue of the Newsletter and archived issues back to 2003
- A catalogue of publications and order information
- Group Leader Resources under the *More* menu.
- Links to videos and more teaching resources.
- Information on Meditation with Children

The Canadian Christian Meditation Community www.wccm-canada.ca

Web designer: Luis Zunino lzunino@telus.net

Méditation chrétienne du Québec et des régions francophones du Canada
(MCQ) www.meditationchretienne.ca

WCCM Websites

International: [**www.wccm.org**](http://www.wccm.org)

WCCM links

www.meditationwithchildren.com – Supports the teaching of Christian Meditation to children

www.thespiritualsolution.com – Young adult website (17-35)

www.christianmeditationgroups.org – information on leading a Christian Meditation group

www.christianmeditation11step.org – Christian Meditation as an eleventh-step practice for people in recovery

www.friendsinmeditation.com – Supporting the work of the WCCM

www.schoolforteachers.org – Essential Teachings Workshops: sharing the gift of Christian Meditation with others

www8.georgetown.edu/centers/meditation – The John Main Center for Meditation and Interreligious Dialogue, Georgetown University, Washington, DC

Note: There are also websites in other languages and in other countries. Go to **www.wccm.org** and click on “The Community” then “National Communities.”

Publicity Samples

Publicity Sample

Please view events on the Canadian website to get ideas on advertising your local event.
www.wccm-canada.ca

A Sample Insert for a Church Bulletin

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION GROUP

What is as old as Christianity, brings joy and peace to those who practice it, and is the best-kept secret in the church today? The answer is Christian Meditation.

In an age of rush and noise it is essential that we find time to be still and quiet. Christian Meditation is silent prayer in which we find God who dwells within our own heart. In finding God we also find our true self and thus we are renewed. Christian Meditation is the natural progression of our prayer life towards a deeper experience of God.

A group meets every..... at..... The one-hour meeting includes music, a talk on Christian Meditation, and 25 minutes of silent meditation, followed by a question period.

For further information, please call.....

Everyone welcome!

“The beauty of the Christian vision is that it is not abstract. It is also physical. All matter, all creation, is drawn into a single unifying cosmic movement: a wave of unity leading us into the union that is the Divine harmony. We respond not to what might be but to what is. The human vocation is identified by the birth of Jesus and calls us to very deep personal joy.”

John Main OSB

Quotes

Quotes

Inspiring Words

"Now the way of meditation is a serious attempt to live life and to understand life no longer in terms of always finding some novelty. We seek an understanding infinitely greater than that. We are led to an understanding that life, each and every moment of it, is perpetually new. This newness is not just a passing novelty, because you discover that in every moment you are springing from the creative hand of God. Godlike newness underpins all life as ultimate reality. Human novelty is the most fragile of life's superstructures. If you can learn to start liking from the depths of this underpinning reality, which is also the depths of your own being, you will encounter your own capacity, your own potential. You will then soon discover that life is allays marvelously fresh, continually exciting because it is always expanding. Your sights are always stretching forward into infinity, not contracting into this or that object of satisfaction. That is why a person meditates. **John Main, *The Way of Unknowing***

"The teaching of Jesus is that reality is already within us and of us. When we can believe him, we are free from illusion. The spirit of Christ teaches us from within as we allow ourselves to be teachable. Meditation is simple a response in faith to the call of Jesus to find the kingdom of reality within us. This reality is described in the New Testament in many ways, as Kingdom, Truth, Life. It is described by St. John and by St. Peter as like light, a light that is shining in a dark place of unreality, radiant and redemptive in the midst of illusion. As we give our attention to this reality, it expands. It grows and illuminates the darkness, dissolves the illusion." **Laurence Freeman *The Selfless Self***

"I strongly believe that the fostering of meditation groups throughout the world is essential to world peace and unite. I see the spread of Christian meditation as a positive step toward a world community based on the very important idea of self-realization and the message of Jesus Christ. As the momentum of life becomes more frantic in this twentieth century, the need for fostering a still point, as referred to by Bede Griffiths, has never been more evident. Through John Main's teaching on meditation one soon finds out that the transformation comes from within. This is the world of the spirit generating peace for all who wish to find it." **Joan Needham, *Canada***

“Naturally, I have tried to start meditation groups in my parish to which I have been assigned. In my First parish only one, or sometimes two, persisted in meditation. And it was not only the smallest meditation group in the country but the only one. And for three years, it was kept alive often by the fidelity of just one person! And yet from that tiny and unpromising seed there are now growing the big branches where many birds find spiritual shelter. And the seed grows when we are doing nothing, only being there.” **Monsignor Tom Fehily, Ireland**

Difficulties on the Path

“When one is inwardly quiet, some of the conflicts that are hidden by the ordinary flow of thoughts begin to come into focus. Normally I would not wrestle with them at this time but would let them go by. The time to reflect on them is after you come out of prayer. The value of contemplative prayer is that it’s a total immersion in that aspect of our relationship with God that happens to be the most important – the cultivation of interior silence. Psychological problems may come into focus as a result of periods of great peace, and a breakthrough may emerge. But generally such insights are a trick to get you to think of something. “Anything but silence” is the response of the false self to this kind of prayer. Interior silence goes totally contrary to all inclinations of the false self. That is why you have to lure it into being still for a little while.”

Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, p.68

“Unless human life is centered on the awareness of a transcendent reality which embraces all humanity and the whole universe and at the same time transcends our present level of life and consciousness, there is no hope for humanity as a whole. The aim of every community should be to enable its members to realize the transcendent mystery in their lives and communicate their experience to others.” **Bede Griffiths, quoted by Shirley du Boulay in The Renewal of Contemplative Life**

“At first silence might only frighten us. In silence, we start hearing the voices of darkness: our jealousy and anger, our resentment and desire for revenge, our lust and greed, and our pain over losses, abuses and rejections. These voices are often noisy and boisterous. They may even deafen us. Our most spontaneous reaction is to run away from them and return to our entertainment. But if we have the discipline to stay put and not let these dark voices intimidate us, they will gradually lose their strength and recede into the background, creating space for the softer, gentle voices of the light.” **Henri Nouwen,,The Only Necessary Thing, 49-50**

“Within there is profound peace, and one experiences utter repose; and yet tatters of thought sail across the surface of consciousness like clouds across a mountain top. In the beginning these intractable thoughts are disturbing; later on one simply lets them go their way, for they do not interfere with recollection any more than the clouds disturb the quiet of the mountain.” **Willigis Jager, The Way of Contemplation, quoted by Paul Harris in The Fire of Silence and Stillness, p.90**

“The world’s spiritual geniuses seem to discover that the mind’s muddy river, this ceaseless flow of trivia and trash, cannot be dammed, and that trying to dam it is a waste of effort that might lead to madness. Instead you must allow the muddy river to flow unheeded in the dim channels of consciousness; you raise your sights; you look along it, mildly acknowledging its presence without interest and gazing beyond it into the realm of the real where subjects and objects act and rest purely without utterance.” **Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, quoted by Paul Harris, in The Fire of Silence and Stillness, p.126**

“As we enter the silence within us we are entering a void in which we are unmade. We cannot remain the person we were or thought we were. But we are in fact not being destroyed but awakened to the eternally fresh source of our being. We become aware that we are being created, that we are springing from the Creator’s hand and returning to the Creator in love.” **John Main, Word into Silence, p.32**

“Abandonment, after all, is what the desert teaches best. As Abbey would say, the central spiritual lesson to remember about the desert is that “it doesn’t give a [---]”. Its capacity to ignore is immense. Yet in that very indifference, one discovers an enormous freedom. Gary Snyder says “the wilderness can be a ferocious teacher, rapidly stripping down the inexperienced or careless. It is easy to make the mistakes that will bring one to an extremity.” Being brought to the end of oneself is the terrifying (and enthralling) possibility that the desert enjoins. Here it is that we enter interior wilderness more fearful and promising than anything charted on terrestrial maps. The wildest, most dangerous trails are always the ones within.” **Belden C. Lane, The Solace of Fierce Landscapes**

Difficulties on the Path compiled by Michel Legault (February, 2008)

Community Laurence Freeman, OSB

“Community” is a much-abused term. The meditator, however, has a strong personal sense of what it means and why it is important to support and protect in a culture increasingly bent upon privatizing and dehumanizing the individual.”



“The community is always the context in which our teaching happens. We do not use the franchise model: the whole community is present, supporting and guiding, everyone who passes on this teaching. Those who teach with us are not just spiritual entrepreneurs but members of a community that is part of the Body of Christ.”



“Our community is a manifestation of the Spirit. It is this faith and vision that has allowed us to adapt and renew our forms at key moments in our history especially those in which we have experienced the challenges of our discipleship most strongly.”



“Our vision as a community is rooted in a great spiritual tradition, in Christian faith and in the perennial wisdom of humanity. It is therefore a force for change and healing in every era.”

Community John Main OSB

“And just as the mantra is the sacrament of our poverty in prayer, so in the community absolute honesty and frankness in our relationships with one another and above all with our Teacher is the sign and means of making the passover from fear to love.”



“To love others involves more than thinking of them, more even than enjoying their company, more even than sacrificing ourselves for them; it involves allowing ourselves to be loved by them.”



“True community happens in the process of drawing each other into the light of true ‘being’. In this process, we share a deepening experience of the joy of life, the joy of being, as we discover more and more of its fullness in a loving faith shared with others. The essence of community then is a recognition of and a deep reverence for the other.”

Revised August 19, 2014