



Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Believing, Achieving, Serving

Christian Meditation With Students



Prayer of the Heart



What is Christian Meditation?

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46

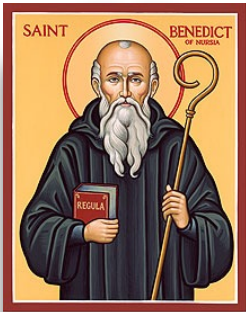
Christian meditation is a prayer of the heart.

Bishop Michael Putney of the Catholic Diocese of Townsville in Australia, described Christian Meditation as the state in which our hearts “can be opened to the movement of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus, and the embrace of God the Father.”



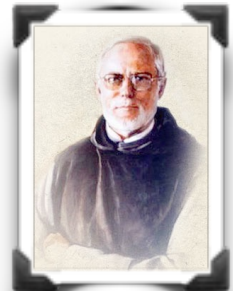
Christian Meditation through the Ages – A Historical Background

The roots of Christian Meditation can be traced back to early Christians of the third century, who left what they saw as the increasingly corrupt life of the cities, and settled in the desert, to live lives fully dedicated to God in prayer.

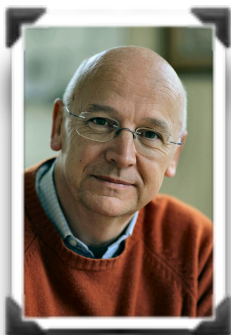


These Desert Fathers and Mothers, as they were called, laid the foundations for the monastic movement within the Christian tradition. Their teaching about how to pray and live holy lives was eventually written down in the Rule of St. Benedict, which became the handbook for life in monasteries and religious communities of men and women throughout the Church.

That Benedictine tradition of silent prayer—Christian Meditation—became much more widely known in the last century through the teaching and writing of Father John Main. He believed that Christian Meditation could be practiced by modern people of all walks of life, and he brought the practice to a small community of religious and lay people in Montreal.



Fr. John Main OSB
(1926 -1982)

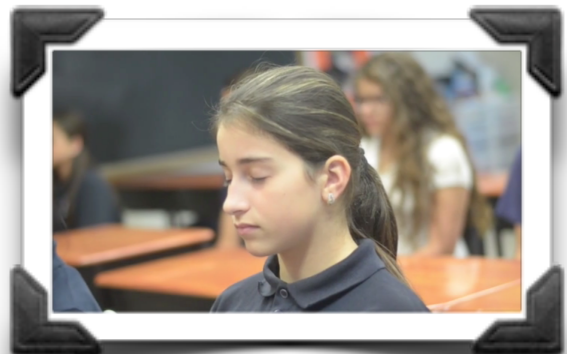
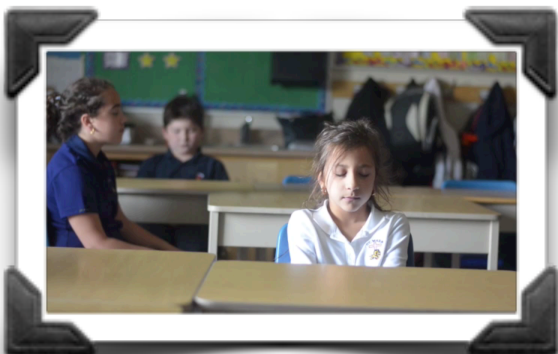


Fr. Laurence
Freeman OSB

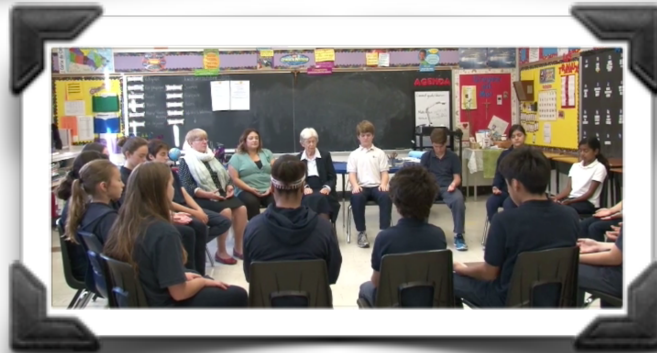
The work of teaching the practice of Christian Meditation to lay people has been continued by another Benedictine priest, Father Laurence Freeman, and the World Community for Christian Meditation. Their work with schoolchildren in the Diocese of Townsville, Australia has inspired other Catholic schools and boards, like our own in Hamilton-Wentworth, to share the teaching of Christian Meditation as a form of prayer within our Catholic Tradition.

The Fruits of Christian Meditation

- Meditation helps us learn about ourselves in God.
- Students have the capacity for contemplation and they are capable of experiencing the presence of God in this simple way.
- Students can meditate and like to meditate. Meditation deepens their personal relationships with God. It can initiate deep faith conversations that bring them closer to God.
- Meditation leads to increased self-knowledge and self-acceptance.
- Research indicates that Christian Meditation positively impacts student mental health and well-being in a secular sense. More importantly, it opens them to a deeper sense of wholeness and well-being which is discovered through their own experience of the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within their heart.
- Meditation increases the desire to build community with others. Students become more considerate, loving, kind and compassionate. They learn that love is a verb.
- Christian Meditation provides an antidote to balance the fast-paced digital world that demands immediacy.



How to Meditate



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

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

Sharing the Faith Experience - Debriefing

Every so often encourage students to share the experience of the meditation.

Respect what the students say related to meditation. Accept their experience.

Guiding Questions

How are you feeling?

What do you like about meditating?

What do you find easy about Christian Meditation?

What do you find challenging about Christian Meditation?

What do you find helpful about Christian Meditation?

What does Christian Meditation mean to you?

What would you like to share about Christian Meditation?



Christian Meditation With Students

Looks Like ...	Feels Like ...	Sounds Like ...
<p>Students and adults <u>sitting completely still gathered in a prayer circle or community</u> with their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eyes gently closed • backs straight • shoulders back • feet flat on the ground if using chairs or legs crossed if sitting on the floor • hands relaxed comfortably on lap with palms facing up or down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discipline • hard work to avoid distractions • lots of effort and hard work in the beginning, but an easy form of prayer with more practice • a special form of prayer • a special time with Jesus • a calm in the storm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Open Our Hearts</i> playing on a CD at the start and children joining in singing • a few deep breaths at the start • <u>continued silence</u> while repeating the prayer word 'ma-ra-na-tha' in your mind • <i>We Call on You</i> playing on CD at the conclusion and children joining in singing • For some classes, there may be a soft singing of the songs at the start and conclusion
DOES NOT Look Like ...	DOES NOT Feel Like ...	DOES NOT Sound like ...
<p>Students and adults <u>sitting around just anywhere</u> with their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eyes open • backs and shoulders slouched • heads down • arms or legs outstretched • hands fidgeting or playing with items that are distractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a visualization of a beach or other scene • wasted time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noises from movements and fidgeting • whispering voices or talking • continued loud deep breathing • throat-clearing noises • repetition of the mantra out loud

Christian Meditation Guidelines

- Make Christian Meditation an established part of your class routine at least two to three times a week.
- Allow students to take ownership by taking turns to do special jobs (e.g., setting up the prayer space, bringing in a sacred object for the prayer space from home, saying a prayer, setting up the CD, turning off prayer candle).
- The teacher does not meditate with students. Teachers gently, quietly and lovingly facilitate the prayer and encourage students. They observe students during the meditation so that all students feel safe with their eyes are closed.
- Keep reviewing the reason for saying the prayer word 'Marantha' continuously from the beginning of the meditation to the end. Focus on the prayer word keeps the mind free of distractions. It helps a person be still and be silent in order to be open to the movement of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus, and the embrace of God the Father. When one finds the mind wandering, gently come back to repeating 'Maranatha'. The ego does not like this discipline and keeps trying to reinsert itself.
- There is no good or bad prayer session. God blesses our desires.
- A personal commitment of daily meditation is life changing through the peace, tranquility, and graces it brings.



Meeting Challenges

- Do not stop the meditation to attend to issues of restlessness. Wait until afterwards to gently respond to any questions or concerns the student may have and allow them to tell you what would help them maintain the quiet.
- Meditation is a discipline and the practice is difficult initially.
- Some students might initially need some specific modification. Place students who have difficulty settling into meditation near good role models, or change where they meditate (e.g., sit on a chair instead of on the floor).
- Remind students to return to the prayer word 'Marantha' if they are feeling distracted. This strategy will also benefit the students who are sitting quietly, but are not really engaging in the process.
- If a student is unable to participate due to behavioural or other needs, and chooses to remove himself/herself from the meditation, let the student leave the meditation space. Provide time and encouragement for the student to join in when ready to meditate.



Questions Students May Ask:

Can we lie down while we meditate?

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

Why do I have to keep my eyes closed?

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

Why do we have to be so still?

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

Why do we repeat 'Maranatha' over and over?

Response: We say our prayer word continuously to keep focused during our time of meditation. It helps us to keep other things out of our minds.

What does 'Maranatha' mean?

Response: The word 'Maranatha' is from the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke, and it is considered a sacred word. It means "Come Lord Jesus".

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

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

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

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

What if I cannot help making noises or moving around while we are in the meditation circle?

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

Response to Parent or Community Inquires

- Christian Meditation is an ancient form of prayer that was introduced by the Desert Mothers and Fathers of Egypt during the third to the fifth centuries.
- It does not replace other forms of prayer or reading scripture or sacraments. It can enrich other forms of prayer.
- Christian Meditation aligns with the Religious Education curriculum.
 - For Grades 1 through 8, it falls under one of the six Curricular Strands - PRAYING.
 - In Secondary, it falls under one of the five Course Expectations - Prayer and Sacramental Life.
 - For more curriculum information visit the Institute for Catholic Education: http://www.iceont.ca/ontario_catholic_curriculum.aspx
- Ask your students to share their experience of Christian Meditation and try to meditate with your children at home. Students make excellent teachers!



Suggested Songs

Open Our Hearts

Words & Music: Michael Mangan

Jesus, open our ears to hear your voice,
Open our eyes to see your face,
Open our mouths to speak your words,
Open our hearts to your love,
Open our hearts to your love.



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We Call on You

Words & Music: Michael Mangan

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



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Letter For Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

Date

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

In our busy world, students are bombarded with noise, stimuli, and a message to keep busy. Our consistent fast pace can detract from our ability to guide each student to become "a discerning believer formed in the Catholic faith community who celebrates the signs and sacred mysteries of God's presence through word, sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, reflection and moral living." One of the ways to achieve this is by teaching students the practice of Christian Meditation.

Christian Meditation is a form of prayer used by monks dating back to the third to fifth centuries. In Christian Meditation we open ourselves to the presence of the Spirit of Jesus active in our hearts, our lives and all of creation. Christian Meditation helps us to learn about ourselves in God. Although it might appear that nothing is happening during the time of prayer, gradually life begins to change. This change is best described in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians which states that, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22)

Some of our teachers will be practising Christian Meditation as a form of prayer in their classrooms. I encourage you to speak to your child about his/her Christian Meditation prayer experience. Please contact me with your questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Teacher

Principal

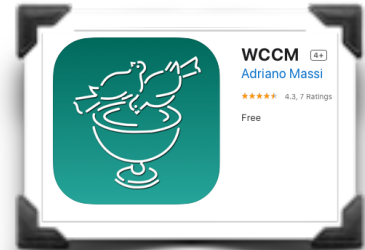
Useful Resources Related to Christian Meditation With Children

Meditation Timers

Are available on Mysite within Elementary and Secondary Curriculum.

The New WCCM App

Search for WCCM in Apple App Store or Google Play



Websites

The World Community for Christian Meditation
www.wccm.org

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

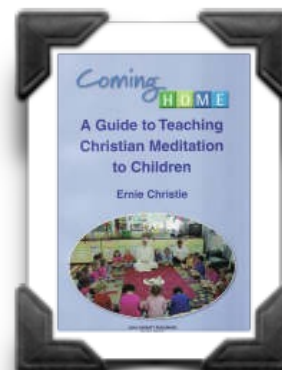
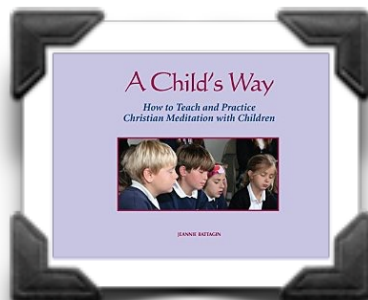
The School of Meditation
www.theschoolofmeditation.org

Christian Meditation for Children and Young People
www.cominghome.org.au

Publications

Battagan, Jeannie. *A Child's Way: How to Teach and Practice Christian Meditation With Children* (2012) Medio Media Publications.
(Available in your school Learning Commons)

Christie, Ernie. *Coming Home – A Guide to Teaching Christian Meditation to Children* (2008). Medio Media Publications.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to Sister Ann Marshall of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada for her dedication and commitment to spreading the practice of Christian Meditation to the students and the staff of the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board.

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