

Peace on Earth and Compassion *memorial prayer vigil and meditation to celebrate the life and legacy of John Main*



The event organized by Toronto meditators Fr. Terry Gallagher and Marilyn Metcalfe was held at St. George's Anglican Church, Pickering, Ontario on December 30. Spiritual friends from different faith communities worshipped and shared the silence to remember John Main. Liturgy, adapted from the service written by Sr. Kathleen Bolger, focused on scripture and John Main's writings.

Participants offered ten readings and prayers for peace on earth from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Jain, Sikh, Baha'i, and Native traditions. Some spoke about their own journey and how John Main's teachings had transformed their lives. Dr. John Vervaeke gave an inspiring talk and reading from the Buddhist tradition. Nora Walks

in Spirit greeted and blessed the gathering in her native Algonquin on behalf of all indigenous peoples. One of our Hindu brothers commented "I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to be in the presence of John Main's spirit as we all shared his presence in silence."

The beauty, peace and soul-sharing experienced at our interfaith gathering is so difficult to express in words, so much like our experiential journey of meditation. Simply put – you just had to be there to appreciate the subtleties and strong symbolism of the night opening up a new understanding of spiritual friendship.

Marilyn Metcalfe
Pickering, ON

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Ottawa Tribute to John Main



Record-breaking snowfalls in the nation's capital did not stop about 70 meditators from gathering in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit (All Saints Anglican/First United Church) on Sunday, December 30, to celebrate the life and legacy of John Main. A welcome from James Kubina was followed by prayer and reflections from excerpts of Father John's teachings – all in a very quiet, contemplative manner, enhanced by the ambience of the chapel. After listening to the teaching "Essentially Free" by Father John, we had 25 minutes of meditation. The singing of Taizé chants throughout this first portion of the afternoon was beautiful. A period of sharing by three meditators followed, people who either had met John Main, or felt they knew him through his teachings.

Don Myrick spoke about coming to meditation in a challenging period of his life. He contacted the Priory in Montreal and met John Main personally, a "distinguished, tall, straight, very genuine person" who showed no aloofness. "You felt you could trust him." In opening up to him, Don received the help and guidance he was seeking. Don also spoke about him being a great storyteller, a terrific mimic, a really fun person to be with. And, most significant, his teaching was very much a part of who he was. You

could not separate the two – his teaching was lived out in his life.

Paul Harris spoke about coming to meditation in a difficult time of his life. He knew he needed to slow down, but it was five years after reading about Christian meditation that he traveled to the Priory, where Fr. Laurence Freeman gave him two tapes of Father John's talks. After listening to them, Paul knew he had found an authentic teacher, a man of the spirit. This was the start of Paul's journey. He realized that meditation was the greatest gift he had been given, restoring equilibrium to his life. He then started a group in Ottawa, and for 24 years has been sharing this gift with people not only there, but around the world.

Ron Dicks met John Main through his book *The Present Christ*, starting Ron's journey on Christian meditation. Ron ended his talk by reading a poem he had written in honour of Father John (see page C6).

A wonderful time of socializing followed, with refreshments provided by meditators from the church. The entire afternoon was a beautiful tribute to our dear teacher, on the 25th anniversary of his death.

Marilyn Sugden
Ottawa, ON

From the National Coordinator

Horizons

I have lived on the prairies for 30 years and have grown to love the broad expanse of the open, flat land. It wasn't always like this. Indeed, when I first came to Manitoba, as I drove out across the land outside Winnipeg my spirits literally flattened too. But now I appreciate the subtle beauty of the colours and contours and the wonderful open sky. I did not realize, however, the extent of the prairie. I knew that it went out to the West, and have travelled that way many times, but did not realize how far south it goes.

Three weeks ago my wife Barbara and I drove from Winnipeg to New Mexico – about 2500 km south. And most of it is prairie! What I hadn't appreciated is that the prairie that I am used to around Winnipeg is the northeast corner of the Great Plains – a vast area with an incredibly varied landscape. My horizons were certainly expanded on this trip!

One of the benefits of meditation is that our horizons are expanded. God opens up to us new areas to explore. These may be aspects of our life or our personality or our behaviour. God provides us with opportunities for healing and wholeness, which usually involve stepping out into new areas or journeying in new directions.

Travelling across the Great Plains for three days sounds as if it would be very boring and monotonous. It wasn't. There are so many gradual changes of landscape, but you have to have the eyes to appreciate it. This is another of the benefits

of meditation – we become more able to see things with fresh eyes. We see God's world in new ways and we are granted new insights into our relationship with God and into other aspects of our life.

Towards the end of our journey to Santa Fe we saw the mountains. There is a spectacular beauty about mountains which is so easy to see. You don't have to look for the beauty in the same way that you do on the prairie. We saw the mountains around the city each day, and each day they were different, depending on the time of day, or the clouds or the snow. There were some amazing sunsets and some dramatic cloud formations. There were also dull days when even the mountains seemed drab.

Our practice of meditation can be very varied too. Sometimes it is very special, sometimes rather dull. There are times when our daily meditation is like driving across the prairie. There may not seem to be much variation and the landscape stretches endlessly to the horizon. We may think we want to get to the mountains where there is something remarkable and dramatic. At these times we need to be reminded that the richness and beauty are in the everyday routine of our meditation practice – just like the beauty of the prairie. It may take effort, but it is the essential part of the journey. Our daily meditation practice – the prairie – is actually a great place to be.

Phil Barnett
Winnipeg MB

The School: Spring Workshop in Ontario Region 2008

School Workshop on the Essential Teaching, coordinated by Michel Legault, past National Coordinator of CCMC, will be held in Ontario in 2008.

The School takes place over a weekend and is for persons who have been committed to the twice-daily practice of Christian meditation for at least two years, and who are ready to share this teaching with others in weekly groups or in other venues. The weekend is designed to be very interactive and focused on small group presentations and discussions. Each participant receives a copy of *A Presenter's Resource Book*. This resource book is designed to help the ordinary meditator with teaching about meditation in a simple and clear way.

The school will also be offered at Providence Spirituality Centre, Kingston, May 30-June 1, 2008. Cost: \$170 per person, including meals and accommodation. Deadline for registration: May 10.

For further information please contact: Ron Dicks, Coordinator Ontario Region, email <rdicks@rogers.com>, tel.: 613-739-1046

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NEWS FROM FAR AND NEAR

CHARLOTTETOWN JOHN MAIN MEMORIAL SERVICE

At 2 p.m. on Sunday, December 30, a warm, sunny day between the deluge of two snowstorms, there was a service at Mount St. Mary's celebrating John Main's life and legacy. Twenty-five participants from the Tuesday meditation groups joined in this memorial. The program, based on the booklet honouring John Main, and prepared by the PEI Meditation Action Planning (MAP) Committee, interwove meditation, music, silence and a short ritual on the WCCM symbol – the drinking doves. It was interesting to hear stories of two meditators who had visited Ravenna and received gifts or purchased art books of the symbol, even though it was only within the last few years that they uncovered its use and meaning. Our time together ended with food and fellowship.

We are thankful for our call to Christian meditation, and for the legacy that John Main has left to help us live inner stillness and quiet amidst our busy activities.

Rae Lane
Charlottetown, PE

NOVA SCOTIA JOHN MAIN VIGIL

On the feast of the Epiphany, two groups, usually meeting separately in town and village, came together for a three-hour vigil in memory of John Main, and in thanksgiving for the gift of Christian meditation which he passed on to us. Although we were unable to meet on the exact anniversary of Father John's death, our gathering from different denominations seemed fitting on a day which universally celebrates the manifestation of Christ to all peoples.

Everyone had been invited to come and go as their day permitted, and our vigil in the dimly lit hospital chapel was very simple. The central focus was three periods of meditation, each introduced by the voice of John Main in simple instruction and his prayer:

*Heavenly Creator, 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.

The intervals between meditation times allowed some quiet for reflection, with soft music from Margaret Rizza's "Light in our Darkness". Readings, spontaneously offered in the stillness by individual participants, included a thanksgiving psalm (118) and excerpts from the letters of St. Paul, and works of John Main, Thomas Merton and St. Anselm.

After the final meditation, people sat in silence for a while, leaving the chapel as they felt ready, quietly welcoming newcomers outside and exchanging greetings between the two groups. We wished the vigil could have lasted longer, but carried its peace with us as we left.

Philippa Ells
Canning, Annapolis Valley, NS

JOHN MAIN MEMORIAL SERVICE HALIFAX/DARTMOUTH

On the sunny Sunday afternoon of December 30, 2007, 19 members of the Halifax and Dartmouth Christian meditation groups gathered at St. Albans Anglican Church in Dartmouth for a Memorial Service celebrating John Main's life and love and legacy.

Our own Rev. Frances Drolet-Smith officiated, handing each of us, as we arrived, a booklet prepared by the P.E.I. Meditation Action Planners. Sitting in the choir stalls lent a warm and intimate atmosphere in this beautiful old church. In opening the service, Frances noted that it was wonderful to see her choir stalls so full. The order of service included a period of meditation. Frances spoke with each of us again, as we came down from the chancel, and we left filled with thankfulness for the precious gift of Christian meditation.

Irene Reid
Halifax/Dartmouth, NS

JOHN MAIN MEMORIAL VERNON BC

As a group, we decided that we would have a meditation/retreat day on October 27, 2007, to mark John Main's 25th anniversary year. For this special occasion we sought as many meditators in the area as possible by inviting everyone who had, at one time or another, been part of the group in Vernon, which goes back about 10 years. We were excited that some Kelowna meditators were able to join us as well. Over 20 people attended, from founding members to one or two who came for the first time to find out what Christian meditation was about.

Our theme for the day was *Growing in Love* and the facilitator was Sister Rita Stang. We had several presentations and two meditation sessions. Some participants brought favourite quotes by John Main to share with the group. It was very inspiring to spend a whole day together finding the silence within. Everyone left refreshed and enriched by the experience.

Rika Harris
Vernon, BC



Introduction to Christian Meditation

On January 31, Julie Meakin spoke to 40 members of the Christian Meditation Community of Toronto. Her overview of the history, basics and theology of meditation was enjoyed by beginners and experienced meditators alike. Referring to Jesus likening the kingdom of heaven to a merchant seeking fine pearls (Matthew 13:45), she affirmed that meditation has been the gift of “a pearl of great price” in her life.

Focusing on the three S’s – silence, stillness, and simplicity – she came to realize that everything connects with everything else, “like the many layers forming our little pearl.” Meditation is a silent form of prayer, of being in the presence of God. “Be still and know that I am God,” the Psalmist says. Julie also cited Father John: “The central message of the New Testament is that there is really only one prayer and that is the prayer of Christ.” Thus, meditation is a way of becoming aware of His presence within us. The way to this experience of the gift of our own being is that of silence and stillness. Like the pearl, created in the depths of the still and silent ocean, we enter the silence and stillness of our true selves, made in the image of God.

We chuckled knowingly at Julie’s reminder that entering the silent space is something of a challenge. Our minds go full steam ahead whether we like it or not – things to plan, to think about, emotions, the past, the future, to the tune of 60,000 thoughts per day!

Meditation is a journey to true self-knowledge – which paradoxically means going beyond self as defined by the ego. It is a way of poverty because we are content to say only our mantra. Julie’s favourite fridge magnet reads *To have more, desire less*. Meditation helps us to be detached from things that distract us or keep us from enjoying the fullness of life God offers. To survive, the ego needs to compare or judge, to maintain its own identity over the “other”. But the mantra takes us deep down through these thoughts to where we are free to be ourselves, to be accepted as we are, to be nurtured in the silence. We find the ground of being that creates unity within and without. “Meditation,” John Main said, “expands our capacity to love and be loved.”

Another of the riches of our little pearl is the gift of community. John Main was prophetic in his recognition that meditation creates community, and that this would be best in small groups meeting once a week, with the different meditation communities forming a “monastery without walls.” As pilgrims on a journey we need companions. Having a



group for support, we share our struggles and encourage each other. We experience a unity with one another at a deeper level than thought. Julie feels a strong connection to other meditators, construing this experience as being part of the mystical Body of Christ.

Meditation also enriches other spiritual practice – other kinds of prayer, Scripture reading, liturgy, and especially the Eucharist. Meditation has also highlighted for Julie how busy we are at church. Perhaps combining some contemplation with our committee work might create a better balance between being and doing, and be healthier for us individually and corporately. It is a mistake to think that meditation is purely passive. The clarity and harmony arising out of silence and stillness takes shape in our daily lives, in seeking the Kingdom of God. We realize that contemplation and action are two sides of the same coin. Meditation gradually purifies us, so we do not act from our ego, “which uses people and loves things, but from our center, which loves people and uses things.” As Fr. Laurence puts it, “Your Martha has stopped complaining about Mary. You see that being comes before doing and gives all doing the character of love.”

Just as our pearl reflects the light beautifully, our lives begin to reflect the light of God’s love more and more. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul proclaims, “Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” Meditation is one way of rooting ourselves in this reality and waiting for the Spirit to transform us from within, not just for ourselves, but for the world. The good news is it is available to each of us. All we need do is begin.

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON

Practicalities of Practice

Q. How do we measure our spiritual progress in meditation?

A. Evelyn Underhill (1876-1941), the great Anglican teacher and author who devoted her life to the study of prayer and spirituality, was adamant against checking one's spiritual pulse. She once said, "it is quite impossible for any of us to measure ourselves and estimate our spiritual progress."

Christian meditation is all about not looking for progress or results. John Main says that it is about taking the searchlight off ourselves, about losing our self-consciousness. If we start asking questions such as "how far have I come?" or "How long is all of this going to take me?" or "Am I becoming holier?" then we are becoming self-conscious and this is something we want to avoid. Meditation, he says, requires simplicity. We are led to that simplicity by faithfully saying the mantra.

It is also a truism that we can measure the depths of the ocean and the number of galaxies, but we simply cannot measure the spiritual in any normal way. The only real test of spiritual growth is an increase in love and compassion for others in our everyday life and relationships.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), the American Cistercian monk, reminds us of these same points. He says: "Do not be overanxious about your progress in prayer. You have left the beaten track and are traveling by paths that cannot be charted or measured. Let God take care of your prayer and your progress in it. Seek only to purify your love of God more and more. Seek only to abandon yourself more and more perfectly to His will."

It does not take long on the path of meditation before St. Paul's fruits of prayer begin their work within us. St. Paul's "harvest of the spirit" includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5: 22). All of these gifts are released to us as we learn to listen to the language of the heart. These gifts then extend outward to others in our family, the community, our work, and to all aspects of our daily life and relationships.

From the book *Frequently Asked Questions about Christian Meditation: The Path of Contemplative Prayer* by Paul Harris (Novalis Publishers). Paul can be reached at paulturner-harris@aol.com

To Father John

Father John.

Beloved friend of all.

In dead of winter,

On a cold and frosty day,

You came so very much alive.

Again,

To all of us,

Through Polly,

Meditator, friend.

Polly, who knew you,

Felt your love,

Knew herself blessed.

Through all the time

She spent so close to you.

And we are blessed

This day.

And every day,

By all you were,

By all you are.

So we remember you,

Twenty and five years since you

left earth,

To go to where all joy is made

complete;

To where you know

As you were always known.

We give our thanks.

Our gratitude, our love,

As you would want us to,

To God, who led you,

Then received you

To Himself,

For evermore.

Ron Dicks

Ottawa, ON

Calendar of Events

Note: For regular updates please refer to the Canadian website at www.meditatio.ca/news/updates

Want to list an event? Go to www.meditatio.ca/Forms/EventForm.html.

April 2008

19 April, Charlottetown, PE. *Earth Song is Our Song.* Workshop day of input, silent reflection, music and song presented by Cathy Sherman, CSJ (composer and writer). Venue: Mount St. Mary's. Time: 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Contact: Sr. Kathleen Bolger 902-892-6585 or <kbolger@peimarthas.ca>. Also, Concert **20 April** from 2 p.m.-4 p.m. Same venue and contact.

24 April, Toronto, ON. *The Scriptural Roots of Christian Meditation* led by Rev. Glenda Meakin, former coordinator for the School for Christian Meditation in Canada. Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Venue: Room #4, Knox College, 59 St. George Street, U of T (St. George Campus). Contact: Clem Sauvé 416-921-0367 or <clems@interlog.com>, or Joy Gordon 416-485-9718 or <joyg@sympatico.ca>.

May 2008

3 May, Charlottetown, PE. *Living Well with Cancer:* A prayer day to help deepen inner peace and maintain a courageous attitude. Venue: Mount St. Mary's. Time: 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Contact: Sr. Kathleen Bolger 902-892-6585 or <kbolger@peimarthas.ca>.

16-22 May. Detroit, Michigan. *The Source of Love*, a retreat led by Fr. Laurence and Giaovanni. Venue: Manresa Retreat House, www.manresa-sj.org, 248-644-4993. For information, Ron Leinweber (WCCM Midwest Co-Coodinator) 248-280-4711 or rolandles.aol.com.

17 May, Charlottetown, PE. Myers Briggs: A workshop to help understand and enhance communications and relationships. Venue: Mount St. Mary's. Time: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Contact: Sr. Kathleen Bolger 902-892-6585 or <kbolger@peimarthas.ca>.

29 May, Toronto, ON. *Roots of Christian Mysticism: Evelyn Underhill*, led by Canon Gerald Loweth, Trinity College,

University of Toronto. Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Venue and contact: see 24 April, above.

30 May-June 1, Kingston, ON. *The School: Workshop on the Essential Teaching.* Venue: Providence House. Cost \$170. Please register by May 10, 2008. For more information, please contact Ron Dicks 613-739-1046.

June 2008

19 June, Toronto, ON. *Roots of Christian Mysticism: The Philokalia*, led by Clem Sauvé, CMCT Member. Time: 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Venue and contact: see 24 April, above.

17 June, Charlottetown, PE. Christian Meditation Retreat: An evening of silent prayer, reflection and sharing. Venue: Mount St. Mary's. Time: 7 p.m.-9 p.m. Contact: Sr. Kathleen Bolger 902-892-6585 or <kbolger@peimarthas.ca>.

20-22 June, Rougemont, QC. Christian Meditation Silent Retreat based on the text of an unpublished retreat given by Fr. John Main. Venue: The Cistercian Abbey, 471, rue Principale, Rougement, QC, J0L 1M0. Telephone: 514-489-0998. Registration June 20, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Starts with supper on Friday, finishes with lunch on Sunday. Speaker: Polly Schofield. Contact: Magda Jass, 514-489-0998, magda.jass@gmail.com, Polly Schofield, 514-481-8746, mark.schofield@sympatico.ca. Cost: \$100 single room shared bathroom, \$120 with private shower. Joining the monastic community for the daily liturgies. Beautiful grounds for nature walks. Maximum registration 27. Full payment by June 2 to Magda Jass. Direct bus service from Berri-UQAM to the Abbey.

Coming up...

17-19 October, Kingston, ON. *Fully Alive* yoga/meditation retreat. Venue: Providence Centre. Co-facilitators: Casey Rock, Kevin Flynn, Lucie Legault. Contact: Casey Rock 416-463-7110 <caseyrock@rogers.com>.

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Ottawa Area Silent Retreat

February 8-10, meditators from the Ottawa area held their Annual Silent Retreat. The retreatants, from 16 communities in Ontario and Quebec, met at Maison Notre-Dame-de-la-Providence in the Ottawa suburb of Orleans. The theme was *Meditation – A Path of Silence*.

Retreat leader Michel Legault, past National Coordinator of CCMC, told this story: A couple, living in noisy Hong Kong for a year and a half, came back to Canada on holiday, with three young children and their nanny. They rented a chalet facing the water and the mountains beyond, and settled into idyllic quiet. But the oldest son, four years old, soon became uncomfortable. Where, he asked, were all the cars and people? And within a few days the nanny was weeping. “There’s nothing here!” she cried. “Nothing, nothing, nothing.”

Those reactions, Michel said, sum up the mixed feelings most of us have about silence. We long for a chance to get away from the noise and responsibilities of everyday life, but we may find silence uncomfortable or even close to unbearable.

Michel used many anecdotes from his love of the outdoors to talk about the path of meditation. For example, sometimes you must have the experience of walking a trail before you can really understand the trail map. He recalled warning signs along the mountainous coast of Wales: *Cliffs can kill. Keep to the path!* and invited us to stay on the path of meditation. Michel also remembered seeing cattails



motionless in the winter snow, until the wind came out of nowhere and set them dancing – just as the Spirit can enter our stillness and bring us to life.

In one instance, Michel compared distractions to sand in a shoe. He and his daughter stood at the top of a sand bank. He began picking his way down carefully, trying not to get sand in his shoes, while she ran full tilt down the dune. Despite his efforts, Michel still got sand in the shoes – and he had a much more difficult descent. What to do about distractions? Don’t get upset by them because you’ll have them anyway. Just keep coming back to the mantra.

Another feature of the weekend was instruction on walking meditation, provided by Joan McGuinness. For perhaps 15 minutes we concentrated on the process of taking one step at a time. We became conscious of the shift of weight to one foot; lifting the other foot forward; placing the heel and then the rest of the foot down; and then beginning all over by shifting our weight. It was a strange experience for most of us, but one that some will try again as a way to quiet ourselves after a busy day.

Every meditation, Michel said, is a good meditation. Every time we meditate we move forward, and yet every time we meditate we begin again. It’s a little bit like the T-shirt he remembers. The front says *Same old T-shirt*. The back says *New day*.

**Marguerite McDonald
Gatineau, QC**

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