

Aspects of Love *A Retreat with Fr. Laurence Freeman*

The annual weekend retreat for the Greater Toronto Area meditation community took place Friday September 19-Sunday September 21. Speaking with authority, and with love, Fr. Laurence facilitated our retreat about love. He organized his talks around love of self, love of God and love of others in the life of the meditator.

Very early, Fr. Laurence laid down the premise that it was “blindingly obvious” that humans were made to love and be loved, and that we should seek to be conformed to love. While he referred to love of God and love of neighbour from time to time, during the first three of four sessions his focus was clearly on love of self. He clarified that proper love of self is not simply attending a spa or going for a massage. It includes looking after our spiritual health, becoming Love, and paying attention, so that we can respond to the needs of our time. He linked the faithful practice of meditation and proper love of self as an approach that leads us away from self-alienation and towards true happiness.

In my own musings, I wondered why he placed such a strong focus on love of self. Then I realized that in the spiritual life we all tend to “plateau.” We tend to arrive at a stage in our practice where we have made some progress and reached a level of comfort. Fr. Laurence spoke directly to this reality, pointing out that in the journey we are called to leave the familiar and the comfortable. He noted that the desert mothers and fathers practiced *ascesis* (self-discipline), and he mentioned four early Christian practices that led to a healthy asceticism. These were: guarding the heart, compunction or breaking open the heart, purity of heart, and poverty of spirit. These practices teach us to love; they divinize or transfigure us as we become Love. Difficult though this *ascesis* may be, Fr. Laurence recommended



faithful perseverance, citing the haunting truth that “most people who give up were on the verge of a breakthrough.” He wisely emphasized “proper” love of self and provided specific ways in which meditators can become more open to the workings of grace. Thus, the strong focus on love of self is a precondition or foundation for moving on to love of God and love of others.

Fr. Laurence spoke of striving to maintain a balance, or harmonizing of the dual movements of Love.

He explained *eros* and *agape* as descending and ascending movements of love which contrast and complement each other. *Eros* drives us towards union through focusing on a particular goal, whereas *agape* is inclusive and embraces the whole. *Eros* is immanent, *agape* is transcendent. To be in harmony, we need to receive Love and give Love, to have both *eros* and *agape*. It is natural that Love received promotes a response of Love shared or passed on. Again, I would suggest that with these concepts in mind, we should be able to take our own spiritual pulse – examining our spiritual life for evidence of this balance and returning to the four ascetical practices and love of self – if we are not becoming transformed into Love and becoming more loving in our relationships.

Fr. Laurence talked briefly about love as *filia* or spiritual friendship, and about the special graces of the meditation group as a source of spiritual companionship. John Main saw the small groups of contemplatives, who reinforced each other in their faithful commitment to meditation and to Love, as a “monastery without walls.” Similarly, Fr. Laurence urged us to seek the “graces” of the group, as a structure which supports contemplative spirituality.

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Aspects of Love *continued from front*

In speaking about love of God, Fr. Laurence emphasized the difficulty of using notions and ideas to describe God, and encouraged us to see God more as events in our lives. This way, God is experienced as “a call” rather than as the satisfaction of our desires. God is met as an event that calls us to go further, to “follow me,” to respond more faithfully to the needs of our deeper self, not those of the ego. Fr. Laurence contrasted the ancient Greek notion of God as the “almighty, all knowing and all powerful ruler of the universe” with the image of God communicated through the person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God gives away everything and is revealed as self-emptying, self-giving, powerless and vulnerable in Love for others. Experiencing God, as

revealed in Jesus, is an event that changes our heart of stone to a heart of flesh, making us more loving, more vulnerable, more real. When we allow this event to unfold in us, we are empowered by Love to give ourselves to powerlessness, to risk our very selves. This risk, he affirmed, is buoyed by the deep optimism of the hope of the Christian vision.

Fr. Laurence summoned us to the hope that, in the end, God’s unconditional and unceasing love for us will break down all selfishness and fear of the ego. In the words of Julian of Norwich, “God will find a way to do a mighty deed that will put everything right.”

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON

Practicalities of Practice

Q. Are meditation and action in our lives both sides of the same coin?

A. John Main was quite adamant that meditation, far from being an escape from life, actually propels one into life and to love and compassion for others. He once said:

It often seems to many people that prayer is an introspective state and that the meditator is someone going into oneself to the exclusion of people and creation around them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Because meditation leads us into the actual experience of love at the centre of our being, it necessarily makes us more loving people in our ordinary life and relationships.

John Main, *Letters From the Heart*

There is a story which amplifies John Main’s emphasis on prayer and action in our lives. He once gave a talk to a group of meditators in Los Angeles and was commenting about St. Paul’s harvest of the Spirit and the fruits of prayer: patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control (Gal.5:22). A meditator during the question and answer period pointed out that he had been meditating for a year and there had been absolutely no fruits of prayer in his life whatsoever. Father John interjected: “none at all?” “Well,”

the man replied, after some thought, “there was a little thing happened on the way here this morning. I drove off the freeway and came to a stoplight, whereupon a car full of teenagers rammed me from behind. In former years before starting to meditate, I probably would have beaten up the driver. Instead today I got slowly out of the car, walked up to the driver and said, “I think we have a slight problem here”.

In telling the story Father John smilingly pointed out that the gentleman in question had undergone a transformation that was greater than most of the spiritual gifts he might receive during a lifetime. That small act of self-control and patience was the fruit of his new prayer life, said Father John, the very fruits of prayer that St Paul talks about.

Meditation is an experience in aloneness but it is not an experience in isolation. Silence leads one to God and simultaneously outwards to others.

Paul Harris

From the book *Christian Meditation: Contemplative Prayer for a New Generation* (Novalis publishers). Paul can be reached at paulturnerharris@aol.com

Kevin Flynn Leads Ottawa Advent Retreat

Patience, waiting, hope, compassion, love – these were but a few of the motifs in a retreat entitled *Advent: Living Between Memory and Hope* on November 29 in the beautiful chapel of St. Paul University, Ottawa. Sponsored by the Ottawa area community, the retreat was led by Rev. Kevin Flynn, an Anglican priest and Director of Anglican Studies at the university. A long-time meditator and group leader, he opened with St. Matthew’s gospel story on the ten bridesmaids. The wise ones took extra oil to be ready when the bridegroom came. As it was for them, we also do not know when the bridegroom will come.

Advent is a season of waiting and preparing. Rev. Flynn read a passage from St. Paul, words of assurance to those who wait. Unlike the early non-Christians, who believed that death was the end, Christians had no need for grief around death. They had the promise of Jesus, His “triumphant return for all.” The early Christians were full of joy, peace and love. As we meditate, we feel this deep peace and union with Christ.

In the next talk, Rev. Flynn referred to St. James, who

Continued opposite

From the National Coordinator

Horizons

Recently I was driving on the highway across the open prairie, with the wind blowing and snow gently drifting across the road. This stretch of the Trans-Canada highway is notoriously bad for blowing snow and the road is often closed in the winter. To alleviate the problem, the government planted trees in a shelter belt alongside the road. When the wind hits the trees it swirls around and the snow settles in drifts before it gets carried across the roadway, thus improving the visibility for drivers.

As we drive along our path through life our practice of meditation helps to improve the visibility. By being more in tune with God we are able to see things more clearly. Things that once might have been obstacles to our way ahead, or which obscured our view, do not seem to have the same importance or power over us. Meditation enables the transforming work of the indwelling Spirit to heighten awareness and encourage us on our journey.

There are inevitably times in our lives when strong winds blow and threaten to overwhelm us. It is at these times that the meditation practice acts as a wind break and gives us protection from the storm. When there is anxiety and stress we may find it difficult to make time to meditate,

but these are the very times when it is important to maintain our practice. It is in the familiarity and comfort of inner silence that we find strength and reassurance.

The shelter belt was not a continuous line of trees along the highway. There were breaks where side roads joined the main highway and there were breaks where trees had died. For various reasons there can be breaks in our meditation practice. A side road attracts our attention and takes us off our main path. Or we get lazy and the tree of meditation withers. Our shelter belt provides no benefit when we are not practicing meditation. Along the highway, though, the breaks were short and there were more trees soon giving the much needed shelter. If we discover there is a break in our meditation practice, all we have to do is start again. Plant a new tree in the shelter belt. Just as when we discover we have stopped saying the mantra, we start saying it again.

We don't have to be buffeted about by the winds that blow through our lives. We have our very own shelter belt of meditation. Thanks be to God for this wonderful gift.

Phil Barnett
Winnipeg, MB

Advent retreat *continued from page 2*

spoke of patience. We wish God were always visible, always present – but this is not usually so obvious. Mostly, God speaks in whispers, and is found in the shadows. What kind of ear do we bring to God? Do we “lean in close” to hear Him? We are bombarded by so much noise and activity in the world that leads to numbness. It is in meditation that our hearts are enlightened, and we hear the whisper of God.

Rev. Flynn focused on the expression “knowledge is power.” Knowledge of another person gives us power over that person. We can have the urge to misuse that power – there can be knowledge without love. God has complete knowledge of us. How are we to stand before such knowledge? We can cower, or we can approach God in love and complete trust as His knowledge of us comes with love and compassion.

“Humbug!” This trenchant word came up in the next session. For some, Advent is their favourite season; others say “Humbug!” Advent gives Christians hope to combat that humbug feeling. “Do not fear, the Lord is near.” Hope gives meaning and purpose to waiting. Our hope is founded on Christ. We have the peace of Christ.

The retreat was an inspiring start to this wonderful season of preparation and waiting for the group of 130 people. We joined in community to meditate between talks, and to socialize at lunch. And there was not one whisper of “Humbug!” among us!

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THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

On Saturday, November 15, the St. Cuthbert Meditation Group met for a day retreat on “the gift of the Holy Spirit in Christian Meditation”. The day was facilitated by Joseph Clarkson.

An understanding of the Holy Spirit is integral to our understanding the mystery of God. All through the New Testament constant reference is made to the Holy Spirit. St Paul says “The Spirit of God was sent into our hearts” (Gal. 4:6). It is this Spirit that Meditation helps us to get close to.

Several people commented this was the first time they had received a teaching on this subject and that it was an easily understood interweaving of scripture and theology.

Although we were a mixed group of seasoned and beginner meditators, Joseph’s presentation was invaluable in that it reached us all. We are all beginners on this journey.

Maureen Westoll
Oakville, ON

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION IN A CULTURE OF ANXIETY TWILIGHT RETREAT IN WINNIPEG

Rev. Glenda Meakin made a return visit to Winnipeg last October 28 to lead a twilight retreat called *Let Nothing Disturb You – Reflections on Christian Meditation in a Culture of Anxiety*. Thirty-six people attended, many of them new to meditation. Glenda described meditation as a stilling of the mind and body. We need to find time to be silent. The world around us is turbulent and disturbing.

Christ’s familiar parable “Who is my neighbour?” was given new life when Glenda asked us to imagine ourselves as the one on the side of the road, feeling battered and beaten. In today’s world, we often feel robbed of peace, harmony and joy. We are bombarded with bad news 24/7. We find it difficult to live fully. Others around us walk by with their own agendas. Religion also has its divisions and a lack of charity when differences surface.

Meditation enables us to be the Samaritan – the outsider who took care of the stranger. He paid for the inn with the currency of love and compassion generated by his love. Christ is always the innkeeper. Meditation restores the missing lens and we learn to see in a new way. The silence of meditation is like a balm, a soothing ointment. It keeps us grounded and our vision more clear. We are able to see the presence of God. As we become more rooted, we see the world differently. We find ground that does not shift. Our soul, our centre, cannot be touched by outside disturbances. We are called to respond to the situation we are in, but we don’t have to save the world, just do our part.

Ann Harwood
Winnipeg, MB

PHIL BARNETT VISITS THUNDER BAY GROUPS

On Saturday, October 25, four Christian meditation groups (about 50 people) from the Thunder Bay area met at St. Paul’s Anglican Church. Experienced meditators and newcomers, we came to hear Rev. Phil Barnett review the history of silent prayer right back to the example of Jesus himself going off alone “to be with the Father.” The story of John Cassian, one of the desert fathers, was also very informative. For modern day contemplatives, Father John Main’s finding of silent prayer within our Christian tradition and bringing it to us was surely inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Alice Ward
Thunder Bay, ON

LET NOTHING DISTURB YOU WEEKEND RETREAT IN CALGARY

Rev. Glenda Meakin was the guest speaker at our meditation weekend retreat at Christ Church (Anglican) in Calgary, last October 24-26. The event was attended by 62 people from churches all over the city. Glenda’s theme, *Let Nothing Disturb You*, was presented in four talks, culminating with the homily at Eucharist on Sunday morning.

Given the economic and political turmoil whirling around us, the theme was particularly apt. Many registrants had never meditated before and Glenda began and ended each talk, and the Sunday congregational service, with a brief introduction to the practice followed by ten minutes of meditation.

Glenda’s gentle manner, coupled with her ability to communicate the depth and simplicity of the tradition, and her skilful and sensitive answers to questions, captivated everyone. We had deliberately planned the weekend

FAR AND NEAR

so people could register for some or all of the sessions. Our success lay in the fact that many who came for a “look-see” on Friday evening returned for the entire weekend.

On a very practical level Glenda reminded us that it is so easy to repeat the mantra in our minds while allowing ourselves to disappear into thoughts (monkey chatter) on another level. To guard against this it is important when saying the mantra also to hear its sound in your head as you are saying it. If you listen to yourself saying it, the monkey chatter is less likely to interfere. I found this very helpful.

I have meditated for many years, starting with TM in the early 1970s, then changing my mantra to *Maranatha* when I discovered the writings of John Main. Meditation has been my lifeline through many challenges, particularly now as I deal with the implications of multiple sclerosis. Glenda’s words resonated with me in a profound way. If we follow the path with commitment and devotion, we can, by the Grace of God, find that place of total silence where truly nothing can disturb us.

Forbes Newman
Calgary, AB

MEDITATION – A PATH OF SILENCE

Michel Legault led a silent retreat on October 17-19 at the Villa Madonna Retreat House in Rothesay, New Brunswick. The theme was *Meditation – a Path of Silence*. Michel has been practicing Christian meditation for 20 years and has given workshops across Canada on various themes. He authored a book titled *La Route du Mantra*.

Michel’s presentation included four talks. The introduction of each talk was based on his personal experiences with spiritual awareness in nature. Many of these awakenings occurred in the Gatineau Hills of Quebec, walking trails in the Rocky Mountains, the pilgrimage routes of Santiago de Compostela, in Spain and France. Michel’s gift of expression allowed us to perceive those experiences as if we too were there, and he readily related these experiences to anecdotes and quotes from John Main and other spiritual masters.

The first talk on Friday evening touched on silence and its importance. It can best be summarized by a quote from one of John Main’s books: “Silence is absolutely necessary for the human spirit if it really is to thrive, and not only just to thrive, but to a creative response to life, to our environment, to friends.” This aspect – silence and stillness – was

our focal point during the retreat.

The second talk was in two parts. First, a historical account of how John Main was introduced to meditation. Part two was “What is the path of meditation?” in which Michel gave us a template for a celebration of being, a journey away from the self, and spoke of the purpose and importance of the mantra.

In the third talk, “How to walk the path of meditation,” Michel used another quote from John Main, “In meditating we are not seeking to possess God or to arrive at a profound insight about God. We are seeking simply to accept the gift of our own being as fully and generously as we can.”

The last talk, on Sunday morning, was “How to stay on the path of meditation.” We were reminded of the importance of our commitment to meditation twice daily, and of going beyond thought to still our thinking minds.

The last hour of the retreat was opened to sharing our experiences. During this time we were made aware of how important stillness and silence is to our spiritual life; this was expressed by everyone in the group. “Silence and stillness is the language of God; everything else is a poor translation,” someone once said.

John Holmes
Hampton, NB

CALLED TO FORGIVE

The Charlottetown Tuesday night group was pleased to welcome Rev. Glenda Meakin as our guest October 14 last – election night. With 30 meditators in attendance, our evening began with silence and our usual meditation.

Glenda tied in the election happenings as she shared enlightened thoughts on scripture passages that talked about God “calling us” to serve in many different roles in our lives. We are all beloved children of God, called to follow His example with simplicity, gentleness, kindness, humility and love in our dealings with one another. The call to serve often carries with it an office of responsibility and privilege. We are asked to be patient with one another and to forgive each other for our wrongdoings just as God has forgiven us. Humility and love are key requirements to serve as God’s messenger.

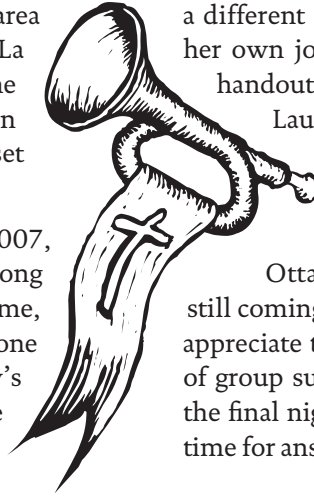
Theresa McCabe
Charlottetown, PEI

Ottawa Hosts Second Six-Week Introduction to Christian Meditation

Last fall, the Ottawa Area Christian Meditation Community launched its second six-week *Introduction to Christian Meditation* series. On Wednesday evenings from October 1 to November 5, St. Margaret Mary's Parish was host to 35 fledgling meditators from the Ottawa area including Orleans, Manotick, Gatineau and La Peche, who came to learn how to meditate in the Christian tradition. They received teachings on various aspects of Christian meditation as they set out to build meditation into their daily lives.

The response to our first series, in the spring of 2007, surpassed our expectations and there had been a long wait list – our room for 30 was too small! This time, in a church, there was plenty of space and no one would have to be turned away. St. Margaret Mary's is a beautiful church with an interior that is simple and serene – so appropriate for meditation.

We designed the six sessions, co-facilitated by Diane Haughian and me, around the outline by Fr. Laurence in his book *A Pearl of Great Price*. Each two-hour



session included a 15-minute talk by an experienced mediator, a recorded talk of John Main, a graduated meditation period and time for questions and answers. On several evenings a meditation video was also shown. There was a different speaker for each session and each shared his or her own journey as part of their talk. There were lots of handouts, and each participant received a copy of Fr.

Laurence's book *Christian Meditation – Your Daily Practice*.

We stressed the importance of belonging to a group, and from our list of 40 groups in the Ottawa area, some participants found one while they still coming to the series. Over the six weeks they began to appreciate the need for ongoing support and liked the idea of group support on their new journey of meditation. On the final night we had a celebration with refreshments and time for answering questions more informally.

**Flora Benoit
Ottawa, ON**

Some Organizing Lessons from the Ottawa Area community:

Publicity – we advertise widely for all our events, but most extensively for the six-week introductory series, with a letter and poster to all churches in Ottawa, and notices to the Anglican and Catholic dioceses for their Friday fax to churches, and to the United Church coordinator. We place announcements in the local newspaper (the Citizen), community newspapers and a local holistic magazine. Group leaders and meditators are encouraged to put the poster up in their churches, as well as a notice in their bulletins. And, of course, we put a notice in NewsNotes and on the website <www.meditatio.ca>. We also have a bi-monthly Ottawa newsletter by e-mail to over 200 meditators in the area, in which we post upcoming events. Ted Sugden, the member of our committee responsible for publicity, has done such a superb job over the past couple of years, it's hard to imagine anyone in Ottawa hasn't heard of Christian meditation by now!

Comments by Participants

Each day as I read and meditate, I ask myself, Why am I doing this?... As a pastor I already pray and work for God. My answer came one day as I read the following, written by another pastor: "As a Christian leader, I often find myself

extremely busy. Recently though I have realized that in doing so much work, 'in the name of God', I have neglected a basic element in my own life of faith: intimacy with God and growth in my spiritual formation. When we become busy in our 'doing' for God and forget to spend time in His presence, then we, in our ministry for Christ, miss Christ's ministry to us." This really spoke to me and I truly believe God called me to this course to learn to spend time with Him. Now I am learning to spend some intimate time alone with God and allowing Him to guide and enrich not only my life, but also my ministry.

**Rev. Neil Baxter, Associate Pastor
Manotick United Church**

Neil's wife, Lise, had this to say: I have been meditating with Scriptures for over 20 years and I've been enjoying my prayer time with God every morning and evening. Now, however I feel the Lord has given me a very special new gift of Christian meditation, which is just wonderful! This gift is made more precious because my husband and I are sharing this new, exciting journey together. What a blessing! We pray together every day and evening, and now we are meditating together. What joy this has been for both of us!

**Lise Baxter
Manotick United Church**



Ottawa Area 2008 Group Leaders' Workshop

On Saturday September 27 last, 25 experienced and potential group leaders met at Saint Paul's Anglican Church in Kanata for an annual Leaders' Workshop. They represented some 40 groups in the Ottawa community, as well as surrounding areas such as Morrisburg, Arnprior, Brockville and Kemptville.

Ottawa Area Coordinator Flora Benoit encouraged us in leading our grassroots meditation communities, which enables us to introduce contemplative prayer to other seekers within their own faith tradition.

Ron Dicks, Ontario Regional Coordinator, began the session with an inspiring presentation on the spirituality of the group leader. Firstly, we are asked to leave self behind and have humility which comes from wisdom. With wisdom come attributes such as purity, peacefulness, impartiality. Secondly, we are called to leadership. Third, we are loved and must love others. Fourth, we must seek the Spirit's guidance in what we do. Finally, we need to realize the greatness of what we are called to do. Our community is to be enabled, guided, and challenged but not controlled. Leaders are holy listeners who "listen" others into existence.

Through individual presentations and small group activities led by Flora, Jean Anderchek, and Ted Sugden, we explored new ways to publicize the group, create sacred space, discover various roles of group leaders – how to attract and

welcome new members, and how to deal with challenges we may face as leaders.

Peter Collins, speaking from personal experience, gave a presentation on "Difficulties on the Meditation Path." He reminded us that some meditators come to the point of desperation before they adopt the path. Because of our woundedness we yearn for wholeness and God-mindfulness. When we face the swamp or dark side of our soul, he advised, we must not give up our contemplative practice in discomfort. He encouraged us to try instead to be present to the feelings in our own body – to be still and be with our pain.

Following the discussions, we watched an excellent, new video from Australia called *Silence in the City*, made by the young meditation community there, as well as *Coming Home: A Guide to Teaching Christian Meditation to Children*, also new this year from Australia.

Best of all, I loved the opportunity to meet other leaders, which enlivened and encouraged me to continue leading a group in Morrisburg. Our appreciation to the organizers, and thanks to Marg McGowan and her group for freshly baked scones and muffins!

Robin Lane
Morrisburg, ON

Calendar of Events

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

January 2009

29 January, Toronto ON. *Introduction to Christian Meditation – The First 20 Years*, by Marilyn Metcalfe, CMCT Member. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Joy Gordon at 416 485-9718.

30 January, Vancouver, BC. *Introduction to Christian Meditation*, led by Rev. Phil Barnett, National Coordinator, Canadian Christian Meditation Community. Time: 7:30 pm-9 pm. For more information contact: Colleen Donald, 604-985-1592 or cdonald@shaw.ca.

31 January, Vancouver, BC. *Going Deeper: A Workshop for Meditation Groups*, led by Rev. Phil Barnett, National Coordinator, CCMC. Time: 10 a.m.-3:30pm. Topics will include the benefits of meditation groups, various leadership roles within the group, tips and tools to perform these roles fully, and sharing the collective experience of meditators and meditation group leaders. Admission by donation. Brown bag lunch. For more information contact: Colleen Donald, 604-985-1592 or cdonald@shaw.ca

February

24 February, Ottawa ON. *Christian Meditation: A Contemplative Path* by Paul Harris. Place: Auditorium, Main Branch, Ottawa Public Library, 120 Metcalfe. Time: 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm. No pre-registration required. Contact: Florence Marquis-Kawecki at 613 523-1309.

26 February, Toronto ON. *Where the Eye is, so there is Love: Contemplating Christian Art*, by Joseph Clarkson, CMCT Member. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Joy Gordon at 416 485-9718.

March

7 March, Toronto ON. *Peace in a Violent World*, one-day Lenten Retreat led by Joseph Bergeron, CMCT Member. Location: Room #4, Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. (St. George Campus). Time: 10 a.m. to 4 pm. (Registration 9:40-10 a.m.) Suggested donation: \$20. Coffee and biscuits provided. Bring a bag lunch or eat nearby. Contact: Claire Andrews at 416-922-7230.

26 March, Toronto ON. *Roots of Christian Mysticism: Evagrius Ponticus*, by Michael Hryniuk, Theosis Resources. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Joy Gordon at 416 485-9718.

27–29 March, Ottawa, ON *Becoming Who I Am; Christian Meditation: Return to Self*. A silent weekend retreat. Speaker Rev. Glenda Meakin. Place: Maison Notre-Dame-de-la-Providence, 1754 St. Joseph Blvd, Orleans Ontario. Time: Friday 7 pm to Sunday 2 pm. Cost \$160 (includes accommodations, meals and retreat). Registration deadline: March 16, with non-refundable \$40 deposit. For more information, contact: Reta Hamilton at 613 838-2401

April

30 April, Toronto ON. *Seeing and Intuition*, by Erika Deery, CMCT Member. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Joy Gordon at 416 485-9718.

May

23 May, Arnprior, ON. *Meditating with the Mystics* featuring Julian of Norwich, by Sister Anne Kathleen McLaughlin. Location: St. John Chrysostom Church, 295 Albert Street, Arnprior. Time: Saturday 10 am to 4 pm (Registration from 9:30 am.) Cost: suggested donation \$25. Refreshments and catered lunch included. Registration deadline: May 9. Contact: Jean Anderchek at 613-832-3436.

28 May, Toronto ON. *Poverty as Riches: Thomas Merton on Contemplative Prayer*, by Rev. Glenda Meakin, CMCT Member. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Joy Gordon at 416 485-9718.

June

5–7 June, Toronto, ON. *Roots of our Tradition*. CCMC's biennial national conference will be held June 5–7 at St. Michael's College on the University of Toronto's downtown campus. Flexible payment options: You may pay all at once, or you may wish to send a deposit (50%) and pay the balance later, or you may send post-dated cheques, with final payment date no later than May 27, please. Register now to avoid disappointment! See details and registration form on the full-page flyer in this newsletter.

25 June, Toronto ON. Swami Satyanandar, by Clem Sauvé, CMCT Member. Time: 7 pm to 9 pm. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Joy Gordon at 416 485-9718.

Want to list an event? You will find a user-friendly form to submit additions at www.meditatio.ca/Forms/EventForm.html.

St. Margaret Mary's

Integration of contemplation into the life of a small Ottawa church



Diane Haughian and Flora Benoit

St. Margaret Mary's is a small Roman Catholic church serving the community of Old Ottawa South for nearly 80 years. It is a vibrant parish with lots of children and plenty of spirit. It has a strong social justice ministry, offering up to 100 needy people a hot meal and a warm welcome every Sunday during the winter months. Part of the church's vision is to promote and continue the transformation begun at the Second Vatican Council. Not surprisingly, St. Margaret Mary's is also home to one of the Ottawa area's 40 Christian meditation groups.

Since the first day we approached pastor Fr. John Decoste, in the fall of 2006, to start a meditation group, we have been welcomed and integrated into the life of the church. A look at the Sunday bulletin shows Christian meditation as a parish council committee. Meditation is also prominently listed under liturgical life, both in the bulletin and on the website. Recently, reading our local community newspaper (the *Oscar*) I was pleasantly surprised to see the Christian meditation time alongside the times of the Sunday masses.

This year I was asked to make a report on our group to the parish council, which was a great opportunity to give the council a brief introduction to Christian meditation. It was very well received. I am sure that some may have learned for the first time that this way of prayer was deeply rooted in their own Christian tradition.

It seemed natural, then, for our group to be invited to set up a table at the "Come and See" weekend at the church last September. These are annual occasions when churches share information with parishioners on their various ministries, with the hope of inspiring new volunteers. We prepared a

display board, had handouts, pamphlets and a few books. It was a great opportunity to raise awareness of Christian meditation and to encourage parishioners to come to our Monday night group.

Among visitors to our table was a priest from Kenya, who expressed a keen interest in introducing Christian meditation in his diocese, and took away information and a copy of Fr. Laurence's *Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice*. A couple from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia was astonished that there were groups where they lived; we referred them to the website to locate one. There were also several inquisitive young adults. A South American couple, now resident in Ottawa, was pleased to know of resources available, and WCCM websites, in Spanish.

Our humble display board has become a travelling exhibit of sorts. At Blessed Sacrament Church in the Glebe, new group leader George Brown set up the board at their "Come and See" weekend to inform parishioners of the group. Recently, the mobile display accompanied Ontario Regional Coordinator Ron Dicks to St. Mary's Church in Carleton Place where he gave an introductory talk.

With the generosity and support of Christian meditation from Fr. John Decoste and Pastoral Associate Linda Gunning, sharing in this contemplative way of prayer has become integrated into the life of our little church. The church's stated vision of transformation and openness "to the mystery of God's renewing spirit" is indeed alive and well.

Flora Benoit
Ottawa, ON

PEI Weavings

Encountering the Word was the theme of a silent retreat at Belcourt Centre in picturesque South Rustico, facilitated by Rev. Glenda Meakin, last October 9-12. The publicity for this retreat stated: "Through silence, meditation and reflection on scriptural passages, we will see the ways two paths to Divine Love – meditation and Holy Scripture, deepen and enrich our human journey."

Glenda presented an inspiring and insightful approach to the Bible, to understanding metaphor and how to open our eyes to Scripture. She advised: "Only you will know where the word will take you today." Scripture helps us to know who we are: *Who am I in this passage?* Biblical myth is a vehicle to carry us to a truth and explain why things are the way they are.

Approaching Scripture with openness, we ask ourselves what new will be revealed and are reassured that whatever our needs are, they will be provided in God's time. The creation stories in Genesis remind us that we are indeed made in God's image. Even though we often seek to hide behind our own "fig leaves", God always clothes us in love. Other passages call us to recognize our blind spots; to let go of our fears and, with humility, to open our hearts to show

love and acceptance to all we meet.

The necessity of an awareness of nature in our spiritual lives was dominant in Glenda's presentations. She referred often to what she named *The Book of Nature*, and how we are encouraged to learn to be our true selves (the robin remains a robin; it does not become a blue jay). In keeping with this, Glenda conducted several mindful walking sessions in the radiant fall sunshine.

We viewed an amazing video entitled *The Illuminator*. It chronicles the seven-year project of hand lettering and illumination of the Saint John's Bible at Donald Jackson's scriptorium in Monmouth, Wales, for the St. John's Benedictine Abbey in Minnesota. Not since the invention of the printing press 500 years ago has there been a hand-scripted version of the complete Bible.

On Sunday morning we walked to Mass at beautiful St. Augustine's Church, the oldest Roman Catholic church on PEI. As we said farewells and departed later, it was obvious this was truly a Thanksgiving Weekend.

Gertie Purdy
Charlottetown, PEI

Fully Alive! – Christian Meditation and Yoga Retreat October 17-19, 2008

Providence Spirituality Centre is set on 33 acres in the heart of Kingston, Ontario. Everything about it – meals, rooms, immaculate grounds with labyrinth – speaks of the loving care of the Sisters for needs both physical and spiritual. It was a perfect setting for all on this meditation and yoga retreat to develop awareness of the body and the present moment as sacred. And we were blessed with one of the last warm and colourful weekends of autumn.

Kevin Flynn, Lucie Legault and Casey Rock led the sessions over two days, culminating in a memorable Sunday Eucharist.

Kevin's talk "Befriending the Body" helped us "unlearn" the notion that the body is a hindrance to connection with God. He encouraged us to be compassionate towards our bodies and to let them open us to the infinite. He also spoke about breathing as a metaphor for incarnation. My own prayer for a greater sense of God's presence was answered by the thought *Every time you take a breath, I am there.*

"Awakening the Heart" – Casey's session – was beautifully linked later with yoga poses to open the heart. Casey shared something of her own path in meditation and yoga along

with her recent experience at a retreat led by Fr. Laurence Freeman. Her remembrance of his meditations on aspects of the heart touched us all.

Our evening session of sacred dance, led by Lucie Legault, gave us an opportunity to try new ways of moving to music – some more sacred than others! It was a great way to let go of one's inhibitions and prepare for a pleasant social gathering. On Sunday morning Lucie guided us in a healing exercise by going through each of the seven chakras in sequence. After she explained the significance and location of the chakra, we rested our hands there, bringing healing and respect for every part of our body. Throughout the weekend, we acquired some practical tips – how to use *ujjayi* or ocean breath, how to activate the feet when seated posture is sagging. And there were some great quotes!

"Punctuality is a kindness" and "Salvation does not depend on my hamstrings."

It was poignant being in this sacred place among a community of seekers. We experienced awakening to new life through selfless sharing.

Susan Rayner
Ottawa, ON



The Gift of Wonder

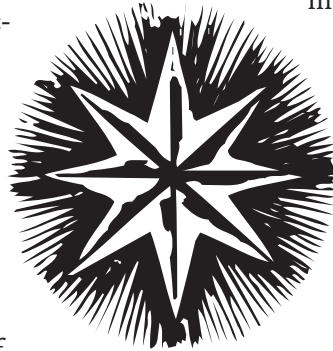
Silent Retreat in Mission, BC

Last September, 26 Christian meditators gathered at Westminster Abbey in Mission, BC for a silent retreat conducted by Rev. Glenda Meakin. The theme was *The Gift of Wonder*. The Benedictine abbey sits on a hill overlooking the Fraser Valley and River. The spectacular setting on a sunny weekend was our first gift. Many participants enjoyed the chanting of vespers and celebration of the Eucharist with the monks in the abbey church. Retreatants were introduced to the slow, peaceful rhythm of meditative walking in a group.

Glenda embarked on the theme by inviting us to reflect on our personal experiences of wonder. She told an updated version of Moses' experience with the burning bush (Exodus 3) as one of wonder, in which his encounter with the divine changes his life. His openness to the divine mystery led him from slavery to liberty. All of us have special moments when we are called, yet we often fail to hear them in the cacophony of modern living. Our challenge is to have the awareness and courage to be open to those encounters of the divine which are filled with wonder.

Glenda said, "This awareness is separation without a wound." The experience of wonder occurs in a context of silence and stillness. It expands our perceptions and understanding, elicits our need to learn more and moves us into a relationship with mystery. It requires a response – an acknowledgement of the divine. We are invited to join in

the song of the universe, and to rediscover "enchantment" in this sense (*cantere* – to chant). Christian meditation opens us to this experience.



In our culture, it is not easy to be awestruck or filled with wonder. Rather, we seek to explain everything and try to control and contain life. This fosters our egocentricity, which keeps us from being fully present to life. Hyper-rationality – for example, claiming, naming, categorizing, psychologizing – leads to disenchantment. The practice of Christian meditation is counter-culture. It helps us to open ourselves to the mystery of life and of the divine. Contemplation is an awareness of the divine. It can lead us into an infinite expansion of

human life. When we meditate we are in God, and God is in us and we begin to live by faith. Meditation leads us into the sacramental reality of life wherein we experience the wonder of God in all His works.

If we are open to wonder, we can be transformed. If we look for the holy in the ordinary, wonder is granted and possibilities open for us to live our life according to the divine. Our task is to get to know this love through our meditation and openness to wonder.

At the end of the retreat, Glenda had us turn to one another and ask, "Who are you?" In reverence, gratitude and wonder each of us answered the other, "I am God's beloved."

**Phyllis O'Neill, Bea Ingram, Colleen Donald
Vancouver, BC**

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Joanne Alves: from Hare Krishna and the streets of New York to Christian meditation in Bancroft, Ontario

(Editor's note: This is a shortened version of the spiritual journey of Joanne Alves. Her more detailed life can be found on <www.wccm.org> – with a click on news.)



Group leader Joanne Alves' spiritual journey began, in effect, one day in the 1960s as a teenager in a Canadian high school where her home teacher felt it was her religious duty to put the fear of the Lord in her students. She says her religion class that particular day was a long sermon about mortal sin, hell, damnation and God as a policeman who condemns seemingly

without mercy. Rejecting this caricature of God, Joanne announced to the teacher: "I don't believe in that God."

Thus began Joanne's spiritual odyssey. She began her working career teaching in a New York grade school but gradually rejected her Catholic faith. She subsequently became involved in the avant garde film/poetry scene, meeting with Allen Ginsberg and the Beat generation of poets. As she says, "I tuned in and dropped out."

Her life then went into a tailspin. She married a fellow poet who was a heroin addict and alcoholic. Eventually leaving

the marriage she joined the Hare Krishna movement in New York City. There she became known as Vishnu Shakti and first experienced the practice of meditation.

The next event in her life was a providential knock on the door. One day she entered a Manhattan Catholic church to get out of the rain, and in the silence heard an inner voice say, "Why have you forsaken me?" Thus she was led back to the Catholic faith of her youth. Then followed a visit to Fr. Laurence Freeman and the Benedictine Priory in Montreal, as well as a visit to India to meet Bede Griffiths, a remarriage and eventual return to Canada.

Now living in the bush, as she terms it, she and her husband Tony



live in a beautiful area of forests and lakes near Bancroft, Ontario, where they grow their own organic food. She attends a local Catholic church, home-cares elderly patients and has started a Christian meditation group that meets in her home every Tuesday evening. She sums up her life by saying, "I now know what 'coming home' is all about."

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