

Canadian Christian Meditation Community

NEWSLETTER SPRING 2010 VOL. 19 NO. 1 THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

And They Came...



School Workshop on the Essential Teaching

Some traveled just down the road, others across borders; some came with joyful anticipation, others with a sense of reluctant response. Called or coerced from different places – geographically and in our own inner journey – we had in common a desire to learn more about the practice that, slowly, had uprooted and re-rooted our lives. “I wandered into meditation,” says Rita, a participant from Ottawa, “and then I did what I said I couldn’t do.” She started a meditation group at her own church and now finds that “every time I get discouraged, someone in our group buoys me up or someone new arrives and reminds me that at one time or another, we are all in distress, but we can find peace and acceptance in our meditation group.”

And so we came, a group of 24 meditators, to Providence Spirituality Centre in Kingston for a weekend in November to learn more about the essential teachings of John Main and Christian meditation. Under the guidance of five leaders – Joseph Clarkson, Ron Dicks, Michel Legault, Rev.

Glenda Meakin and Julie Meakin – we explored the facts and fruits of meditation. “Baby-stepped” through giving a talk, we had the chance to practise among our peers, using the details of our personal journeys and basics of John Main’s teaching to craft simple talks for different types of audiences.

We also quickly learned how much we didn’t know about the tradition. Quick! Who wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing*? What does *apophatic* mean? It was a fast-paced and hilarious *Jeopardy*-like history of meditation. We then turned the tables to stump the School leaders, and in the process learned just how much collective wisdom there was in the room. We each didn’t have to know all the answers! What we really needed was a heart full of love, willingness to be fully ourselves, and openness to see the way that God is calling us as we walk with others on the journey.

The journey, for most of us, is do-able! The Christian meditation tradition as taught by John Main gives us, as another

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Canadian Council appoints Krister Partel as National Youth Coordinator

It can seem as though anxiety fuels our culture, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed and directionless. Youth and young adults are experiencing greater pressures and are bombarded by competing messages, yet many are searching for spiritual meaning and purpose to find balance in their lives. A personal meditation practice may be the key. The Canadian Christian Meditation Community recognizes this and has begun to actively reach out to them.

CCMC has selected Krister Partel to be National Youth Coordinator, for a two-year term beginning January 2010. The objectives are simple:

- To promote and share the practice and discipline of Christian meditation, as passed on through the teaching of John Main, to youth and young adults at both the national and local level;
- To develop and maintain a national spiritual network of youth and young adults interested in, or already practising, Christian meditation;
- To expand the youth and young adult membership of the Canadian community.



An open invitation to youth across Canada

Our objectives are bold, but with will, determination and support from the Canadian community they are achievable.

Over the next year and a half, I hope to work with you to bring these goals to fruition and help foster the next generation of meditators in our community.

Just who is covered by the term *youth and young adult*? For purposes of this initiative the age range would be roughly 16 to 39. If you are, or know someone who is, a young adult or student seeking to connect with others across Canada to further and deepen their meditation practice, feel free to contact me to receive more information as we move

forward. Everyone is welcome. We have come to meditation from a variety of paths, and we believe in its potential to transform people and the world.

We would also love to hear about any initiatives with youth and young adults in your area. Sharing our experiences helps us all.

Krister Partel
National Youth Coordinator
Ottawa, ON
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Practicalities of Practice

Q. What does the term letting go mean in the practice of Christian Meditation?

A. In one of his talks, John Main says that newcomers to meditation often seem to be gritting their teeth and saying: "I'm going to come to this silence even if it kills me." He goes on to say that in the practice of meditation we have to "let go" of achieving anything. We should have no objectives, no goals, nothing except the saying of the mantra and openness to the indwelling presence of Christ.

However this does bring up a question. Is silence itself a goal, the pot at the end of the rainbow? There is a spiritual truism that silence is only the finger pointing to God, it is not God. Silence is the means but it is not the end. So silence is not something we can possess. We have to go beyond possessiveness.

We may enjoy some silence from time to time in our practice of meditation, but it is not something we can achieve completely through our own efforts and the gritting of teeth. The saying of the mantra opens us up to the possibility of silence, but it is not a goal we feverishly seek. Deep silence itself is simply a free gift of God.

But there is something that develops in our daily commitment to the practice of meditation. It's what John Main calls openness to the God within, the presence of the spirit that lives in our hearts. This openness to the presence of God exists even when we are up to our eyeballs in alligators as the saying goes, even when distractions are like mosquitoes driving us crazy, when sometimes our entire meditation period seems to be all about dodging bullets. Don't be disturbed by distractions and don't try to possess the silence. Let the silence happen in due course.

In "letting go" we let go of talking to God, thinking about God, imagining God. As John Main says, we want to do something immeasurably greater. Meditation is about *being*. We seek to *be* with God, to be with Jesus, to be with his holy spirit.

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

From the National Coordinator

Horizons

I recently returned from a speaking tour to Trinidad, Curacao and Barbados as part of the ongoing support that the Canadian meditation community provides to the much smaller communities in the Caribbean. It is certainly a beautiful part of the world, with so much to delight the senses. First, of course, is the temperature: +25 degrees is a lot more pleasant than the -20 we left behind in Winnipeg! Then there are the trees, with leaves of such a variety of shapes and shades of green. On the sandy beaches, the light blue colour of the ocean is amazing. Many of the birds have brilliant colours and exotic plumage. Plants vary from the lush vegetation of a rain forest to cactus in a dry desert. Buildings range from historic mansions of the landowners to workers' huts. On Curacao the architecture has a distinctive Dutch flavour with buildings painted in bright colours.

These sights were normal to the everyday life of the people who live there. They are probably so accustomed to them that they don't give them a second thought. But to us visitors they were unusual and extraordinary – not part of our everyday experience, so we see it all with fresh eyes.

In many ways, meditation is quite ordinary. It is a simple practice that has become part of our everyday life. Because it is familiar we don't usually appreciate how extraordinary it is. But just think. Through meditation we intentionally open ourselves to the reality of the presence of the living God whose Spirit dwells in us. God is that close, but we are

often not aware of it. Many people don't know about this, even people of faith. Or they may know in their minds, but not experience it in their hearts.

One purpose of my tour was to remind people of this extraordinary reality and provide them with a way to experience it for themselves. We who are meditators are bearers of this wisdom and experience, so part of our purpose is to share the practice with others. It can be as easy as inviting a friend to come to the meditation group we attend. In John 1:26 we read that Philip invited Nathaniel to "come and see" Jesus. Nathaniel was surprised that anything good could come from the very ordinary town of Nazareth. We too can invite people to "come and see." They may be surprised to discover that a group of ordinary people, with a simple, uncomplicated practice, have experienced something extraordinary – the presence of the Spirit of God within us.

The truth is that this apparently extraordinary reality is completely ordinary. This is the way that God has made us. God's spirit dwells within us. It is a gift that God has given to all people. Perhaps we can help a few more to see this ordinary reality with fresh eyes, and come to experience it in their hearts.

Phil Barnett
National Coordinator

More on Phil Barnett's trip: page C12



Attention Oblates

The latest issue of the Oblate newsletter *Via Vitae* was mailed out a few weeks ago. We have received several emails, letters and calls from oblates who are not on the current mailing list. If you would like to have your name added to the mailing list, please send your contact information to:

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Page design: www.khatvanga.com

BC Ecumenical Initiative

A Saturday morning in January. The venue, the Interfaith Chapel at the University of Victoria, could not have been more apt. There were representatives from Centering Prayer, the Contemplative Society, Solus-Salann and the BC Christian Meditation Community. The event was initiated through the efforts of Daphne Taylor and Henri Locke, University Chaplain.

Each group gave an overview of their community. Colleen Donald, Regional Coordinator for the BC Community spoke on the life of John Main and the roots of the Christian tradition of meditation. There were two meditation periods followed by Taizé chanting.

A simple lunch was provided. Bodies and souls satisfied!

Colleen Donald
Vancouver, BC

Distractions

From talks entitled "Christian Meditation: A Way to a Listening Heart." This is the second of three workshop sessions given in October 2009 at a retreat led by Sr. Kathleen Bolger SSM at St. Alban's Anglican Church, Dartmouth NS. The first workshop was reported on in the previous issue of the Newsletter. Watch for "Meditation and the Gift of the Mantra" in the next issue.

Sr. Kathleen identified three levels of distraction:

Level 1 – **Surface level distractions.** This includes thinking, personal or spiritual self-consciousness. These distractions are rooted in us and include thoughts about the past or concerning the future. In meditation, we let go of simple distractions. We keep the door to our heart of hearts always open. Also, we may find that we need to slow down some of our activity. In meditation, we stop thinking about ourselves. The mantra helps with letting go of everything.

Level 2 – **Unconscious.** Where our woundedness dwells – our shadow side. Here, we find feelings of anger, grief and rejection as well as our memories, especially from times of turbulence. This is where forgiveness is very important as it leads to healing, to feeling deeply loved by God. This leads to His forgiveness, from God who is Love.

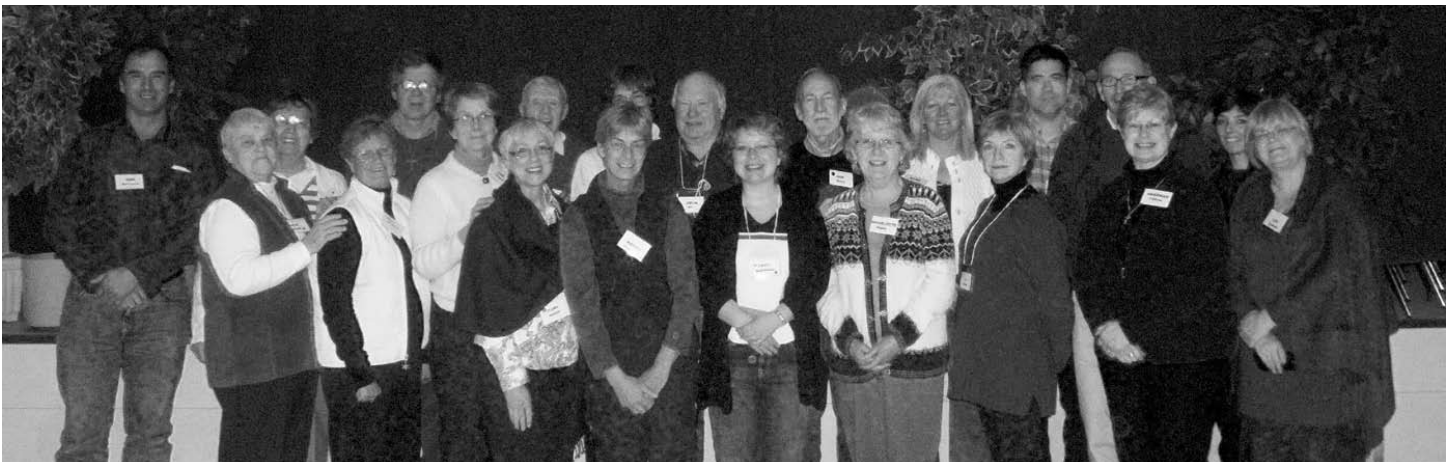
Level 3 – **Consciousness.** Our conscious level requires faith and waiting. Sr. Kathleen referred to Thomas Merton's prayer to Christ, "Bring me through the stone wall," i.e., the ego. The ego must be our servant and not our master. We yearn for God but still feel outside. The false self will gradually melt away as focus shifts from *self* to *God* and then to *others*. We need to keep chipping away at the ego towards our true self and to God who we will then find in the ground of our being. We need Jesus as our guide. All the way to heaven is heaven because Jesus is our guide.

Irene Reid
Halifax, NS

Ottawa Group Leaders Harvest their Collective Wisdom

On February 6, group leaders and teachers of the Ottawa Area community took part in a workshop entitled "Harvesting Our Collective Wisdom." The day-long event was hosted by the meditation groups of St. Joseph's Parish and facilitated by Joyce Hardman and Cathy Nobleman, experienced leaders from the group at First United Church. The purpose was to support leaders in their ongoing work of sharing the gift of Christian meditation.

The 24 participants divided into four units to recount their experiences as group leaders and to identify and discuss key questions. The units were called MA, RA, NA and THA. (As you can see we are very original.) The topics included: how can we as leaders honour each person in the group;



Ottawa group leaders

FAR AND NEAR

how to promote Christian meditation as a legitimate and powerful part of our Christian tradition; how can we attract new members.

To the last question it was suggested we advertise our groups in church bulletins; place posters in neighbouring churches; use websites and community newspapers; and just mention meditation, when appropriate, at work or during our daily activities. To foster an accepting attitude when leading a group, practise the art of listening, refrain from being judgmental, and make sure everyone is made to feel special and welcome.

Days like this are vital for any Christian meditation community. It is important for leaders and potential leaders to spend time to focus on building relationships, to listen to each other, and just to sit and meditate together. We always find that in this way we form a special bond with others and begin to build a solid base for our groups. As a consequence we develop into a supportive, close-knit family.

Jack Murta
Ottawa, ON

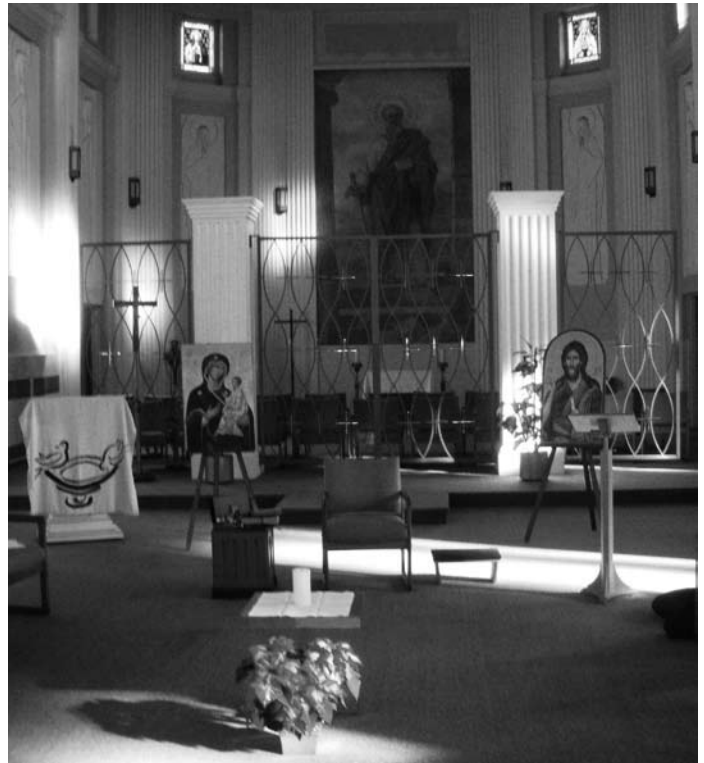
Third Annual Advent Retreat in Ottawa

Saturday, November 28, 2009: a group of 100 people met at Saint Paul University Chapel, where Rev. Kevin Flynn led a retreat entitled Celebrating the Coming One.

Rev. Flynn set the tone with two icons at the front of the chapel: one of the Madonna and Child, and one of John the Baptist. He presented them as quintessentially Advent figures, who lead us into becoming more aware of our hopes and aspirations. Gaze at them, see the icons as windows into heaven, who point to heavenly figures they represent. Where we set our gaze will transform us, shape and direct our lives.

Mark 1 introduces us to John the Baptist, the voice crying, "Prepare the way of the Lord." The journey itself is what we need – at least as important as reaching the stable at Bethlehem. We need to empty our hearts so there is room.

The old life is passing away; new life is on its way. We must simply wait, not knowing when it will come, what it will look like or how it will change our life. We must prepare the way for new life. Sometimes God speaks so quietly, we must lean in close in order to hear. The Baptist identifies himself as *a voice*, his whole self subsumed into his mission. Make room for God to bring us God's own self. Pay attention to nothing other than the naked yearning. Meditation is a discipline to learn how to let go, to have a naked desire and trust for God, to create more space for the Coming One.



Chapel retreat setting

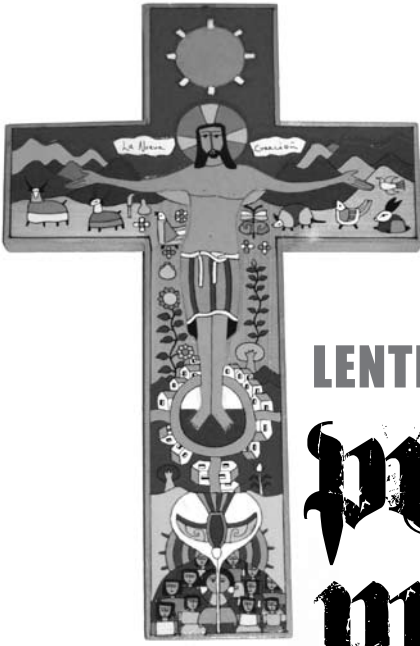
John the Baptist marks the first time in three centuries that a prophet in Israel calls for repentance. He calls for a change of deeds, of conduct. Whoever has two coats, or food, must share with those who have none. John the Baptist pointed away from himself to the Coming One. He called his followers to live lives worthy of God. Asked "Are you the one who is to come?", he had humility, a sense of proportion about who he was: "I must decrease and He must increase."

Wait with expectant attention. "Let those who have ears to hear, hear." "Come and see."

Charlotte Gupta
Ottawa, ON



Charlotte Gupta and Rev. Kevin Flynn



LENTEN SERIES 2010

prayer & meditation



For the fifth consecutive year, Fr. Terry Gallagher SFM organized a contemplative Lenten series at Scarboro Foreign Missions in Toronto. Topics ranged from *Mysticism in Christianity*, to *Lenten Meditations of an African Missionary in Canada*.

One of the sessions, on February 24, was presented by Joseph Clarkson, WCCM-Toronto Coordinator, who led a reflection entitled *The Sign of the Cross and several Crosses of Christianity*. Using music and images, as well as silence, he shepherded over 90 “pilgrims” on a reflection of what it means to make the sign of the cross and then spent some prayerful time interpreting and then gazing upon some specific representations of the crucifixion.

Most of us have undoubtedly made the sign of the cross thousands of times. How great is our awareness of the meaning of this symbol or of the gesture? Joseph reviewed the practice of making the sign with the thumb on the forehead in early Christian times. The Roman theologian Tertullian wrote in 204 A.D., “At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out... in all the ordinary actions of our life, we trace upon the forehead the sign.”

The Eastern Orthodox tradition makes the sign with the first three fingers of the right hand joined together to signify the Trinity, and the other two fingers bent towards the palm to signify the dual nature of Christ as divine and human. The practice of joining the symbolic use of the fingers to the gesture of making the sign of the cross helps to create a more conscious practice when signing oneself, “in the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” By becoming more aware of the meaning of making the sign of the cross upon ourselves, we can participate more fully in this beautiful prayer.

Joseph then proceeded slowly and prayerfully through a PowerPoint presentation of several paintings of the crucifixion, in each case, speaking briefly about the details and adding some interpretation and then including a reflective exercise. We viewed the following: Dali’s *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*; El Greco’s *Christ on the Cross*; *St. Francis praying at the foot of the cross* from San Damiano, Italy; *The Transfiguration* of Fra Angelico, a cruciform image; and a cross entitled *La Nueva Creación* from El Salvador. Many crosses and paintings, Joseph noted, incorporate elements of the crucifixion and the resurrection. He drew attention to how the power of symbol adds meaning to the artistic representations. Using these images during times of prayer can help us to focus and to reflect upon the meaning of the cross.

The session ended with the prayerful song *You Raise Me Up* which embodies the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection in our own lives.

For information on future Advent or Lenten series, contact <terryg@scarboromissions.ca> or telephone 416-261-7135.

WCCM-Toronto

John Main's Anniversary in Montreal

On December 30, we commemorated John Main's transitus, as we have done for the past two decades, in Loyola Chapel, with the Eucharist, meditation and a gigantic Agape meal. Fr. Paul Geraghty and Fr. Gerry Westphal celebrated. They both knew and loved Fr. John well.

Although Fr. John never tired of warning us "not to count heads," there were over 75 of the Montreal community who came that evening – old and new meditators. Amidst their smiling faces and the evident joy of the company as we ate and talked, I was reminded that we are created for life – immortal life – as Fr. John so often said. Whether we like it or not, we shall go on being for ever – beyond death – because God cannot take back the gift He has given. When someone we love dies, part of us dies with them; but at the same time they go on living – transformed – within us, closer than before, revitalizing and enriching our lives – because of love.

Nothing validates this more than the experience of meditation, provided one has the courage to lose oneself in the silence, in the depth, where the Spirit enfolds the whole universe. The goal, the supreme gift – is Communion – not asked for, not even hoped for. Contemplation is not something we do, not something we can achieve. It is given at God's discretion. But having experienced it – even once – we come to know that what we stand on is solid ground; and that we have nothing to lose, nothing to fear.

Fr. John gave me my compass for life, by teaching me to pray – teaching all of us that there is only one prayer – that of the Spirit of Christ within each of us. In the depth of silence we are one with His Spirit. "The mystery of Love," he said, "is that we become what we delight to gaze upon, and so, when we have opened our hearts to this Light – we become Light."

Yes, Fr. John was in Communion. He focussed on the one thing... and he became Love. Totally human with his foibles and faults, yet he lived his life with energy, joyous optimism, and reverence. Life was a gift – to be enjoyed with others. For Dom John Main life was a great adventure. He was, and is, fully alive.

**Polly Schofield – Oblate
Montreal, QC**

Sonnet

The Goal Of Life

The goal of life is: come to realize
How we already are in heaven here
Embrace this wisdom and it will come clear
Give full attention always, say the wise
Of who we are within to recognize
Awake to silence where it will appear
Live in awareness God is ever near
Of Love does everything we are comprise
Forsake the noise and live the inner glow
Met all with peace and love be in accord
In everything to feel the sacred flow
Or in this moment is our soul's reward
Embrace this mystery, which we all know

is to completely live within the Lord.

**Rosemary Lutter
Ottawa, ON**

(musing on talks by Fr. Lawrence Freeman)



Calendar of Events

For regular updates go to www.meditatio.ca/News/updates.html

April

17 April, Vancouver, B.C. *Staying the Course – Fidelity and Perseverance.* A community retreat day of renewal for meditators on the journey. It is also an opportunity to meet and pray with fellow pilgrims. Brown bag lunch. By donation. Contact: Colleen Donald at 604-985-1592.

29 April, Toronto, ON. *Roots of Christian Mysticism: Teresa of Avila, Mystic and Social Critic* led by Rev. Gerald Loweth, WCCM-Toronto member. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George Street. Time: 7–9 p.m. For more information contact: Maureen Casey Rowed at 416-733-0233, e-mail <myetmoe@hotmail.com> or Joy Gordon 416-485-9718.

May

18 May, Cranbrook, BC. *Meditation for Christians* led by Derek Cameron. Time: 7-9 p.m. Venue: Christ the Servant Parish, 1100 14th Avenue South. Contact: Marywood at 250-426-8117 or marywoodretreats@shaw.ca

27 May, Toronto, ON. *Apatheia* led by Michael Hryniuk of St. Michael's College. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George Street. Time: 7–9 p.m. For more information contact: Maureen Casey Rowed at 416-733-0233, e-mail <myetmoe@hotmail.com> or Joy Gordon 416-485-9718.

29 May, Ottawa, ON. *The Way You Pray is the Way You Live: Sharing Our Journey.* Several meditators – some young and some not so young – will share how they came to the path of Christian Meditation, and their experience of the fruits of this way of contemplative prayer in their daily lives. Join us for this day of fellowship, inspiration and meditation. This would be a wonderful opportunity to introduce a friend or family member to Christian Meditation. Venue: The Good Shepherd Parish, 3092 Innes Rd, Orleans. Time: 10 a.m.–2 p.m. This is a pot luck so bring finger foods to share. Please register by 22 May with Gail Lussier or Marilyn Dunn at 613-830-9545.

June

4-6 June, Toronto ON. WCCM-Toronto annual weekend retreat, led by Rev. Glenda Meakin. Theme: *The Gift of Simplicity.* Venue: St. John's Convent, 233 Cummer Avenue (Yonge & Finch). Time: Friday evening to Sunday noon. Cost: Residential \$200 single; Commuters \$140. Contact: Lucy Chong 647-288-8206; e-mail <lucych@rogers.com> or Claire Andrews 416-922-7230.

11-13 June, Montreal QC. Weekend Retreat – Polly Schofield will present from Dom John Main OSB's historical retreat material. Venue: the Cistercian Abbey at Rougemont.

Time: between 3 and 4 p.m. Friday 13 June to 1:30 p.m. Sunday 15 June. Cost: \$145 for a room with private bathroom and shower, \$100 for a room with shared bathroom and shower, for those bring own sheets and pillowcase and towel. Book early since space is limited. To register: send \$45 made out to Christian Meditation Retreats to: Magda Jass, 4540 Wilson Ave., Montreal, QC, H4A 2V4. Contact: Magda Jass at 514-489-0998.

17 June, Toronto, ON. *Encountering the Divine in Beauty* led by Joseph Clarkson, WCCM-Toronto member. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George Street. (Meeting will be followed by annual Satsang.) Time: 7–9 p.m. For more information contact: Maureen Casey Rowed at 416-733-0233, e-mail <myetmoe@hotmail.com> or Joy Gordon 416-485-9718.

September 2010

17-19 September, Vancouver, BC. *The School: Workshop on Essential Teaching.* Learn how to share the gift of meditation with others. This weekend retreat for 20 participants will be held at Westminster Abbey in Mission and led by Rev. Glenda Meakin. For more information contact: Colleen Donald at 604-985-1592.

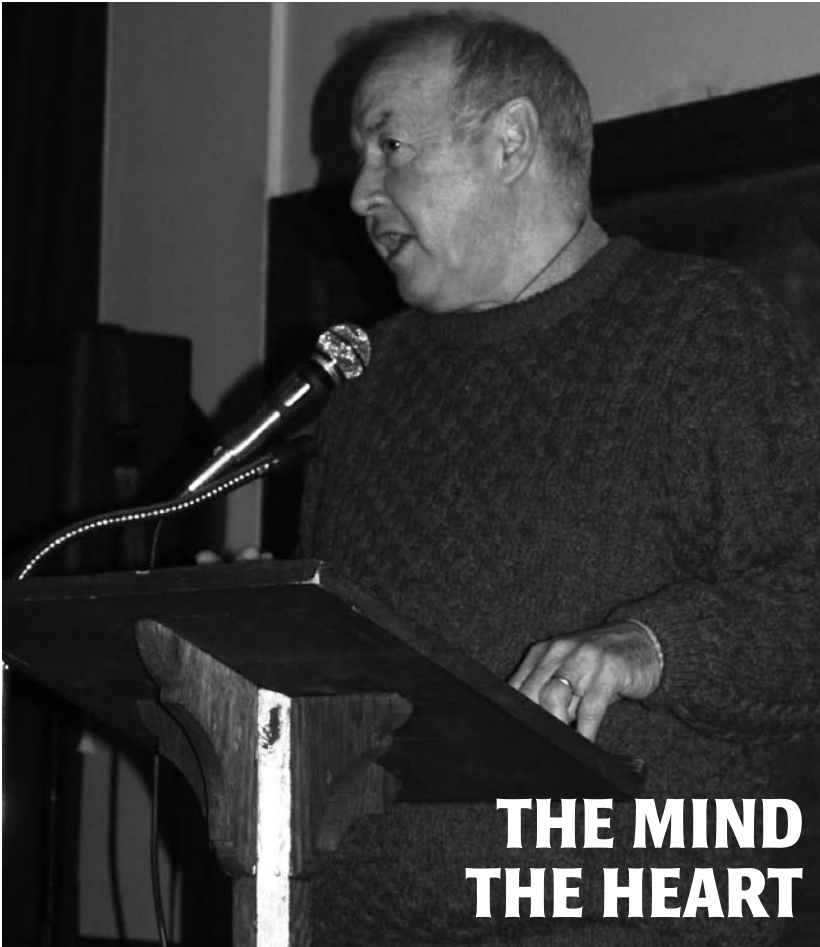
20–23 September, Montreal QC. Retreat with Fr. Laurence Freeman Venue: Manoir d'Youville, 468 Boulevard d'Youville, Île Saint-Bernard, Chateauguay, QC. Time: 2 p.m. Monday 20 September to 11 a.m. Thursday 23 September. Cost: Room with single bed, shared washroom: \$300; Room with 2 single beds, shared washroom: \$465 for 2; Room with 1 double bed, shared washroom: \$465 for 2; Room with 2 single beds, private bathroom: \$500 for 2; Room with 1 double bed, private bathroom: \$500 for 2 or \$335 for 1. To register: send \$75 made out to Christian Meditation Retreats to: Magda Jass, 4540 Wilson Ave., Montreal, QC, H4A 2V4. Contact: Magda Jass at 514 489-0998.

Regularly Scheduled Events

First Thursday of each month, Calgary, AB. *Meditation Booster – Monthly Drop-in* led by Engeline Piet at FCJ Christian Life Centre 219-19th Avenue. Time: 12 noon to 12:45 p.m. and 7 to 8 p.m. Contact: FCJ Christian Life Centre at 403-228-4215.

Last Thursday of each month, Toronto, ON. WCCM-Toronto monthly teaching meeting. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George Street. Not held July and August. Individual events are described above. For more information contact: Maureen Casey Rowed at 416-733-0233, e-mail <myetmoe@hotmail.com> or Joy Gordon 416-485-9718.

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



THE MIND creates the abyss and **THE HEART** crosses it

John Callaghan's title for his talk at the January meeting of WCCM-Toronto is a quotation of Sri Nisargadatta from the book *I Am That*. John is a popular speaker annually to the community, and this year he sparked timely interest because of his longstanding outreach project to the poor of Haiti.

Much that goes on in our lives is all in our mind, he stated boldly, adding that the phrase "to lose one's mind" can take on a positive connotation in the contrasting contexts of mind and heart. At the obvious level, the mind is full of considerations – worries, fears, desires flowing through it at a great pace, keeping us fully occupied with its contents. Mind includes our thoughts, opinions, judgments, reruns of arguments and comments that we make unconsciously to ourselves. It can be like a mental movie projector which we are all too prone to watch, often in a drama starring ourselves and our own concerns. John explained the necessity of going beyond this limitation, citing Raymond Panikkar: "The last function of the intellect in terms of spiritual growth is for the intellect to transcend itself."

The heart is a very deep place within us that is itself a mystery. By way of illustration, John told the story of a needy woman in Haiti saying to a caregiver, "If you have come to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you have come because our destinies are related, then

everything is good." What this shows is that we cannot be Christ to others unless they are Christ to us. John further suggested that the heart is neither body nor spirit, but both. Living from the heart changes us – a state difficult to explain to those not living from the heart. As St. Catherine of Siena says about love, we must look deeply; the more we see the more we love, and the more we love the more we see.

In contrast to this loving, seeing heart, the mind looks out at everything very differently. Nothing is just as it is; everything changes according to our needs. With the mind, we live in the world of *I want*. The loving, seeing heart lives in the present moment. This heart-centered awareness becomes available to meditators as a choice, an alternative to *I want*. Even when we begin to be aware of the option, we struggle between *I want* and the Spirit, but we feel the edge of the demands of the heart in moments of awareness.

So, John encouraged us to be "out of our minds," to be in touch with and living from our hearts. Then we begin to realize joy and awe within us, that Christ is within us. Our life journey can be seen as a melting process. Like an ice cube that is slowly melting, letting go of its iciness and becoming transformed into a puddle, returning to its watery essence, we are not as we seem to be. We can be like the melting ice cube. We can be changed.

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON



MEDITATION AS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY

**A summary of Julie Meakin's talk at
WCCM-Toronto's February meeting**

It took a 14th-century conflict between Gregory, a monk on Mount Athos (who ended up spending four years in prison), and Barlaam of Calabria (a priest and theologian with powerful political connections), and a number of Church councils. But eventually, the practice of contemplative prayer was upheld as Orthodox, Gregory was made Metropolitan of Thessaloniki and later a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

We usually think of subversion in purely political terms – the plotting and planning involved in overthrowing a regime. The word doesn't normally apply to meditation. The dictionary definition is, "to turn from beneath, to turn under." To overthrow something that is established. Subversion implies change, a transformation, something that begins quietly, underground, hidden, but that eventually makes itself known. It starts with small groups of like-minded people who are committed to a cause and who are willing to make sacrifices. Another characteristic of subversion is that it is indirect. It does not confront its opponent head-on. It takes time and patience to reach its goal.

Before looking at meditation as subversive activity, we might look at Christianity itself. Take Mary's *Magnificat*, for example. This has to be a most unnerving song to the powers that be, and perhaps for us in some ways as well. "He has brought down the powerful... and sent the rich away empty." (Luke 2:52-3) Jesus, an itinerant preacher who "proclaimed liberty for captives," was deemed enough of a threat to the powerful. He had to be executed. Was it

something to do with his teaching about the Kingdom of God? The Christian movement itself had to exist underground for its first two centuries, and even today, Christians in certain parts of the world have to meet in secret in people's homes to avoid being persecuted by the government. Indeed, the Lord's Prayer which we say every day, can also be seen as subversive – it requires that life as we know it be overturned. "Thy Kingdom come..." Radical words – they mean change, movement. They are subversive.

Well, what about the practice of Christian meditation? How can sitting in silence twice a day be considered even remotely subversive? What exactly are we subverting? Who is doing it, and how? The short answer is this: Meditation is a process of undermining the Kingdom of Self and establishing the Kingdom of God within us. In meditation we are subverting the power of the ego by faithfully repeating our mantra, knowing in faith that God's grace is working in and through the silence and stillness. As John Main states often, meditation is a journey beyond self into the mystery of God.

In this work, we do not see ourselves engaging in any threatening activity to the powers that be. We are quiet, inconspicuous. Indeed, the metaphors that Jesus used in his parables for the Kingdom of God are also small, unobtrusive – seeds, leaven, salt. Yet things are happening; there is movement, growth. The work of the mantra brings us to acknowledge the things about ourselves that we would prefer to keep hidden. It undermines our need to present

only our best selves, to keep buried our sinfulness, shame, pride. All these parts of ourselves are brought to awareness so that we can bring our whole selves to God, warts and all, as the saying goes.

In the process of “taking the spotlight off self-consciousness,” as John Main observed, and opening ourselves to the consciousness of Christ within us, we discover what is illusion and what is reality. Meditation is subversive because it turns over the illusion that the ego is the ultimate reality. Meditation changes our beliefs, attitudes and values. It is subversive because in nourishing our rootedness in God, we begin acting out of our true self. Meditation subverts the ego’s desire to be in control, to use people and love things. Rather, as Fr. Gerry Pierse says, “It allows our true self to love people and use things.”

Meditation allows us to name the false self/ego and recognize ways we allow it mastery over us. We can begin to live out of our true self, living out of the power of love. Meditation is subversive activity because love is subversive. “Perfect love casts out fear,” St. Paul wrote. Is there anything more subversive than to love your enemies? In meditation we realize that the end of this subversion is love, and the

means is also love – love of self, love of God, love of others – because Christ himself is the Way. Our prayer no longer is ours, but joins the prayer of Christ in our hearts, that “great, cosmic river of love that is the Holy Spirit.” (John Main)

Meditation seeks the Kingdom of God. “Each morning and each evening we make space for the kingdom to expand a little further, firstly within us and then through us.” (John Main – *The Present Christ*, p. 39.) It takes time for us to believe that we really are loved unconditionally. To be able to say, “Not my will, but thine be done” without fear or hesitation, with complete trust and fidelity, is a lifelong journey of conversion, of turning to God. It may mean joining in peace marches, or working in Haiti, as a couple of meditators we know have. It may mean communicating with our political leaders, or even extending a hand in forgiveness and reconciliation to another. “Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation,” was St. Seraphim of Russia’s wise counsel. Karl Barth famously said, “To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against disorder in the world.”

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON

School Workshop *continued from front*

participant said, “a clear roadmap.” Its signposts were made even more real by Glenda Meakin, who brought us home to scripture and used the Exodus story as a metaphor for the psychological stages of the journey of meditation – a roundabout route over a very long time.

The weekend filled us with gratitude for the opportunity to become more deeply rooted in the community. We

all emerged with resources – and hearts full of grace – to help us on our way. Whether leading a group, giving a talk or sharing our story with a friend or acquaintance, as Fr. Laurence Freeman reminds us, “You are not expected to be an expert or a model meditator. Just a humbly committed one.” (*The Pearl of Great Price*)

Nancy Huggett
Ottawa, ON

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Caribbean Trip 2010

CCMC Helps Build Monastery Without Walls

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the Caribbean in January? For me it was warmth – especially from the perspective of a Winnipeg winter. On a recent speaking tour to Trinidad & Tobago, Curacao and Barbados, accompanied by my wife Barbara (who travelled at her own expense), we certainly experienced the physical warmth of the climate. More importantly, we received an incredibly warm welcome.

Wherever we went we were greeted with kindness and generosity, and were welcomed into people's homes and lives. What a privilege to be able to share in the daily lives of our hosts, and to meet their families and friends. They also gave us the caring gift of time. There was time to rest when needed, and time to enjoy the unique culture and landscape of each of these wonderful islands.

I found it enriching to give talks to so many people with different backgrounds and interests, and in such a variety of settings. We met in churches, a cathedral, meeting rooms, worship centres, a school, a private home and a college chapel. There were members of hosting congregations, people from other churches, and some with no church affiliation. There were high school students, Anglican clergy on their continuing education week, business executives, theological students, and a group who had suffered significant personal loss.

There was tremendous interest in each location. In Trinidad

the numbers were astonishing – over 700 people in total. I was also interviewed for two TV stations and a diocesan newspaper. Yet whether it was a church full of people, or an auditorium of high school students, or a few people in the front rows of an otherwise empty cathedral, it was the individual response that was a delight to witness.

For many, meditation was a new experience which they wanted to explore further. Several people said that they intended to re-commit to the twice-daily practice. There were some who talked about plans to begin a new group; one was a woman of lively faith who was 92 years old. Some said they previously had questions or reservations about meditation which they now felt were answered. After each meeting there was a buzz of conversation as people stayed behind to share their experiences and build community.

For me, it was a wonderful opportunity to appreciate once more the breadth of the World Community. In each country I met enthusiastic, gifted people who are committed to practising, teaching and promoting Christian meditation. Their enthusiasm is infectious. I came home deeply grateful for the experience and personally renewed in my own commitment to the extension of the “monastery without walls.”

**Phil Barnett
Winnipeg, MB**



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