

Canadian Christian Meditation Community

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2010 VOL. 19 NO. 4 THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

B.C. School Workshop on the Essential Teaching **A Leap of Faith**



Last September, 23 meditators from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Washington State arrived at the Benedictine Westminster Abbey in Mission, eager to learn how to share the gift of Christian meditation with others. The Canadian community sent four inspired teachers to lead us – Rev. Phil Barnett, Rev. Glenda Meakin, Joseph Clarkson and Louise Dudar.

It is remarkable how quickly an authentic experience of spiritual community develops in a group of meditators. Author Gerald May M.D. writes that “The power of grace is nowhere as brilliant or as mystical as in communities of faith. Its power includes... love that pours forth among people, as if through the very spaces between one person and the next.”¹ So it was in this context of community that we began our weekend of prayer, work and play.

There are seven gifts or virtues of the Holy Spirit received by us in faith. The role of teaching meditation soon shows how vital these are, and our four teachers modeled these gifts. The workshop presentations included John Main’s Essential Teaching (knowledge and understanding); sharing meditation with a friend or a group (counsel); the tradition of Christian meditation (piety and fear of the Lord);

the stages of the meditation journey (wisdom and fortitude; and preparing and leading a group, which calls on all seven. The sessions provided tools and insights to help us move from the passive/receptive to the active/giving gift of meditation.

As members of the Christian Meditation Community, we also share the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control, described by St. Paul as the harvest of the Spirit. (Gal.5) The workshop participants revealed these qualities – people who had never previously spoken in a group shared their meditation journey in humility and honesty. Although the information is similar, each presentation had the unique, loving quality of that particular pilgrim. All of us found the speaking element challenging. We realized that every group leader doesn’t need to be a polished speaker, but that we are capable of communicating the message of Christian meditation, each in our own way.

We need to take that leap of faith, to step into the unknown to which we are invited – to respond to the active element of our practice. God’s love is eternally expanding. The more

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A Leap of Faith *continued from front*

we enter into this experience the more aware we become of the natural imperative to share. “I gave you this work: to go and produce fruit, fruit that will last.” (John 15:16) We do this by working in the vineyard of our meditation community. This is what God longs to see in us. Like a careful gardener, He will clip and cut away anything that interferes.

The teaching and resources that we took away are already being put to good use. Some participants left with the

commitment to begin and lead groups, others have used their knowledge to present events. All of us are beneficiaries of the depth of resources offered and the generosity of CCMC in spearheading this event.

¹ *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (pub. Harper Collins)

Colleen Donald
Vancouver, BC

Heart, Body, Spirit – Christian Meditation and Yoga

This is the sixth consecutive year for the Fully Alive retreat, led by meditators and certified yoga teachers. Casey Rock, Kevin Flynn and Lucie Legault, the regular presentation team, were assisted this year by Kathy Westgate and Joseph Clarkson. Retreatants are encouraged to honour the body concretely through yoga and meditation, and are challenged to understand that the body can assist us to live in the reality of God’s loving embrace in the present moment. The main components, as described below, may give readers a sense of armchair participation, although nothing beats being there to help you feel fully alive.

Befriending the Body

Kevin Flynn – Listening is important. Waking up to what lies deep in our heart is important. Citing Patanjali (the long-ago father of yoga), Kevin suggests that when we have tried all other options and found them inadequate, we NOW begin to really make something of ourselves. We do this in a variety of ways. One is the way of yoga where we use the body to access reality, to begin, NOW, to open up to what really is. In yoga we learn to go deeper in paying attention to our body. We slow down and, with fresh eyes, go deeper into the mystery of life through the experience of our bodies, experiencing the body as it is. Through yoga, we can learn to say YES to everything as it is, not as we want it to be, by befriending the body as a vehicle of experience. In sum, yoga teaches us to be in awe of life, as it is, in the present moment, in the NOW.

Awakening the Heart

Casey Rock – This topic seems a frightening prospect as we know only too well that cares and concerns about family, friends and the world at large can pain and burden the heart. Often, it feels like the heart is too much awake. The prophet Ezekiel claimed that God wants to remove our “heart of stone” and give us a “heart of flesh.” The latter heart will not shrink from fear, nor will it layer itself with protection. God wants us to have a mirror image of the divine heart, a heart of justice and compassion.

And what, we ask, must we do to receive this heart of divine

love? We must realize that we are not the surgeon who can remove the heart of stone. God is the surgeon. We must learn to let go – of our lists, our memories, our great ideas – and rely on God’s power to remove the junk that accumulates in our heart. We must remember that God sent Jesus in the flesh. There is great value in the body. We must learn to sit, to develop spine strength, and to learn, from the body, where to work on emotional and physical scars. The body can be a messenger that awakens us to what shape our heart is in. We need to let God have more control of our heart.

Encountering the Divine in Beauty

This PowerPoint presentation, by Joseph Clarkson, was reviewed in the most recent newsletter.

Honouring the Sacred

Lucie Legault – Yoga and meditation together can help develop awareness of our connection to all of life, and to name that Life as sacred. Some people may have greater experience in yoga, and others in silent meditation but, ideally, both work together.

Using a poster of Rembrandt’s *The Prodigal Son*, Lucie reflects that in Christianity, the body has become the prodigal. We have become estranged from the body via some past teachings and trends about our bodies. The painting of the father shows one masculine and one feminine hand – the compassionate presence of the father receiving his son, using the strength of the masculine and the receptivity of the feminine. We come to receive our body as gift as we incorporate the light of God into our bodies.

Lucie explains the chakra system as a way of understanding the body’s energy. She identifies each of the energy centres in the body and celebrates this in dance and colour. This “whole body” approach to spirituality and the integrating exercises help us to experience our bodies in a new and wonder-filled prayerful way. We concluded by dancing to music with flowing coloured scarves, an experience enthusiastically enjoyed by all.

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON

From the National Coordinator

Horizons

For several years now Barbara and I have become increasingly disenchanted with the winter ritual of sweeping snow off the car and scraping ice from the windows. Because of zoning by-laws, it was not practical to put up a carport. The only option was to build a garage in our backyard. But we have a lovely flower bed where the garage would have to go, and I was not keen to have a large building intruding on the open feeling of our garden. After much agonizing we decided to go ahead with the project.

There was a lot of digging to do. Once the vegetables were harvested I transplanted all the perennials from the flower bed to their temporary storage until the spring. Then I moved all of the topsoil to the place where we would be making a new bed. I should have counted the barrow-loads – it seemed to go on forever. Eventually all was prepared and the crew came to lay the concrete and erect the garage. Now that we have several snow falls behind us, I can say that I'm more than pleased with our new garage. All my preparatory work was well worth the effort.

Our practice of meditation is a work of preparation. It prepares us to be receptive to the presence of God. It is like digging a garden so that the soil will be ready for the plants to grow. Meditation allows our inner life to take root and grow to fullness. It allows us to bloom into the person God

has created us to be. The fruits of meditation are the signs that this transformation is gradually taking place.

It will take some more work in the spring to lay out our new flower beds and move the perennials again, but I'm sure we will enjoy the new garden when it is established. That, too, is the nature of meditation. There is always more work to be done – more tilling the inner garden where the Spirit dwells. Our daily practice helps us to keep ahead of the weeds. It keeps us as fertile soil where the plants that we want to grow will flourish, and the ones that we don't want will die away. It would be good if the flowering plants are perennials that thrive year after year, and not annuals that only last a short time. Once again it's our daily practice that ensures that the benefits of our meditation stay with us and continue to flourish.

It seems rather strange to be writing about gardening imagery when the ground is frozen solid and will be for several months yet. Fortunately the point is really about meditation, and we can do that year round, regardless of the weather. Our continuing practice of meditation will enable us to bloom where we are planted, even in the depths of winter.

**Phil Barnett
Winnipeg, MB**



HELP WANTED

We are looking for someone to assist in the coordination of this quarterly newsletter.

Skills required include word processing and being able to download and print photos in black and white.

For more information, please contact joseph.clarkson@rogers.com

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Living between Memory and Hope

Kevin Flynn leads Ottawa meditators into Advent

On December 4, Rev. Kevin Flynn led 130 meditators in our fourth annual Advent retreat in the chapel of Saint Paul University in Ottawa. Participants, including a number of new meditators, came from outlying areas of Brockville, Morrisburg, Prescott, Bancroft, Manotick and Casselman in Ontario, Aylmer and Cantley in Quebec, and as far away as Montreal.

It was a rich, spiritual day with readings from the Bible, peaceful Taizé chants, and gentle stretching to help develop a connection with our bodies. Rev. Flynn offered reflections and stories for each Sunday of Advent, starting with the feast of Christ the King. His commentary on the Gospel reading of Mark (the second week) brought John the Baptist to life for us. Here he helped us picture John as the same age as Jesus, being an extremely persuasive preacher, and attracting scores of people to his powerful messages. We imagined St. John living in the desert “clothed with camel’s hair... eating a diet of locusts and wild honey.” St. John was a tremendously influential figure for Jesus. “What John said and what he did was cut from the same cloth,” we learned. It was no small wonder that Jesus held him in such high esteem.

We also heard of John’s commanding message of repentance. This message ties into our daily meditation practice. The precious times when graced moments of truth are illuminated for us, when our excuses and whining no longer suffice. We undoubtedly come to know the truth and are compelled to make the necessary changes in our lives.

It was appropriate to hear the Christmas story, and to be reminded of the imagery of darkness and light. Christ was born at night, in darkness. To know this simple truth provides great comfort. When fear rears its ugly head at night, we are reassured of God’s presence and love. This Christmas image stimulated personal reflection of our own dark side. Rev. Flynn spoke of sleep and night-time being daily reminders of our human limitations. We need sleep to live, and we are restored and healed by it. Perhaps, then, our own darkness is not to be feared. Perhaps it is time to embrace and integrate our inner darkness.

To end the retreat, we sang a timeless chant written by Julian of Norwich. The words rang with the day’s message of hope and of God’s immense love for us:

You have grounded my soul deeply in you, O God,
and I am endlessly treasured.
All shall be well, all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.
Come light of lights into my heart.
Come wisdom of Spirit into my heart.

Irena Konopacki-Kubina
Kanata, ON

Ottawa Hosts Fourth Annual Introduction to Christian Meditation Series

The Ottawa Christian Meditation committee sponsored its 4th annual 6-week series *Coming Home: An Introduction to Christian Meditation* October 6 to November 10, 2010 at the Good Shepherd Parish in Orleans.

Six members of the Ottawa Christian meditation community each volunteered an evening of their time to share their meditation journey and to present one of the introductory topics: *What is Meditation?* (Eva Hegmann); *John Main* (Ron McRae); *The Roots of Our Tradition* (Archie Boyd); *The Wheel of Prayer* (James Kubina); *Leaving Self Behind* (Cathy Nobleman); and *Meditation as a Way of Life* (Don Myrick).

Members of the Good Shepherd meditation group welcomed the attendees each week and hosted a social on the final evening. There was also a book and resources table organized by Marg McGowan so that participants could purchase books and CDs if they so desired.

The attendees were fully engaged throughout the six weeks and kindly shared their thoughts: “The guest speakers were so kind to offer their time and share their experiences. We are very grateful to them... You have opened a new door to us – meditation – for which we are very grateful.” “Thank you for this lovely meditation adventure.” “Thank you for such a wonderful introduction to meditation! I think that I have started on a long and fascinating journey.” “Thank you for a great meditation experience. I’m so happy I came.” “It has been very, very worthwhile!”

Their enthusiasm is contagious and they are already asking on behalf of friends “When is the next series?”

Charlotte Gupta
Orleans, ON
Organizer/facilitator of the series

FAR AND NEAR

Come and See

How would you, or do you, share your practice and experience of Christian meditation with others? That was the question addressed at the Advent 2010 Ontario Regional School for Meditators, held at Kingston's Providence Spirituality Centre. Participants came from across southern Ontario to learn and discuss the various ways we can open our inner silence outwards, to embrace new people and pass on the gift we have been given.

Every member of the Resource Team – Michel Legault, Glenda Meakin, Marilyn Metcalfe and Julie Meakin – brought many years' experience in the practice and teaching of meditation. The dozen or so students were a more unequal group. Some measured their meditation experience in decades, others in months. But all could point to profound changes the practice had made in their inner lives, and felt moved to invite others to share the joy they had received. For some this could mean starting a new meditation group. Others wanted to bring particular friends and family members, at critical points in their lives, onto a new path of healing and peace.

The purpose of the School embraces all these hopes. Its intention is to pass on John Main's teaching, to help us, as a community, stay true to what we have been taught, and to raise up new teachers and leaders to carry that tradition forward.

The sessions began with a revelatory homily on the Gospel of John by Rev. Glenda Meakin. From the images of fulfillment and transformation in stories like the wedding feast at Cana, and the Samaritan woman at the well, Glenda drew practical lessons for those facing the often frightening challenge of simply opening ourselves to the power of grace. In meditation we experience the loving presence of God. Nevertheless, it can take faith and courage to put our full trust in that experience. It has not gotten any easier since the first Apostles heard the call from Christ, "Come and see."

Michel Legault introduced the breakout sessions. Students offered one another support and suggestions to help improve the ability to explain – to someone they knew, or to a newcomer to their group – what their meditation practice means to them. Later on, Julie Meakin led a playful, yet highly informative tour of the history of Christian meditation, satisfying a lot of curiosity, and opening up exciting new areas for personal reading.

At the closing session, Marilyn Metcalfe raised some more pointed questions – which probably everyone in the room had asked themselves at one time or another: Shouldn't I be passing on this gift of silent prayer? Am I ready to do

that? Am I even qualified? It was a relief to hear the strengthening wisdom someone had once passed on to Marilyn. "God doesn't call the qualified," they told her. "God qualifies the called."

So in the end, it comes down to the same demand for faith and courage as in the beginning – the same willingness to trust our own experience of Christ in the silence of our hearts.

Jeff Ewener
Toronto, ON



*Irena Konopacki-Kubina, Julie Meakin,
Kristen Partel and Elise Skinner*

Silence, Stillness, Simplicity: Finding your Centre in a Demanding World

"What makes this meditation a Christian meditation?" was just one of the questions asked by a mostly university-aged crowd at an introductory event on Christian meditation, held at St. Joseph's parish hall, right in the heart of the University of Ottawa. A group of 30 people came out on October 17 to listen to Julie Meakin discuss Christian meditation, God and the teachings of John Main. Elise Skinner spoke on her journey as a meditator, and Irena Konopacki led the group in a 20-minute meditation after reviewing the basic techniques of the practice.

A young man with a Baptist background said he was stunned to learn that Christian meditation existed and was moved by Julie's talk and Elise's testimonial. A mother brought her two children and their friend. She is not Christian and the friend is Buddhist, but they came away from the event keen and energized. Another woman, who had attended a recent silent retreat in Orleans, brought her daughter, a University of Ottawa student.

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The event highlighted what is best about our community, authentic experiences shared from the heart. For the assembled group, it was also an opportunity to let go of the frenzied world outside and the inner monologue, and to get in touch with the deeper presence of God that dwells within everyone.

Krister Partel
National Youth Coordinator
Ottawa, ON

The Sacrament of the Present Moment

At the WCCM-Toronto meeting in October, Joe Bergeron reflected on the difficulties – and rewards – of living in the present moment. A lover of the fall season, Joe rejoices in the glory of the colours and bright warm days, unlike a friend of his who, seeing autumn leaves mainly as a harbinger of the dark days of winter, is blind to their splendour. He told the story of a monk who ignored his vow not to touch any woman, in order to help a nun across a swiftly flowing river. As he continued walking, his companion monk obsessed over this infraction of the monastic rule for hours after, dwelling on his “sin.” “I put her down on the river bank,” the first monk admitted, “but you are still carrying her.” Instead of being trapped in the past or worrying about the future, Joe urged us to discover our true selves by living with heart and soul in the present.

St. Paul knew so well to turn his weaknesses over to the power of Christ and the Spirit. And so did the 18th-century Jesuit priest Jean Pierre de Caussade who, in his famous book *Self-abandonment to Divine Providence*, coined the term “sacrament of the present moment.” Caussade exhorted his readers to be aware of each moment and to see God in everything. Both these spiritual writers teach us to live life selflessly – with attentiveness to the divine.

Meditation can help us experience God within. But this way of seeing with the heart is not natural to us. Our culture teaches us self-absorption and blocks the truth of the Incarnation – that God is with us here and now. It often takes courage to let go of anxieties about past problems and future possibilities, but we must detach from our attempts to control what is uncontrollable. Then, Joe assured us, slowly we come to accept that “life is what happens when we are busy making plans.”

All contemplative traditions stress the healing power of silence and meditation. John Main’s rediscovery of the power of the prayer word in John Cassian’s writings led to his teaching of Christian meditation using a mantra. Joe referred to John Main’s book *The Heart of Creation* as a potent introduction to meditation’s “silence, stillness and simplicity”: “The commitment... is to be detached



Bill Watson thanks Joe Bergeron.

from self-conscious preoccupation, through fidelity to the mantra and to the twice-daily practice... [In] the times of meditation, then, we become progressively more simple, more joyous, more centred.” We gradually come to experience “perfect harmony with what is.”

Joe was quick to admit that it is a difficult path. Yet, with the help of meditation, we can live each moment to the fullest. Coming to an appreciation of the “sacrament of the present moment,” we see every aspect of life in a completely new light.

Carolyn Murray
Toronto, ON

25th Anniversary of Kanata Meditation Group

The Christian Meditation group at Holy Redeemer parish in Kanata celebrated the 25th anniversary of its existence, October 18, with a talk by the founder of the group, Paul Harris. The anniversary evening also featured the sale of books, the display of two albums of John Main photos, as well as photographic panels of 400 Christian Meditation groups around the world.

In addition to members of neighbouring Christian Meditation groups, a number of former leaders of the group were welcomed and joined the celebration.

Paul spoke in his talk of his own personal journey to the teaching which culminated in 1983 with his first visit to the Benedictine Priory in Montreal. Subsequently he joined the first Christian Meditation group in Ottawa founded by Don Myrick then located at Parkdale United Church. The original group in Kanata was started in Paul’s home in 1985

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and eventually years later was incorporated as a parish organization at Holy Redeemer Catholic Church. In addition to the Holy Redeemer group there is now another group in Kanata at St Paul's Anglican Church led by Marg McGowan.

In his talk Paul spoke from his 27 years experience in meditating about four essential aspects of meditation he considered extremely important. The topics included: on hitting the wall, letting go, distractions, and the key role of the weekly meditation group.

Hitting the wall, said Paul, is a term marathon runners use during a race to describe the sudden feeling that they are treading water, an elephant has jumped on their back, or an anchor is suddenly dragging them down. He then related this term to a quotation from John Main. Said Main, "The path of meditation is a way of purification... purification is often abrasive, painful... but we have to understand that we must be stripped of everything that would hinder our openness to the pure energy of God."

The speaker added: "On hitting the wall in our practice often means aridity, dryness, the feeling of boredom, endless distractions and the absence of the sense of God's presence." He then quoted the Jesuit William Johnston, who says: "God is more present in darkness than in light. He is nearer in times of desolation than in consolation. So the advice is stay with the darkness, go through it. Don't run away."

The second important aspect of the journey Paul pointed out is the term *letting go*, which refers to giving up words, thoughts, images, concerns, fears, wanting to get anywhere and wanting to see results. Letting go he said can be summed up in the phrase: "Let go and let God."

Distractions were next on the hit parade of questions for most meditators. Paul emphasized that it is important on the journey to recognize that distractions are part of the human condition and we must come to terms with the reality of the wandering mind. However, as he pointed out, "it is important to remember that when we are bombarded with distractions our will is still tuned into the presence of God... gentleness and patience in handling distractions indicate the Spirit is working silently within us."

In his final important aspect of the practice, Paul emphasized that Christian Meditation groups are the primary delivery system of the teaching, and not only introduce newcomers to the teaching but solidify the ongoing commitment of regular meditators. He stressed that John Main had a deep insight and prophetic vision that his teaching on silence and stillness in prayer would be widely shared by being handed down in small weekly groups of meditators.

Archie and Moira Boyd
Kanata, ON

Practicalities of Practice

Q. How does one find a suitable quiet location to meditate?

A. This can be quite a challenge, often requiring the co-operation of spouses or other family members. In regard to location a recommendation (if possible) is to meditate in the same location each day and make it a sacred space. The goal here would be to meditate in one definite place set aside for stillness: a place simply to be. This holy space could be a den, a bedroom, or a specific room in a basement, which through common agreement would be a "quiet place" when occupied by a family member when meditating.

Thomas Merton once advised: "There should be at least a room or some corner where no one else will find you and disturb you and notice you. You should be able to untether yourself from the world and set yourself free, loosing all the fine strings and strands

of tension that bind you, by sight, by sound, by thought." Certainly our spiritual environment and surroundings can be an assist in coming to stillness. And often our prayer room will be a friendly reminder that we are not to be disturbed at our time of meditation.



Meditators can use different means to ensure a "prayer corner." One could have a candle, a timer, icons, John Main Daily Readings book and the sacred scripture. To ensure quiet meditators often take the phone off the hook during their meditation period and close curtains to ensure visual privacy.

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

Calendar of Events

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

February 2011

24 February, Toronto, ON. *Named as Beloved: Meditation and the Healing of our Identity in Christ* led by Michael Hryniuk. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George Street. Time: 7 to 9 p.m. For more information contact: Maureen Casey Rowed at 416-733-0233, email <myetmoe@hotmail.com> or Joy Gordon 416-485-9718.

March 2011

23 March, Calgary, AB. *Introduction to Meditation – Part 1.* Led by Engeline Piet at FCJ Christian Life Centre 219-19th Avenue. Time: 7 to 9 p.m. Contact: FCJ Christian Life Centre at 403-228-4215.

26 March, Calgary, AB. *Meditation Retreat Day.* Led by Engeline Piet at FCJ Christian Life Centre 219-19th Avenue. Time: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Contact: FCJ Christian Life Centre at 403-228-4215.

30 March, Calgary, AB. *Introduction to Meditation – Part 2.* Led by Engeline Piet at FCJ Christian Life Centre 219-19th Avenue. Time: 7 to 9 p.m. Contact: FCJ Christian Life Centre at 403-228-4215.

31 March, Toronto ON. *Play, Symbol and Festival in Liturgical Spaces* (Powerpoint presentation). Speaker: David Pereyra, WCCM-Toronto member. WCCM-Toronto monthly teaching meeting. Time: 7 to 9 p.m. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Maureen Casey-Rowed at 416 733-0233.

April 2011

9 April, Toronto, ON. Benedictine spirituality gathering. Time: 10 a.m.-noon. Bring brown bag lunch for those who wish to stay on for the afternoon retreat. St. Basil's Lenten Talk: *Fasting on Busy-ness – Feasting on Holiness: Our Sojourn to Holy Week.* An afternoon retreat from noon till 4:30 p.m. The season of Lent invites us to retreat from our normal busy routines to devote sacred time and space for reflection on Christ's life journey and teachings. Location: St. Basil's Church, 50 St. Joseph St, Toronto, ON. Contact: Marilyn Metcalf, MEDIT8RMM@aol.com.

28 April, Toronto ON, *Awakening to the Joy of Unceasing Prayer.* Speaker: Marilyn Metcalfe, WCCM-Toronto member. WCCM-Toronto monthly teaching meeting. Time: 7-9 p.m. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Maureen Casey-Rowed at 416 733-0233.

May 2011

20-26 May, Bloomfield Hills, MI. *Getting Rid of God: A Christian Meditation Retreat with Fr. Laurence Freeman.* Time: 7:30 p.m. May 20 till noon May 26. Location: Manresa Jesuit Retreat House, Bloomfield Hills, MI. Cost: \$525, includes non-refundable registration fee of \$50.00. Contact 248-644-4933 or email office@manresa-sj.org

20-22 May, Rougemont, QC. Silent Retreat held at the Cistercian Monastery. Presenter: Polly Schofield – talks based on materials from the John Main Archives. Registration 3-4pm; departure after lunch Sunday. Single room with bath \$145, without bath \$100. Contact: Magda Jass 514-489-0998, magda.jass@gmail.com.

26 May, Toronto ON. *Heart to Heart: Meditation as a Universal Practice.* Speaker: Julie Meakin, WCCM-Toronto member. WCCM-Toronto monthly teaching meeting. Time: 7-9 p.m. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Maureen Casey-Rowed at 416 733-0233.

June 2011

2011 National Conference

10-12 June 2011, Ottawa, ON. Biennial National Conference of the Canadian Christian Meditation Community. *John Main and 20th Century Mystics.* Keynote speakers: Fr. Laurence Freeman and Rev. Glenda Meakin. Workshop presenters: Fabrice Blée, Joseph Clarkson, Rev. Kevin Flynn and Sr. Janet Malone, CND. Special event: *A Woman in Love*, a play about Catherine Doherty performed by Sr. Anne Kathleen McLaughlin, gsic. Venue: St. Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON. Cost: Residential \$295; Commuters \$220. Registration deadline is April 15, 2011. Contact: Simon Lonsinger at 613-219-5419; email 2011ccmconference@gmail.com. For more information or to obtain a registration form visit www.meditatio.ca.

10 June, 2011, Ottawa. Retreat for Clergy. *One Thing Necessary: Contemplative Spirituality in an Active Ministry.* Led by Fr Laurence Freeman. Venue: Saint Paul University Amphitheatre, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, Ontario. Time: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cost: \$20. Includes a light lunch. All clergy are welcome. Please register by May 31 with Charlotte Gupta at cgupta@rogers.com or 613-841-2894.

12 June, 2011, Ottawa. *Silence in the City: a retreat for Youth and Young Adults* facilitated by Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB. Theme:.. Time: 3-6 p.m. Venue: Saint Paul University Amphitheatre, 223 Main Street, Ottawa ON. A light meal is included. Everyone is welcome and there is no cost of admission. For information visit www.meditatio.ca and to register, email ChristianMeditationOttawa@gmail.com. Please register before June 4.

23 June, Toronto ON, *Encountering the Divine in Beauty – Part 2* (followed by our Annual Satsang) Speaker: Joseph Clarkson, WCCM-Toronto member. WCCM-Toronto monthly teaching meeting. Time: 7 to 9 p.m. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. For more information contact: Maureen Casey-Rowed at 416 733-0233

Regularly Scheduled Events

First Thursday of each month: Feb. 3, Mar. 3, Apr. 7..., Calgary, AB. *Drop-In Meditation Booster* led by Engeline Piet. Venue: FCJ Christian Life Centre 219-19th Ave. Time: 7 to 8 p.m. Contact: Engeline at 403-228-4215.

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

Meditation as a Path to Interfaith Dialogue

Fr. Terry Gallagher was our guest speaker at the September teaching meeting of WCCM-Toronto. Introduced by Maureen Casey Rowed as “a very animated leprechaun,” he proceeded to live up to this designation, enchanting his audience with his journey *From Meditation to Dialogue*. For Fr. Terry, the practice of meditation led him to see and celebrate the truth that all faiths love and worship “the one God.” He has been very involved in attending and initiating interfaith events, including participating in the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne, Australia in December 2009.

Beginning to meditate, Fr. Terry explains, brought him into a deeper relationship with the Spirit, that spoke to his heart through “the other.” The Spirit “does not recognize the boundaries that we have set up between each other. It invites us to dream that one day we will enter into respect and deep dialogue with people of all faiths, a dialogue that does not even need words.”

He quoted Swiss theologian and author Hans Kung, also a participant in the Melbourne conference last year: “There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions and... no peace among the religions without dialogue and cooperation among the religions.”

As revealed in the tenets of various religions in the poster below, the way is open to us to experience this dialogue and solidarity.



The Bible shows that Jesus celebrated the faith of people he met who were not following the precepts and faith of the Jewish people. Fr. Terry cited the story of Jesus speaking with the Canaanite woman of the “wrong” religious tradition (Matthew 15). Jesus concedes, “Woman, great is your faith,” and her daughter is healed. Although Jesus felt his calling was to the “lost sheep of Israel” he recognized the Spirit of God as calling to people of every faith.

Similarly with the Centurion (Luke 7) and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). True worship is not a matter of being in the correct church, nor of the correct faith tradition. Fr. Terry asserts that if we carefully consider these Bible readings, we also can be led by the Spirit to the same acceptance of our brothers and sisters of other faiths.

Interreligious dialogue – one of many fruits of Christian meditation

It has been true for many Christians that ventures into other religions have resulted in a deeper understanding of their own tradition. The Q&A session that followed Fr. Terry’s talk raised one example, a book by Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian*. (Oxford: One World, 2009.) The author, a practicing Catholic, describes how Buddhist perspectives can inspire a more person-centred and socially engaged understanding of Christianity. With a renewed emphasis on religious experience above rigid dogma and ritual, an enlivened Christianity can result, with beneficial consequences for worship, social action and engagement with Christian tradition.

Knitter is Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at Union Theological Seminary, in NYC. He has been a leading advocate of globally responsible inter-religious dialogue for 25 years and is the author of over ten books on the subject. This book was recommended by Fr. John Kennedy at the 2009 John Main Seminar.

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON





The riddle of distractions

moment because she had no choice. As she recovered, she reasoned that “in order to come back to the experience of the present moment, allow your consciousness to shift away from those cognitive loops that distract you from what is happening right now.”

It was exciting for Carolyn to compare Jill Taylor’s scientific evidence with the spiritual insights of Martin Laird. While the language differed, Laird understood fully Taylor’s recognition that she could choose to move from “brain chatter” to her compassionate heart. On contemplative practice, he writes that “the concentration of the attention of the heart... will bring the thinking mind to silence, and the silence holds with its gloved hands the wild hawk of the mind.” Distractions are the work of the thinking mind, but as we reject them we come to an increasingly deep discovery of the “silent vastness of the heart, the silent depths of God.”

Laird’s crucial message is that we are not our thoughts and feelings. He bids us be witnesses of thoughts and feelings, not victims. He bids us be “like Mount Zion, God’s holy dwelling place,” not like the weather around the mountain. He urges us to move away from our thoughts and feelings, and the obsessive commentary on them. Laird takes Taylor’s insights one step further, main-

taining that not only does this inner noise separate us from others, it separates us from God. Those who live in the present moment live in harmony with their compassionate heart and sink into the vastness of the divine.

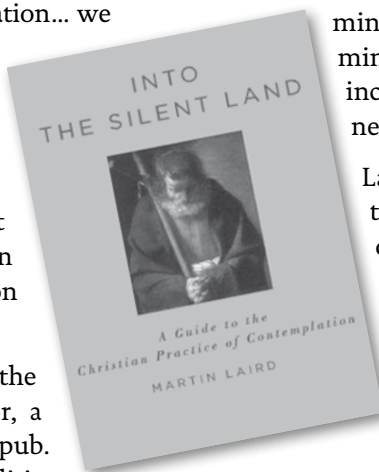
In the end, Carolyn held out an assurance to meditators from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, “If you do nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back a thousand times, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed.”

WCCM – Toronto

The answer to the riddle of distractions is that they deepen our contemplative practice – this according to Martin Laird in his book *Into the Silent Land: a Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation*. At the November meeting of WCCM-Toronto, Carolyn Murray analyzed this thorny issue.

Carolyn began with John Main’s assertion that “it is very humbling... to discover that after all our education... we cannot be still for more than a few moments and our mind wanders off on the most ridiculous sidetracks” (*The Way of Unknowing*). His solution always was, “Say your mantra.” Fr. Laurence Freeman also appreciates the discipline of the mantra to quiet the mind, but he is more explicit about the pull the ego has on us toward “self-consciousness, self-infatuation and distraction” (*The Selfless Self*).

These spiritual insights are confirmed by the scientific and personal findings of Jill Taylor, a Harvard brain scientist. (*My Stroke of Insight*, pub. 2006) After the loss of her left brain capabilities due to a massive hemorrhage, Taylor discovered the beauty of her right brain which she called her “compassionate heart.” Suddenly she was inundated with feelings at odds with her highly intellectual mind – feelings of contentment and a sense of being connected with a higher consciousness. She worked hard to recapture the capabilities of her left brain: language, critical thinking, memory. But she became less appreciative of its tendencies towards negative thinking, anxiety and endless “brain chatter.” She came to experience the peace of living in the present





The 18th International Congress on Palliative Care Montreal, 5–8 October, 2010

In the 1980s, Dr. Balfour Mount approached me to prepare and decorate a “quiet room” for the delegates to the International Congress for Palliative Care, which is held every second year for over two thousand health care professionals from around the world. Over the years the “quiet room” has evolved into a “meditation room” where people come to meditate early in the morning before the congress sessions begin. Each year, it is with great delight that I welcome back seasoned meditators from around the world.

I have noticed a great upsurge in the interest on the necessity for the spiritual aspect of our humanity – and its special importance for those caring for the dying. What began as a trickle of two or three coming to the “quiet room” has swelled to a sizable group that has necessitated the introduction of an additional session at midday. I personally consider it a very great privilege to be able to participate in this event and facilitate these sessions.

Polly Schofield

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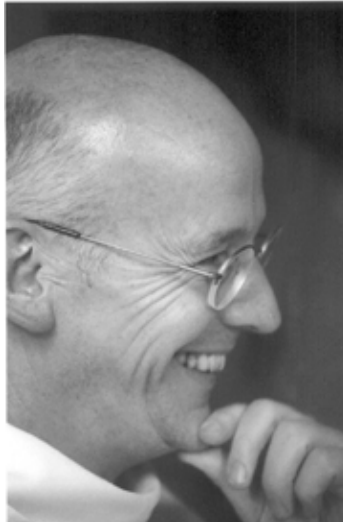
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An Insightful Island Retreat with Fr. Laurence Freeman

Tiny, verdant St-Bernard Island juts into Lac St-Louis on the south shore, opposite Montreal Island. This was the setting for our silent retreat with Fr. Laurence, last September 20 to 23. It was the end of a brilliant autumn day when I arrived at Manoir d'Youville, our retreat centre. The setting sun shot orange rays through the black branches of an old tree in the distance. One large branch bent over the riverbank creating, between it and its trunk, a hole through which the light flowed. A harbinger, I thought, of the spiritual insight I am seeking.

Fr. Laurence did not disappoint. He urged us to “exercise the muscle of faith.” This is the role of meditation – to be present, to make present – to dispel the illusion of the many “virtual realities” which our minds and our cultures create. I saw that these virtual realities have their own belief systems. Much television programming fragments our attention with its consumer-oriented seductions, its fixation with sex, violence and natural catastrophes. Our social, political and even religious institutions invariably create their own virtual realities with implicit hierarchies of beliefs. But beliefs are not faith. Faith is the simple openness to God within.

We need sacred time, Fr. Laurence said. We need time for meditation. Our minds will play games as we shift into faith – the faith that we can know God. The mind will bombard us with reasons for staying without, not going within. Yet, if we just show up for meditation and say the mantra, the steadfastness of the soul will prevail. To quote



*It is not what you
believe that makes
a difference, but
how you live*

John Main, “Leave self behind so the other can appear.”

Stages of the Mind

Sacred time in meditation leads to insight, the insight of the pure heart. This, said Fr. Laurence, is the true nature of the mind, unprejudiced, undistorted, experiencing, not conceptualizing. This is like the mind of a child. The child’s faith is mythical and magical. It has an innate sense of fairness, justice and moral understanding. The child has “first sight,” is present to the moment, sees what is there, and is capable of deep wonder and joy.

Adolescents and youth become more self-conscious and try to adjust to the ways of the world. They long for new experience and are open to inner experience, to meditation. But role models and mentors are critical at this transformative age. Young adults are marked by rapid growth, insecurity and self-doubt. They often leave institutional religion and get absorbed in their worlds.

In middle age, a social identity has formed, complete with battle scars. Attention by now can be intensely fragmented by the demands of life. Finally, in older age, our mortality looms, our bodies become frail, and access of outer (as opposed to inner) experience decreases.

To retain, or return to, the “first sight” of childhood is a marvellous gift, a real consequence of meditation.

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