Canadian Christian Meditation Community

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THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

The Voyage of St. Brendan and the Spiritual Journey of Meditation

Father Laurence in Toronto



Father Laurence Freeman visited Toronto on October 23, 2012 as part of his cross-Canada tour, and spoke to 150 meditators about meditation as a contemplative work of love.

Although frequently mentioning that, in meditation, we leave the riches of words and the imagination behind, Fr. Laurence showed

himself quite capable of using words to weave a deep, clear and encouraging

He mentioned that Anglican primate Rowan Williams had recently addressed the Synod of Catholic Bishops in Rome, to speak about Christianity and evangelization. To the surprise of many involved, the Archbishop spoke about Christian contemplation as the key element in the recipe for transformative renewal.

image of Christian Meditation.

We must highlight our contemplative tradition if we are to properly stress the best elements of effective evangelization.

Fr. Laurence's main topic was the interior journey of meditation and how we share the fruits of our practice. We are all on a spiritual journey, and he reflected on the characteristics it shares with the mythical ocean journey of St. Brendan.

St. Brendan and his fellow pilgrims' medieval voyage – a risky expedition to an unknown destination – required losing sight of what was safe and familiar, in order to make their way in faith towards the further, future shore.

Just as the sea voyage of St. Brendan involved the changing of horizons, so does meditation transform the horizons of what we are comfortable with, and each journey involves expanding the world we know. Launching ourselves into meditation involves participating in a contemplative tradition. This tradition is not a set of static teachings, but a living tradition, a living transmission. Hence, it is more like a stream than a book.

When we meditate, we are agreeing to change the horizons of what prayer is all about, and our perspective on prayer is expanded. Ultimately, the spiritual journey, the meditation journey, is all about God's work of changing our heart of stone to a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

One of the great challenges of the journey is to integrate the expanded horizon of the daily practice of contemplative prayer into our daily life.

When we practice daily meditation, we push away from the shore of what is comfortable, using the oar of the mantra, in an act of faith, and become humanized in a deeply harmonizing journey. So, with faith, the mantra and the daily practice of meditation, we can transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and join in the work of love that truly characterizes the journey of meditation.

Joseph Clarkson
 Illustration: Vitor González

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Meditation from the Pulpit

1200 Hamilton parishioners learn about Christian Meditation

It wasn't the usual way to start a Christian meditation group, but on Sunday, October 21, Fr. Ed Mahony, pastor of Corpus Christi parish in Hamilton, Ontario,

invited Paul Harris to give the Sunday homily on prayer.

Paul spoke at the three masses on the various kinds of Christian prayer. He then spoke about the ancient and traditional practice of silence and stillness in contemplative prayer, as taught by the Benedictine monk, Fr. John Main.

Paul recounted a visit he had made a number of years ago, with the WCCM's Fr. Laurence Freeman and a group of Canadian meditators, to Mother Teresa and her religious community in Calcutta, India. Fr. Laurence spoke to 150 members of her community on the practice of Christian meditation. Mother Teresa confirmed that the daily practice of this way of prayer was the basis of her spirituality, and that of her worldwide Missionaries of Charity.

Mother Teresa revealed the secret of her life's work, when she said to Paul and his companions, "God does great things in silence. His language is silence. Meditation is the fuel which powers a life of service to others. We must set aside this time each morning and evening to find a new energy within, God's energy, the energy of love."

Paul also showed the congregations how Christian meditation is a faithful renewal of a prayer tradition rooted in the Gospels and

the letters of St. Paul, and practised by the 4th-century Christian desert monks.

He also emphasized the role of John Main who saw that the great social, spiritual and psychological stresses of modern society had created the urgent need for a deep contemplative response.

The day before the masses at which he spoke, Paul also led a morning parish session for 40 participants on the teaching of Christian meditation and the role of the weekly Christian meditation group. That meeting included a meditation period, a question-and-answer session, and a selection of books and pamphlets on

Christian meditation.

Three weeks later came the first meeting of a new Christian meditation group, in the Corpus Christi parish hall, under the leadership of Fr. Ed Mahony. Not surprisingly, a large group was in attendance.

- Joanne Palangio

Southwestern Ontario Christian Meditators Fall Event

The Rev. Glenda Meakin led a morning of teaching and practice in Christian meditation at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Kitchener on Saturday, September 29. Seasoned and novice meditators from Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Stratford and St George attended.

Glenda began the morning by offering an introduction to Christian meditation, since many were beginners to this form of prayer. She then led us into a time of meditation, an experience always enhanced by the companionship of a large group.

The theme of Glenda's talk was stability. Spiritual stability – knowing that we belong to God and can trust always in God – grounds the faithful.

But stability is not an insurance policy against pain or suffering. When we rise each morning, we do not know what the day will bring – pain and loss may well be a part of it. Yet, if we remain receptive to the presence of God, that

abiding awareness will get us through the day and allow us to live our life where our Lord has planted us. Stability allows us to face our own reality, as well as to enter into the pain of others in a more open and authentic way.

Stability requires discipline, and the discipline that keeps us stable is Christian meditation. The simplicity and the poverty of our one-word mantra, *maranatha*, helps to turn us toward God. In this turning the world opens up, so that we see God in all things, and in all people.

The cross that was signed on our foreheads at baptism reminds us that we are always the beloved of God. When we live from that anchor we are transformed, and not bowled over by anything that the world can throw at us.

Practising our meditation twice a day builds the stability of God's love within us. It is a gift we receive from our Lord, and one that we then can give away to others.

- Rev Julia Gill

From the National Coordinator

A Year of Growth, Change ... Life!

Meditation teaches us how to live in the present moment – and lately each passing year feels more like the passing of a moment! 2012 saw our world and national community engaged, growing, and developing, which describes a living organism. Our individual and community identity is rooted in relationship with Christ through our practice. This dynamic relationship creates change and growth through transcendence.

Highlights of the past year were Fr. Laurence Freeman's induction to the Order of Canada and his cross-country tour. Fr. Laurence, with the International Guiding Board, developed a vision statement for our community for the next three to five years, which the national council of our Canadian community is working to implement.

In addition, new groups have started. We are reaching beyond our more typical church-based settings. A meditator in Alberta introduced meditation in the local library. In Ottawa and Vancouver, meditators welcome street people. We are beginning to meditate with young people and schoolchildren. Meditators celebrated the life and legacy of John Main on Dec. 30 – the 30th anniversary of his death. Local community events and retreats occurred.

The School Essential Teaching Weekends continue. The School leaders have created a new initiative to help local meditators reach out within their local communities. The newsletter shares the activities and reflections of the community.

Our new website, **www.wccm-canada.ca**, was launched. It is a good way to learn of events and access support

material. The Resource Center offers essential publications and new materials. Helpful and interesting CDs are published and mailed. So much necessary work done by generous volunteers. Truly miraculous.

Our next big community event is the Biennial Conference in North Bay, Ontario, June 7, 8 and 9, 2013: *Meditatio: Rooting and Reaching*, with keynote speaker Rev. Glenda Meakin. This conference will be a chance to gather and prepare the groundwork for the future. Community participation is vital to the process of discerning future actions.

As a deeply rooted Christian community in Canada, meditators across the country have a transformative yet simple gift to share with others. Join us as we explore exciting new ways to branch out and bring others the peace, harmony and new consciousness that meditation nurtures. The flyer and registration form is available at **www.wccm-canada.ca/events**.

True community happens in the process of drawing each other into the light of true 'being'. In this process, we share a deepening experience of the joy of life, the joy of being, as we discover more and more of its fullness in a loving faith shared with others. The essence of community, then, is a recognition of and a deep reverence for the other.

- John Main

– Colleen Donald National Coordinator

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me.

- Revelation 3:20

Canadian Christian Meditation Community National Resource Centre

(5964 ave. Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, Suite 208 corner ave. Royal)
P.O. Box 52, Station NDG
Montreal, Quebec H4A 3P4
514-485-7928
christianmeditation@bellnet.ca

http://www.wccm-canada.ca

Editorial Team

Phil Barnett, Joseph Clarkson, Colleen Donald, Joy Gordon, Mark Schofield and Jeff Ewener

Send submissions to newsletter coordinator Jeff Ewener at <newsnotes@bellnet.ca>.

échos du silence, a newsletter for French-speaking meditators, is available. Send inquiries to Fr. Michel Boyer, editor, 2715, chemin de la Côte Ste-Catherine, Montréal H3T 1B6 or email <info@meditationchretienne.ca>.

Page design: www.khatvanga.com

A New Look at the Vital Role of

For more than 30 years, Christian meditation groups worldwide have demonstrated that they are the primary means of sharing the teaching. Perhaps now it is time to re-evaluate, re-emphasize, and reinterpret their role. The personal observations and suggestions that follow – on the current status and future of the Christian meditation group – have come from my 28 years of experience in starting and leading meditation groups, and from discussions with leaders in the community about the importance of the weekly meditation group.

John Main had a deep insight and prophetic vision that his teaching on silence and stillness in prayer would be primarily handed down in small groups. It was his hope that this teaching and practice would be shared in an organic way through support groups of men and women meeting on a weekly basis in homes, churches, schools and work places. He had a profound understanding of the ancient tradition of Christians gathering together to enter into the experience of prayer.

How many times in his talks does he indicate that it is not sufficient to listen to talks or read books on the teaching, but rather that one must enter into the experience of this way of prayer? The Christian meditation group has in fact become the primary spiritual focus, where newcomers can not only hear the teaching on a weekly basis, but more importantly enter into the experience and the discipline of the practice. The group is where the teaching is "not taught, but caught."

Though each of our groups is unique, with its own inter-relationships and history, it also embodies a long tradition of experience, from Biblical times to the 21st century.

Meditation Groups: Communities of Faith

As Laurence Freeman has pointed out, "John Main saw this modern development of contemplation as originating in the communities of faith and the liturgy at the heart of the early church. These early Christians also gathered in small groups in one another's houses. This coming together in



prayer formed the "koinonia or the social interaction and communion that was the distinguishing mark and power of the early church." These small groups met to pray and offer support and encouragement to each other in their common faith.

The Historical Roots of Small Groups

There is no doubt that the teaching of spirituality is historically rooted in the tradition of the small group. The Israelites were divided up into tribes and family units, particularly during their sojourn in the wilderness. Jesus chose a small group of twelve to form the heart of his ministry.

Throughout the last 2,000 years small groups of men and women have banded together in the monastic life, to live with and support each other on the spiritual journey. It seems only natural that people who are praying contemplatively in the 21st century should also come together in groups to support each other on their common pilgrimage. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – the most successful "small group" organization in the world – has demonstrated that a simple teaching and small weekly group meetings can transform lives.

Small Groups are Today Redefining Spirituality

A recent book – *Sharing The Journey* by Robert Wuthnow – documents the growing popularity and influence of small groups in creating community and teaching spirituality. Wuthnow maintains that small groups are redefining spirituality, and that religion is once again becoming alive in the humble homes of those on the spiritual path. He offers evidence that small groups have emerged in response to the impersonalization of society and the weakening of family and community ties.

What have we gathered from our lived experience over the past 38 years, since John Main started the first Christian meditation group in 1975, at Ealing Abbey in London? We have learned much about the role and influence of the weekly meditation group.

the Christian Meditation Group

Why Meditators Meet in Groups

The heart of the meditation group is the sharing of silence. The power and strength of meditation together comes from the words of Jesus, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:2).

This is the foremost reason for getting together once a week. It is as if meditators instinctively realize that this is a journey that is difficult to make alone; one that is so much easier when we make it with others. It is true that no one else can meditate for us, that we meditate by ourselves each day – but at the same time, we need the support of others if we are to persevere.

The Development of a Spiritual Bond among Members of the Group

Meeting in a group promotes a spiritual bond amongst the members, and a shared concern between the travellers on our common pilgrimage. The meditation group is really a community of faith, much like the early Christian communities established by St. Paul.

The group setting enables beginners to learn how to meditate. Newcomers can be integrated into a group at any point in time. Experience has shown that when a group starts in a new geographic area, people who have never meditated before will join the group, and learn the practice.

Small Groups Give Support and Encouragement on the Spiritual Path

The weekly group meeting provides support and encouragement to those who might be discouraged or experiencing difficulties "on the path." All of us, whether new or experienced meditators, at times need the encouragement and companionship of others who are faithful and committed to the discipline.

We also need to absorb the teaching more deeply, and we do so at the weekly meeting with the playing of a taped talk by John Main on some aspect of Christian meditation. There are now over 200 talks by Father John and additional talks





by Laurence Freeman available from www.MedioMedia. org on various aspects of meditation. These talks provide instruction, deepen our motivation, and help us to persevere on the path. They give us a spiritual boost each week: part of the food we need for the journey.

The question/answer period at the end of the meeting often helps immeasurably in clarifying situations, not only for the questioner who is often a newcomer but also for other members of the group. Discussion allows members to safely express their doubts, fears and misunderstandings of the teaching.

Small Groups Provide a Variety of Advantages as an Organizational Model

Small Christian meditation groups have a great advantage in adapting to their environment. They require virtually no resources, other than the time their members devote to the group each week.

The small group provides a sense of community for people who feel the loss and breakdown of neighborhoods and personal family ties. The need for encouragement, support and sharing are additional reasons for joining a group.

We all need the affirmation of others and thus our faith can be strengthened through the bonds of love, caring and fellowship that develop in the small group. Basic spiritual and human values are shared in a group setting and subsequent friendships develop.

We are not, contrary to public perception, a society of rugged individuals, who wish to go on entirely alone. Rather, we are communal creatures, capable of banding together in bonds of mutual support. "Meditation creates community," as John Main so aptly put it.

The prayer that leads from the head to the heart, from fragmentation to unity, from isolation to caring, grows in the fertile ground of the weekly meditation group meeting. This is the spiritual revolution taking place all around the world today. It was John Main's great vision that the teaching would grow and expand and be shared in weekly groups. Let us, each in our own way, get on with the challenge John Main has left us!

– Paul Harris

Letter from the Editor New Year & Ever-New World

As many of you know, this past year we marked the 30th anniversary of the passing of John Main. In his memory we include below a brief excerpt from one of his astonishing talks on meditation. Like all of them, it offers encouragement, context, theology, spiritual expansiveness and a rock-like grounding in the holiness of here and now. His prayer is with us.

We've begun to get an encouraging response to our new electronic edition of the Newsletter. More of you are signing up to replace your dead-tree subscriptions with the big, bright and beautiful, full-colour, instantly delivered e-version.

I'm sure more of you will make the switch in 2013. It's a better way for you to keep up with your Christian meditation community – and a better way for your community to keep in touch with you.

Please e-mail us – or fill out the form on the facing page, with your annual donation – and tell us *Yes, you would like to switch to the e-version*, or *No, not right now*. You'll also help us create a more up-to-date list of our subscribers – and help us make sure we're delivering exactly the kind of newsletter you want to read, in any format!

And while you're otherwise gearing up for this wonderful 21st century, don't forget to check out our gorgeous new website – www.wccm-canada.ca!

It's the go-to place for novices and longtime meditators alike, with information and resources about meditation and the Canadian meditation community. Your suggestions and messages of appreciation can be sent to the talented designer, Luis Zunino, at **lzunino@gmail.com**.

Love & Peace, Jeff Ewener, Editor newsnotes@bellnet.ca

John Main, 1926-1982 **Giving Us Everything**

Meditation is so important, because meditation is itself an absolute commitment. It's a commitment to be open to Christ – totally, utterly – by taking the attention off ourselves and putting it on him.

And the way we do this is a very simple way – by reciting our mantra. And this is an absolute commitment. Either you recite it or you do not. You can follow your own thoughts. You can make your own plans. You can analyse your own insights when you're meditating. But if you do, you will soon learn from your own experience that you remain in the closed system of self-consciousness. But reciting the mantra, and

continuing to recite it – and letting go of our own thoughts, our own fears, our own sadness, our own plans – letting go releases us into the liberty and infinity of God.

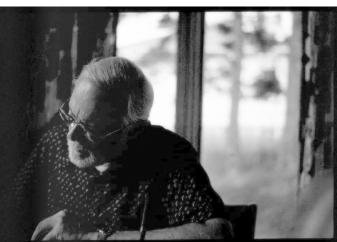
And this is what Jesus calls us to – to trust in him, to follow him – not by half-measures, but by absolute measures. But in his gentleness, he gives us a way that leads us, by a steady progression, away from self, into his infinite mystery. And

that way is the way of prayer, the way of meditation. And the way is the way of daily fidelity. Wherever we are on the path, whether we are just beginning – and meditating twice every day for twenty minutes – or whether we've been on the path for some time –

on the path for some time – and we meditate for thirty minutes, or meditate three times a day – wherever we are, all that is required is, that we give ourselves totally to our commitment.

It seems, when we begin, that this is asking a lot. But the feast of Christmas reminds us that God, in his gift to us, does not just give us a lot. He gives us everything of himself, in Jesus. Somehow, we must understand that. And

we must understand it in the silence of our own heart. And so when we meditate, we receive, each of us, as fully as we can, the gift of God in Jesus. And to receive it, we require a generosity that is not less than the generosity of God. That is why we must say our mantra with the greatest attention we can, with the greatest love we can.



- John Main



For regular updates go to www.wccm-canada.ca under Events

Orleans, Ontario

15-17 March 2013: "This Is My Story" - Silent Retreat. The Ottawa area Christian Meditation community invites you to a silent retreat, led by Rev. Glenda Meakin. Maison Notre-Damede-la-Providence, 1754 St Joseph Blvd, Orleans. Cost: \$190. Register by February 28, with \$50 non-refundable deposit. Mail to Reta Hamilton, PO Box 276, Munster ON KOA 3PO. For Info: Reta Hamilton 613-838-2401, meditation.r@gmail.com

Edmonton

8-10 March 2013: School of Meditation: The Essential Teaching. Cost: \$245 for accommodations and meals. Early birds! Register before January 8 for \$20 off admin and meal cost (\$225 total). Required deposit: \$100 (not refundable after February 15). Location: Star of the North Centre, St. Albert. Contacts: Monique Eng: moniqueeng@hotmail.com, Mia Klein-Gebbinck: miklge@ telus.net; 780-354-2108.

Montreal

17-19 May 2013: Cistercian monastery at Rougemont, Quebec. Silent retreat for Benedictine oblates and meditators with talks based on the unpublished writings of Fr. John Main. Presented by Polly Schofield. \$150 room with bath, \$130 shared bathroom. For registration call Magda Jass: 514-489-0998 - magda.jass@gmail. com

Toronto

23 February 2013: Lenten Retreat, Saturday afternoon, 1:00-4:30: "Lectio and Visio Divina", with Br. Ignatius Feaver, at St. Basil's Parish Hall, 50 St. Joseph St. (Bay & Bloor). Saturday morning, 10:00-Noon: Benedictine Spirituality Gathering, with Marilyn Metcalfe. Bring a bag lunch and make a day of it!

Suggested donation: morning only: \$10; afternoon only: \$20; all day: \$25. No advance registration required.

Last Thursday of every month: Toronto teaching meetings at Knox College, Room #4, 59 St. George St., University of Toronto (downtown), 7:00-9:00 pm. Winter topics: "Silence During Our Liturgies", "Islamic Meditation", "The Impact of Place". Contacts: Maureen Casey Rowed 416-733-0233, myetmoe@hotmail.com; Joy Gordon 416-485-9718

TOTAL AMOUNT

Meditatio: Rooting and Reaching

Come to the CCMC National Conference 2013, North Bay, June 7-9! St. Joseph's Motherhouse, North Bay ON.

Keynote speakers: Rev. Glenda Meakin, Sr. Priscilla Solomon CSJ

Contacts: Call Gisèle 705-476-2173 or Sharon 705-752-1540 or email 2013ccmc@gmail.com and book today!

For information on new titles please see page 12 in the international section.

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L'Arche Assistants in Ottawa Learn about Christian Meditation

In 1964 Jean Vanier founded L'Arche (in English, the Ark), an international community to serve those with developmental disabilities. In his mid-thirties at the time, Vanier had enjoyed a varied and distinguished career, as a Canadian naval officer, as a philosophy teacher at the

University of Toronto, and as the son of Governor-General Georges Vanier and his wife Pauline. He named it L'Arche after Noah's ark, to be a place of refuge, and a symbol of life and hope between God and humanity. This movement has now spread to 150 L'Arche communities in 40 countries of the world.

The seven L'Arche houses in Ottawa recently celebrated their 40th birthday. Those who stay and live at L'Arche are referred to as core members, and assistants are those who befriend and support core members, helping them to reach their full potential in a family environment.

In light of Jean Vanier's own spiritual path and his urging that prayer leads

us outwards to others, Ottawa's Paul Harris was invited to present three sessions on Christian Meditation to L'Arche assistants from the seven Ottawa houses, this past September, October and November.

In his opening talk Paul pointed out that Jean Vanier and his mother Pauline both had a strong link with John Main and his teaching on contemplative prayer. In the UK in 1992, Jean Vanier gave the three-day John Main seminar, and also offered advice and guidance that greatly assisted the structural organization of the then-new World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM).

Paul also observed that the book One Woman's Journey, a biography of Pauline Vanier, Jean's mother, reports that she led a weekly Christian Meditation group at the

L'Arche Centre in France, and played John Main's taped talks at the weekly meetings for L'Arche trainees from around the world.

The primary emphasis in Paul's three monthly talks centered on the teaching and practice of Christian meditation as a foundation for love and service to

"Our prayer lives and our actions cannot be separated," he said, "for they are of the same fabric. Prayer and action are two sides of the same coin. This mixed life of prayer and action was chosen by Jesus himself - who taught, preached and healed on a daily basis while at the same time, according to the gospel, went out in the mornings

and evenings for times of prayer."

Paul stressed that, like Jesus, Jean Vanier recognized that fruitful action flows from the silence and stillness of daily prayer. Jean Vanier once said: "when we live in community, and our everyday life is busy and difficult, it is absolutely essential for us to have moments to pray and meet God in silence and quietness."

Putting his own action to words, Paul included a meditation period in each of the three sessions.

- Lucie Hanak

Jean Vanier shaking hands with one of the core members of L'Arche Daybreak, John Smeltzer. Photo: Warren Pot, Wikimedia

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