

A WEEKEND OF IMPRESSIONS Pushing Deep & Reaching High

The National Conference began on a cool June afternoon. The sun was trying to peek through low clouds, and a slight breeze blew around us. It was a bit fresh, but this was Ontario, and the cool air would keep the bugs down.

St Joseph's Motherhouse is located right on the banks of Lake Nipissing, a beautiful setting. On our way in, I noticed the entrance sign: "The love of Christ has gathered us as one" – so lovely, and apropos of meditation, which unites us in the silence.

As soon as we arrived, the greetings began. Laughter, surprise and hugs from friends and acquaintances from across Canada. And even all the way from Jacksonville, Florida, in the person of US National Coordinator Gene Bebeau.

The resource room had plenty of material to choose from – books, CDs, even back issues of *Monastic Studies!* A lot of new resources were available – *Meditation and Children* and



Meditation and Mental Health and others. Mark Schofield and Marilyn Metcalfe did a great job putting it all together.

The opening ceremony was led by Sr Priscilla Solomon, and rooted us in the rich Aboriginal spirituality that has grown and evolved out of this northern place over a thousand generations.

The opening ceremony was a smudging ritual of purification. Sage smouldered in a dish, and Sr Priscilla used an eagle feather to fan the smoke over us all. She took off her glasses, remarking that the ceremony will enable us to see with the eyes of the heart – reminding me strongly of the Benedictine tradition.

Sr Priscilla offered a prayer to the four directions, then led us outside to show us the trees all around, and draw our

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Sr. Priscilla Solomon opens the conference

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Letter from the Editor

Community of Love

This issue of the newsletter features reports and reflections from our National Conference, held for the first time in North Bay, Ontario, in June. As you can certainly see, it was a wonderful success.

Thanks go out to our writers, who generously shared their time and their thoughts in creating the articles for this issue. And special thanks go to photographers Chris Tanner and Marilyn Metcalfe for the profusion of beautiful images that illuminate these pages.

Among the non-conference-related pieces in this issue is one on teaching meditation to children, in advance of a Meditatio forum on the subject in Ajax, Ontario, this October. The forum is one of many initiatives being taken by Canadian and world meditators to branch out, spreading the fruits of our spiritual practice throughout a wider community.

It also shows the amazing vitality and variation of our Canadian Christian meditation community – which is the reason we have this newsletter. For in all our different communities and individual lives, we are walking the same path. If any of you feel moved to share your local news or experiences with a national community of your fellow meditators, we'd love to hear from you!

It is, after all, *your* community, and *your* newsletter. And as the National Conference demonstrated, the more we share as individuals, the more we are – together.

P.S. And keep checking our website – www.wccm-canada.ca – for news, updates, contacts and so much more!

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

Pushing Deep *continued from front*

attention to the way their roots push down into the earth while at the same time their branches reach up toward the sky. She told us we would become rooted in this place as well, over the course of the weekend. We all gained a rich new appreciation for the trees and the beautiful grounds.

The meeting-room itself was nice and spacious. Polly Schofield of Montreal (one of Saturday's speakers) created beautiful calligraphy banners, which were hung around the room. One that touched me was from John Main: "The world must be renewed in sanity and sanctity."

We remembered some of the meditators who passed away in the last year, including Ron Dicks of Ottawa, Claire Andrews of Toronto, Fr. Jim Rent CSB, and others whose names people offered up for remembrance.

Saturday began with an early morning yoga session, to get mind and body together for a great start on the day.

The Saturday talks and discussions were lively, thoughtful and inspiring. Polly Schofield shared with us her memories of John Main, and the early days of Christian meditation at the Montreal Priory. Paul Harris discussed the great value of small groups.

Before lunch there was a panel discussion on the theme of "Branching", facilitated by Toronto's Joseph Clarkson. After lunch, the discussion focused on "Inclusiveness" and

"The Community of Love", with Ottawa's Kevin Flynn as facilitator.

For each panel, there were a number of speakers, addressing different topics and aspects of the theme, and animating the general discussion that followed. You could pick and choose

which panels you were most attracted to. But usually it was too hard to choose.

Saturday evening was our AGM, or Annual General Meeting, chaired by our National Coordinator, Colleen Donald of Vancouver. The AGM included fascinating reports on meditation activities and outreach being done in every region of Canada, along with reports on the School of Meditation, the Benedictine Oblates, the national council and others. Chris Tanner's computer visuals were really helpful in keeping all the information organized and clear.

After the AGM came our "entertainment" time, with the wonderfully appropriate Bazza and his multitude of percussion

instruments. Drums, shakers, cymbals, gongs, and so many more, were all laid out in the middle of the floor, and everyone was invited to pick one.

Bazza then led us in an "Introduction to Percussion" session – a kind of meditation for the body and the ears! We had to listen carefully to the rhythm he tapped out for us,

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Opening ceremony centrepiece

From the National Coordinator

The Essence of Community

Our recent Biennial Conference, *Meditatio: Rooting and Reaching*, expressed Fr John Main's essence of community, which by its nature generates new life. And what a wonderful, generous, creative community we shared at North Bay. How blessed we all are to be on this journey together! Those who weren't able to be with us physically were certainly in union with us through our times of meditation.

From the Aboriginal welcoming and purification ceremony to the closing Celtic Eucharist, we experienced a sense of connection, unity, presence, and expansion. We were encouraged to make new beginnings, confidently nurtured by a rich tradition. We learned that healthy roots provide strong and adaptive growth in spite of challenging environments.

Rev. Glenda Meakin, the conference keynote speaker, is one of the exceptional, nurturing, teaching mothers in our world community. As a speaker, Glenda radiates love. She animates scripture with a sense of immediacy and significance for our daily lives. Gently the challenge is revealed: who are you called to be and who is it that calls you? There is nothing as effective as love for opening the doors of the heart.

Throughout the weekend, openness, friendliness and mutual acceptance between participants was evident. We were present for the journey together and open to learn from each other. Meditators, fully alive in their daily lives and jobs, are sharing the gifts of meditation wherever they find themselves – prisons, offices, churches, libraries,

homes, schools and preschools, hospice and hospital settings. Participants shared ideas, experiences, obstacles and solutions.

We learned how often simple hospitality was a gift greatly appreciated by newcomers in a group. The important welcome the group offers, as a place to be accepted, with the freedom to be silent.

Hearing impaired meditators were grateful for the CD transcripts available on our website (www.wccm-canada.ca – group leaders section) which help them to follow the recordings. Others appreciated the many resources available on the website for starting a new group.

Some meditators form groups close to home and others reach out to friends further afield. The Canadian community's outreach to the Caribbean is producing strong growth in meditation with children in Trinidad. In the far North, a meditation group meets in what is called the Catholic Igloo Church, two degrees north of the Arctic Circle in Inuvik, Northwest Territories. (See article in the International Section.)

At the beginning of our conference, Glenda Meakin asked,

“In a form of Church that is passing, will we be mourners or midwives?” For meditators in the CCMC, the choice was an enthusiastic and trusting “midwife.” Thank you to everyone who made this gathering possible and welcomed the Spirit among us.

Colleen Donald
National Coordinator
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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 recognition of and a deep reverence for the other.

- John Main, OSB



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GOD'S DREAM

Pushing Deep *continued from front*



Bazza leads the drumming

let it enter into us in a very meditative way, and then respond to it.

Bazza would call for particular instruments to join in. At one time, the two sides of the room were playing different rhythms at the same time, while Bazza sang the words to a Nigerian folk tune. Everyone had a great time and let loose with joyful enthusiasm.

Afterwards we had a reception, conversation and socializing.

Sr Priscilla led a very moving closing ceremony, with a smudging ritual, prayers to the four directions, and used fresh water from Lake Nipissing to call to our minds the sacredness and value of water itself.

After this was the Eucharist. Rev. Glenda Meakin, our Keynote speaker throughout the weekend, presided, with a homily on Luke 7 – the Widow of Nain, and the renewal of life through faith.

Then we had lunch and headed home again – full of energy, excitement, and peace. We had sunk our roots a little deeper, and looked forward to stretching our branches a little higher than ever!

Rev. Julie Meakin



Paul Harris on bongos



Drumming: "Joyful Enthusiasm"



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

An Invitation to Be Midwives

The featured speaker at the 2013 Christian Meditation Biennial Conference in North Bay was the Rev. Glenda Meakin, who used the Gospel of John to investigate the theme of “Rooting and Reaching”.

She began with an overview of the teaching of John Main. For Fr. John, the starting point of meditation is that we already abide in God. As created beings, we are rooted in the mystery of God. So meditation is about becoming more conscious and more aware of this reality, of our rootedness in God. John Main discerned this teaching in his own life experience, interpreted in the light of scripture, and especially from the Gospel truth borne out in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Meakin then turned to scripture, the first chapter of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word.” She pointed out that the phrase “in the beginning” echoes the first words of the Book of Genesis, thus inviting us to see the Incarnation as the beginning of a New Creation. Jesus calls us, in his life and his teachings, to remember both “who we are” and “whose we are” – and he shows us how to live out of that reality.

The gospel story of the Wedding Feast at Cana, chapter 2, shows us how the new creation brings together all that is divided, in a healing and restoring of human brokenness. In this story, Jesus addresses Mary as “woman,” harkening back to the use of this term in the story of Adam and Eve. This wedding is a symbol of Jesus, the living union of heaven and earth, of man and woman, of humanity and all creation. The whole purpose of human life is to come into union with God. Human life is at its richest and fullest in this union of humanity and divinity, as demonstrated in the life and person of Jesus.

In the story of the cleansing of the Temple, later in chapter 2, Rev. Meakin invites us to allow a new vision to take root in our hearts. To let this happen, we need to be silent and still and open to the presence of Christ in our hearts. We need

to let go of all that separates us from God, and submit to the cleansing that the poverty of the single word provides. Like the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) with her five husbands, we too have many loves besides the love of God.

Yet we can be restored and reunited in our true self by faithfully returning to the singleness and discipline of meditation. The Spirit will clean out the clutter in our hearts, so that we can return to the well of divine grace within.

Rev. Meakin suggested we see ourselves as the empty bucket which the woman brought to the well. When we come to meditation in humility, letting go of everything but the single word, emptying ourselves of ego-driven passions, we can experience a time of healing and restoration to our true selves.

When we are open to the movement of the Spirit within ourselves, Rev. Meakin observed, we become witnesses to the presence of the Spirit in the modern world, providing an example and even inspiration for others. Strengthening this connection – between the inner Spirit and the outer world – is what “rooting and reaching” is all about.

Though we find ourselves often in darkness, Rev. Meakin urged us to see with the light of Christ. In times of confusion, we are tempted to be like the Pharisees of Jesus’s time, replacing the movements of the Spirit and the love of the living God with clichés about God, the tried and true formulas that seem to give us easy answers to life’s problems.

Yet we are part of the New Creation. We must be midwives to the life of the Spirit, being born in our hearts, and in the hearts of those we reach out to. Closing her teaching with the raising of Lazarus, Rev. Meakin called on us to be open to the new ways that the Spirit calls us to follow.

As she remarked on Sunday, when we ask ourselves, “In what ways is God asking me to reach out?” we can



Rev. Glenda Meakin



GOD'S DREAM

An Invitation to be Midwives *continued from previous*

choose to respond either as mourners or as midwives. The mourners in our midst will focus on what is lost – grieving over problems such as shrinking congregations, and other changes in the life of the Church since they were young. Mourners prefer familiar ways of worship and ministry, and even when reaching out to others, their approach will often create limitations.

The midwife, on the other hand, attends to the birth of the new. She looks for the signs of a healthy and vigorous Spirit, signs of the renewing and energizing new life that Jesus, in the New Creation, brings to us all.

Rev. Meakin invited us to keep looking and listening with the eyes and ears of the heart to whoever is in front of us, and to avoid becoming frozen into any particular ways of

following the Spirit. She concluded with one of John Main's favourite scripture passages – 1 Peter 2.

“Come to him a living stone... and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood ... You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into the marvelous light.”

It is up to us to offer ourselves to God on God's terms – not on our own terms, not limited to our own uncertain vision, but to see with the eyes of Christ.

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON



Rev. Julie Meakin, Rev. Glenda Meakin, Cathy Nobleman



TALKS BY POLLY SCHOFIELD & PAUL HARRIS

Rooted in the Teachings of John Main

Polly Schofield

Polly Schofield came to know Dom John Main and his small community in 1978, through her two sons, whose religious instruction Father John and Brother Laurence agreed to take on. Friend and disciple of Father John, she was called the “daughter of the house”, and considers it the greatest privilege of her life to have been able to be with him during the days leading up to his death. She spoke from this personal experience.

Father John was stern and organized but a man of love, and this love infused everything he did. He was grounded and rooted in one reality. He was asked, “What does fullness mean?” He answered “Emptiness”. The key to meditation is simplicity. Do not embellish, compromise or complicate it. Just say the mantra. The sole purpose of meditation is to lead us into communion with God.

We are called to community. Jesus’ greatest pain was not the suffering he endured on the cross but knowing that his disciples did not understand him. It is true we make the journey alone but John Main stressed the spiritual fellowship of meditation.

He also said that Christian meditation is not a movement, it is not an organization. We are a world community of, not for, Christian meditation. That which joins us together is contemplative prayer – a gift given to us by the Spirit by which we join the prayer of Christ to the Father.

We do not talk about meditation – we meditate with others. The first twenty-five years are the most difficult! Father John warned us about talking about our spiritual experiences. Teaching of meditation is not by reading but by meditating with someone. It’s our group not my group.

As a trained art historian, Polly was asked by Father Laurence to take charge of and archive Father John’s papers and those of the early days of the Priory. Father John wrote his talks on cue cards and 350 talks written on cue cards have been

archived at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. She said these talks are a treasure, as relevant today as the day they were written.



Polly Schofield

At the Priory, the rule of the house was that anyone who was in the house when it was time to meditate was asked to meditate. Father John said that when you meditate, don’t take credit for what you consider a ‘good’ meditation, or take blame for a not-so-good meditation. What is important is that you meditate.

Father John seldom talked about meditation but it was primary in his life. He recommended having the New Testament open in your meditation room.

Listen to his talks. Meditation is not an experience from books but a continuous openness. Our twice-a-day practice of meditation gradually transforms our lives. It opens our eyes to reality, to all of life and to love. Love is prayer and prayer is not possible without silence. In our commitment to prayer, we are not isolated but we are one.

Polly recalled that after Father John’s death she found a piece of calligraphy, written from the book of Bhagavad Gita and carefully tucked away in his belongings, which read “God dwells in the hearts of all beings. God dwells in thy heart.” This was the heart of his message.

Paul Harris

The role of the Christian meditation group is to share the teaching of John Main. And for John Main the importance of the group to the practice of meditation is firmly rooted in tradition.

Fr. John had a deep understanding that the teaching is handed down by small groups of men and women. The meditation group is where the teaching is “caught not taught.” The small weekly meditation group functions as two sides of the same coin. It is not impossible to meditate



GOD'S DREAM

Talks by Schofield and Harris *continued from previous*

on one's own but it is much easier to do so with others. Newcomers come to a group to learn how to meditate and for those who have previously meditated, the group provides support and encouragement.

John Main was very aware of the early Christians who gathered in homes to celebrate the Eucharist and to pray. Religious communities through the centuries were founded in small groups. Moses divided the Israelites into 12 tribes and Jesus had a small group of 12 disciples.

Two contemporary events further influenced John Main's thinking that Christian meditation could thrive in small groups. While he was in Ireland studying law and subsequently teaching law, he became aware of Alcoholics Anonymous and their small weekly meetings. The AA approach was simple; they taught the 12 steps and held small group meetings.

The second influence was the 1973 book by Fritz Schumacher *Small is Beautiful*. The book was considered among the hundred most influential books published since World War II. One of the themes of the book was the advantage of smallness – Schumacher believed that small groups of individuals could change the world. He believed that smallness was the antidote to “bigness”.

John Main recognized the advantages of weekly small group meetings to encourage one another in the practice. Schumacher disliked hierarchy in small groups and so too in gatherings of Christian meditation there is no hierarchy. The group leader is just another meditator who inserts the CD and pushes the play button. Evidence of Schumacher's

influence on John Main was his attendance at Schumacher's funeral in 1977 in London, England.

The essential teaching of meditation occurs in small groups, in communities of love. Christian meditation has been practiced for 38 years, since the founding of the first community by Father John in London in 1975. What have we learned?

First, the strength and power of the small groups comes from Jesus. As Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I.” Jesus is fully present during group meditation.

Second, it is so much easier if we meditate together. Third, a marvelous spiritual bond develops in small meditation groups. As a Zen master said, ‘If you're lighting a fire with one log, after a few minutes it sputters and eventually goes out. But if you start with five or six logs, it develops into a big fire.’

A meditation group makes us one in mind and heart and spirit. It gives strength to those who are having difficulty, helps those who are on the journey and helps us all to persevere. In a group we learn to travel beyond ourselves, and each one is transformed in the process.

A meditation group is not a mere social gathering. It is a group aware of the power of Jesus within each member. Our mere presence in a meeting is a help to others.

Meditation is a gift and gifts are meant to be given away. The greatest gift is to start a group where you share the gift, and automatically share the teaching, with others.

Elaine Mills
Toronto



Paul Harris
We are one in heart

Calendar of Events

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

Ajax, Ontario

Meditatio Forum: “Teaching Meditation to Children” – October 4 or 5, 2013 – St. George's Anglican Church, 77 Randall Drive, Ajax ON (stgeorgeschurch.ca).

Register by September 15. Contact: Marilyn Metcalfe – MEDIT8RMM@gmail.com. See article page C14.

Kingston, Ontario

8–10 November: “Fully Alive” – A Christian Meditation & Yoga Retreat, Providence Spirituality Centre.

To register, contact Lucie Legault at 819 827-1278 or legault.smeltzer@videotron.ca. Registration deadline: October 15

HOLDS US ALL AS ONE



Gathering



Sr Priscilla leads closing ceremony



GOD'S DREAM

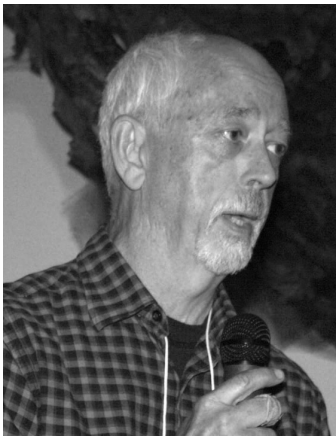
TWO PANEL DISCUSSIONS ON SHARING THE TEACHING Reaching Beyond Ourselves

Morning Panel – “Branching”

The theme of this year’s conference was rooting and branching in our meditation practice. In the morning panel session participants shared their experience in branching out and sharing the tradition with others. Facilitated by Joseph Clarkson, he and Sister Mary Sammon spoke of teaching meditation to children of various ages.

Sr. Mary presented two short videos of teaching meditation, one to a group of Grade 3 children and the other to a group of Grade 6 and 7 students. She introduces the meditation practice and helps calm the restless ones by gently touching their hands. The younger children, from an inner city school, faced many challenges and were a vocal and restless group. The older class of girls actually had more trouble keeping their eyes closed.

The meditation is introduced for only a few minutes, and ends with the students saying “Namaste”. The videos showed both groups sitting calm and quiet for the meditation.



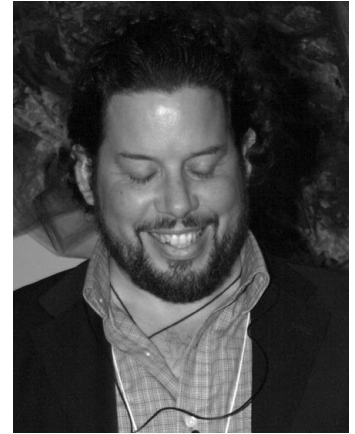
Joseph Clarkson
Reaching into schools

outreach should contact principals. Making that personal connection is a good way to get permission to enter the schools. He also suggested going to where one knows the teachers, and to Sunday schools. He admitted high school students present a challenge, with the distraction from their cell phones, etc!

Joseph Clarkson, a recently retired teacher, explained how he used his contacts to teach meditation in the schools. He has the students pay attention to their breathing, close their eyes, listen to their heartbeat and give thanks for life. For the first sessions, which last about two minutes, he does not use the mantra.

Joseph suggests that those who want to help with this

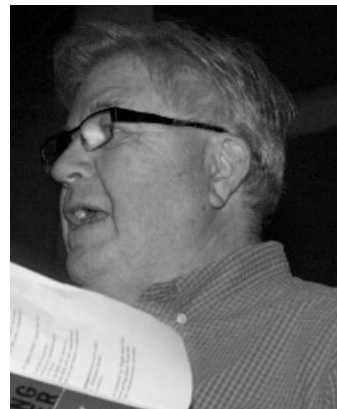
Francisco Wulff spoke on work and meditation. He shared his experience of working in the field of international development. While it was very rewarding, after 20 years he began to question the work, and felt emotionally exhausted.



Francisco Wulff
Meditation and Work

He spoke of the moment when he first realized that the practice of meditation was essential to his life. He was serving as the interpreter for Fr. Laurence in Venezuela. He asked the participants to identify the age at which they began to meditate. Most had begun after 30 years of age, mostly after 40. Francisco wondered about these different age groups, about why they start meditation and how they incorporate it into their lives.

The younger groups seemed to be natural seekers, looking for a mystical light. Mid-career groups were concerned with the quality of their work and what meditation does for them. The older ones have often experienced a crisis in their career or vocation, and are looking beyond work to the important connections in their life.



Ted Dionne
Beauty in four directions

Meditators like these can influence their workplaces, even transform our understanding of work – from a way to make a living to a living work of love.

Ted Dionne spoke about the connection between meditation and AA – the Alcoholic Anonymous movement in North America. He referred to the book “Breathing Under

HOLDS US ALL AS ONE



Water” and referred specifically to the 11th step in AA’s 12-step program. This step states: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

While not a member himself, Ted explained that AA is considered a way of processing life, one which focuses on the contemplative approach rather than the ego-centric one. Many in AA follow Thomas Keating and the practice of centering prayer.

The basic principle of AA is that an alcoholic can be the best person to help another one. The growing spiritual energy of the group as a whole gives strength to its individual members.

Ted quoted from the writings of Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating referring to the process of opening our will to the creative act and concluded with the saying, “Beauty above us. Beauty below us. Beauty in four directions. Beauty within us.”



Beth Smith
Freeing the human spirit

Beth Smith is engaged through the Royal Ottawa Hospital and Corrections Canada in chaplaincy work with men in secure treatment units, and with men and women who have been found to be not criminally responsible for their crimes.

Beth described a program called “Freeing the Human Spirit” which uses asanas, or yoga positions, along with a breath-focused meditation practice. Chris-

tian meditation groups are also popular.

Even though the men practise meditation and yoga while locked in their rooms, Beth tells them to meditate “together” in their hearts. The programs offer medical and psychological help, and the meditation group can also provide an interpersonal connection.

Beth told us of one man who, at age 25, had already been in jail twice. He told her that twenty minutes in meditation allowed him to feel free, and gave him the opportunity to become a more spiritual and reflective person.

Afternoon Panel: “Community of Love”

In this session several people spoke of their “branching out” to different communities, and creating a community of love in their own groups.

Michel Legault spoke eloquently of his visit to Haiti in December 2009, which was, it turned out, just before the devastating earthquake that hit the country. Clem Sauvé had suggested that CCMC provide support to the meditation communities in the Caribbean, to assist with Father Laurence’s busy schedule and to build on a previous visit by Paul Harris.



Michel Legault
*Combining meditation
with social needs*

Once there, Michel was struck by the Haitians’ struggle to simply survive. He wondered if it was even appropriate to introduce meditation to them, when they had to struggle so hard just to meet their daily needs. He realized that meditation could provide them with an inner resource that could actually help them to deal with their difficult challenges.

He spoke to groups of hospital staff, volunteers, students, and regular meditation groups. He travelled to small villages, and to the hospital operated through the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, which has an excellent reputation. In some situations his talks given in French were translated into Creole.

Michel’s experience raised an increasingly important question. How can we combine meditation with social needs?

Philip Barnett described his tour of the Caribbean in 2010, visiting the countries of Trinidad and Tobago, Curaçao and Barbados. The meetings were held with a variety of groups, including practising meditators, secondary students, business executives and Anglican clergy, in groups of up to 200 people.

In addition there was publicity through newspaper articles and TV interviews. The meetings in Curaçao involved smaller community groups. In Barbados they were able



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Cathy Nobleman
God meets us as individuals

to hold morning talks as well as some evening talks in the cathedral. Philip brought books and CDs from Canada, and distributed them in great numbers. New ways in which Canadian meditators can support those in the Caribbean will be discussed this fall, at a meeting of North American coordinators in Jacksonville Florida.

Kathleen Nobleman and Joyce Hardman have led a

meditation group at a United Church in Ottawa since 2005. They described the personal experiences that led each of them to Christian meditation and their common goal of an inclusive, open meditation group.

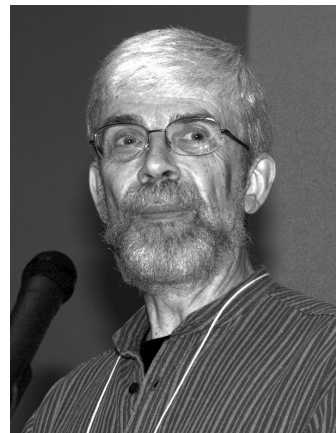
The women spoke eloquently of their belief that meditation is an opening and sacred experience. Kathleen stated that what happens in meditation is none of our business, nor is the background of the people in the group any of our concern. God meets us as individuals. Every story is individual and every story is sacred.



Joyce Hardman
God is there in us

Joyce spoke of how happy she is to teach the tradition. Sit still and let God act – because God is already “there” in every single one of us. She spoke of the breakdown of communities in our modern society and the need people feel for inner peace and connection.

She and Kathleen described how every week their group does a welcoming circle, as there are always new people. They believe we should be trying to move meditation out of the churches, to where the people are.



Kevin Flynn
Reaching the Young

Kevin Flynn, a priest and Director of Anglican Studies at St. Paul’s University, spoke of a meditation group that meets there at noon hour. The participants are not students at the university, but people who work in the area.

He explained the apparent lack of student interest by the fact that youth, at this stage of their lives, are busy assembling their “ego”, rather than transcending it. Some young people, in

places such as in India, are on a more spiritual path.

However the risk, he said, is not that we might ask too much of young people, but rather too little. There is a true desire for altruism among them. If meditation can move out of the churches, it can reach out into the community to where the people are – seniors’ homes, libraries, work places, and beyond!

Marie Dyach
Toronto



The great Christian contemplatives are unanimous in their evidence: no matter what their spiritual path, for each of them union with God is real, an existential reality, more solid, more filled with being and certainty than any other experience in the physical world. In this sense, the contemplative is the greatest realist of all.

– René Voillaume



MEDITATION IN PRISON

Words of Witness

These words of witness were shared with us at the National Conference, and they are worth sharing. Needless to say they have to be anonymous. We hope to soon add a new “prison” page on our website.

They are from patients in a correctional facility that is a treatment center for those with mental health issues, who have been brought to the practice of Christian meditation.

“I am a person that has high anxiety every day. Even with medication there still is a lot of anxiety that flows through my body. I always hoped I could find something that would help me. I used to try sleeping for a couple of hours, however my anxiety was too high for sleep. I’ve been in jail now for 8 months, and I am happy to say that since I have been meditating for the past two months it has had a huge impact on me. I am able to calm down when I need to. I hope more people learn this.”

“Before I begin to tell you what meditation has done for me, I will tell you a bit about myself. I am 25 years old and am serving a fifteen-month sentence for fraud and break-and-enter. This is my second time in jail. My first was when I was eighteen, for an armed robbery. Then I was sentenced to four years in federal prison. Both times, coming to jail has been because of a drug addiction, and because I’ve never had faith in my life or the strength to believe things can be better.

Back to meditation. When I came to this place I made a few friends and they were already involved in chapel service and the meditation group. They told me I should come along. I started going and sat there and took it in, and it allowed me to feel relaxed and free. That twenty minutes of meditation and the silence gave me time to free my mind.

The second time I went it started to make me feel spiritual. It’s like, when the silence takes over, it allows

God to become a part of my life. It felt so wonderful to me to have meditation in my life that I began doing it alone in my room every day. Also along with meditation, prayer has become very important to me morning and night.

Since I’ve started doing meditation and prayer I feel more in tune with myself. I feel more free from all the hurt and pain I’ve been through in my life. For that, I am grateful to have been shown how to meditate.”

“Being introduced to Christian meditation was exactly what I expected it be as a beginner – strange and uncomfortable. I must confess that I had a very difficult time relaxing myself and submitting to the spirit of God as I repeated my prayer phrase, *Maranatha*. On many occasions, I confess that one of my eyes would open to scan my surroundings, thinking what the heck did I get myself into?”

It’s been a number of months, and I am grateful that our chaplain’s persistence led to my joining the meditation group. Over time I’ve discovered that, with practice and

consistency, meditation has become a very personal and important part of my wellbeing. I’ve found it to be quite helpful to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord, and then ask Him to quiet my mind and lead me in my meditation. My mind does wander, but by simply returning to the mantra I have essentially given myself wholly to Him.

My practice has become rather spontaneous in some ways. When I feel my mind becoming too ‘busy’, I feel compelled to spend time in the stillness meditation requires. It has amazed me and inspired me how simple it is to just be still, be quiet, and give myself up to Him. It is an effective and wonderful practice. I believe meditation requires submission, and the practice has improved my emotional, mental, physical and spiritual health.”



Teaching Meditation to Children: Growing Up & Growing Within

Meditatio Forum in Ajax, Ontario, in October

The gospel tells us what we have to do to enter the kingdom of heaven – we must “become like children.” (Matt. 18:3)

It’s a challenge for grown-ups. Yet meditation, in its deep simplicity, seems to move us in that direction.

But how much more of a challenge is it for young people? If you’re already a child, what is Jesus urging you to become?

This October, some of the most experienced teachers of meditation to children – Dr. Cathy Day and Ernie Christie of the Catholic Education Office in the Diocese of Townsville, Queensland, Australia – will present a forum in the Toronto area to address this and other aspects of teaching meditation to children.

Many readers will be familiar with Cathy from her dialogue with Fr Laurence on the CD “Meditation with Children” which was distributed last year to Canadian group leaders. Now she and her colleague Ernie are touring North America, to share their experience of introducing meditation into a regular school curriculum at both the primary and secondary levels.

There will be two sessions of the forum. Interested participants can choose to attend either Friday, 4 October, or Saturday, 5 October. Both days run from 9:30 to 4:30, at St. George’s Anglican Church, in Ajax, Ontario, about 40 km east of Toronto.

Anyone who has ever raised or worked with children, or even visited with them on holidays, may find it hard to associate them with meditation – especially the part about “stillness” and “silence.” Those with experience downplay that challenge, though.

“The younger elementary students are rarely challenging,” says Toronto’s Joseph Clarkson. “The secondary school students are more difficult to work with – for me.” Joseph has been bringing meditation into Toronto-and-area classrooms for the past four years. He estimates he delivers about seventy-five sessions a year, and reported on his experiences at the National Conference in North Bay.

There are some “tricks of the trade.” Says Joseph, “For elementary students, I always begin with a ‘paying attention’ activity. I usually bring gongs or other percussion instruments, and we pay attention to the sounds. Then we begin to pay attention to our breathing, in a more formal meditation session.”

There is a wealth of resources available through the WCCM to support these efforts. In addition to the CD released last year, the international website (wccm.org) and the School of Meditation site (theschoolofmeditation.org) both have several links to useful materials on meditation with children. An Australian website, cominghome.org.au, offers tips and advice, along with videos of young meditators reflecting on their practice.

Our Canadian site (wccm-canada.ca) has a link on its events page to the flyer and brochure for the Forum, as well as registration forms.

In fact, the larger challenge is often to convince teachers that meditation is a worthwhile investment of their scarce classroom time.

Marilyn Metcalfe, one of the organizers of the upcoming Forum, has been working to introduce meditation into the Sunday school classes at her local parish.

“The biggest challenge,” she says, “was to convince other teachers that meditation can be incorporated into the Sunday school program, which is already filled with crafts and singing and storytelling.”

Joseph agrees. “The biggest challenge is that teachers feel they don’t have the time to spend meditating,” he says. Himself a retired teacher, Joseph is not without sympathy. “They have so much curriculum to cover, and so many local and provincial priorities to address.”

But through the challenges come rewards, and it is the children who benefit.

As Marilyn says, “The stillness and simplicity gives the children a break from the noise and activity that bombards their every living moment.”

“We’re teaching them that there’s a special place within them that is accessible,” says Joseph, “a place of calm and peace and truth.”

The children on the Australian website videos agree. They offer numerous reasons why they like to meditate. “To get in touch with the Lord.” “It gets the worries out of your head.” “You just feel safer, I guess.” “It helps you to focus.”

One young man put it this way: “It makes me feel like me, to be myself. And no one else.”

And that may be exactly what Jesus urges young people to become – who they really are. And no one else.



Kayaking on Lake Nipissing



Words only really refer to other words. This is a liberating discovery for each of us, provided that we can have the courage to follow it through and become truly silent.

- John Main, OSB

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 For some information on new publications, please see **page 12** in the international section.

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Catching Spirituality at the Cistercian Abbey

It is Victoria Day weekend, May 17 to 19. The cherry blossoms and lilacs fill the air with heavenly scents. I drive up the entrance lane to the Cistercian Abbey in Rougemont, Quebec, lush greenery on either side.

I am exhausted, having driven from Montreal and gotten lost twice. My personal battery is empty – spiritually, emotionally and physically – having spent the last three years dealing with a severe family health crisis. This retreat, I hope, will give me a boost. And so it did.

The Abbey walls and grounds, complete with apple orchards and tame Siberian huskies, are so tranquil, that at first I am disoriented. The peace is cacophonous.

I am greeted by a broad smile from Magda Jass, who organized the retreat, and by Polly Schofield's warm hug. Polly will conduct the conferences with readings from Fr. John Main's unpublished papers. We will attend the liturgies of the monks, filled with their soul-lifting Gregorian chant. And we will be silent.

Polly's friendship with John Main lasted years before his untimely death from cancer at age 50. Her experience allows her to sprinkle his texts with anecdotes. We hear not only his words but the workings of his eloquent spirituality. We can imagine him as a warm and loving person.

Love is his message. God is love, and love is the only model upon which to develop our spiritual lives – not ritual, and not good behaviour, as important as these are. I was reminded of an Indian sage who said that ethical behaviour is the foundation of spirituality. Ethical behaviour is love in

action. But Fr. John stresses that "love is not an activity, but a sacrament. Love is the creative power of our own self-giving."

Move into the force-field of love, he tells us. And to enter it, silence is the spiritual catalyst. We should bring our whole person to an alert silence, the silence of the heart, as the Upanishad says.

With the help of the mantra to silence our minds, we are freed to become still. In silence, our soul expands. At times, we feel God's loving presence. Other times, God seems non-existent. Yet these periods of spiritual alienation are important, too, because they strengthen our commitment and perseverance.

As powerful as John Main's message was, so was the spirituality which filled the abbey, the monks, us, the very walls. It has been said that spirituality is caught, not taught. And I caught a big dose of it. Just what I needed.

- Fr. John Main

Thank you John Main, Polly and Magda.

Marguerite Alexander



What we need constantly to be deepening is our understanding that Love is an abiding presence among the shifting sands of our life. And this understanding must be both mature and personal. We have to understand that Love is the free choice of a conscious being to turn away from self towards the other.



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