

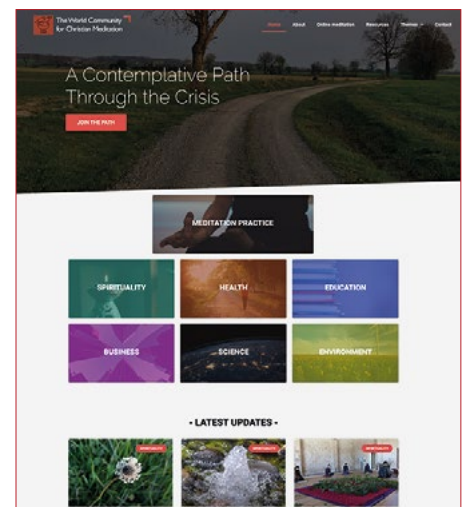


## The Path through the Crisis

Laurence Freeman reflects on the post-Covid-19 world: How can we make a contemplative response to an unknown future?



*After the Night Vigil, the Bonnevaux Community watched the Easter Sun rise. Although the Holy Week Retreat had to be limited to the residents, thousands online from around the world could join in the ceremonies, the contemplative mass and the teachings by Fr Laurence*



### A CONTEMPLATIVE PATH THROUGH THE CRISIS

Our new website combines online events, short videos, talks, interviews, written resources - many ways to strengthen and inspire us to understand the spiritual dimension and its opportunities during these tough times. Join 'The Path' to receive updates on the new resources as they appear: <http://acontemplativepath-wccm.org>

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## Dearest Friends,

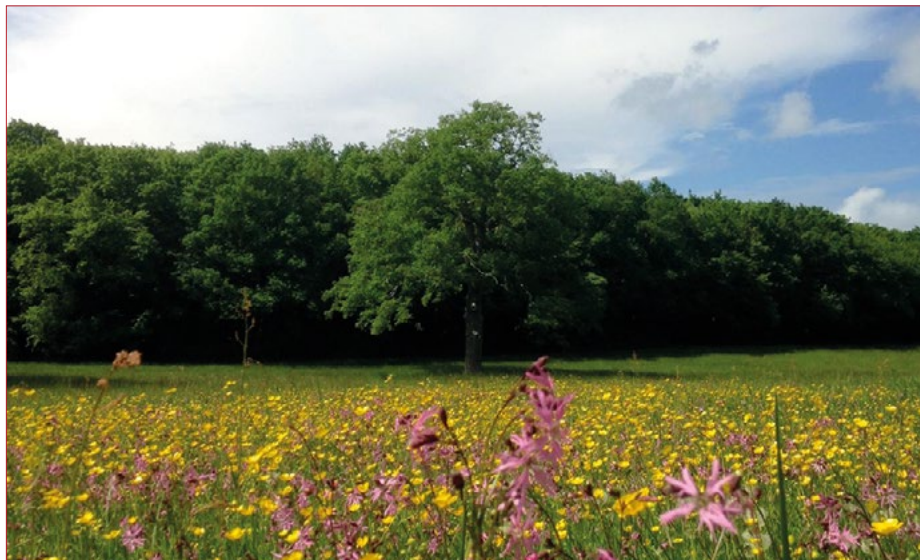
A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

During the First World War the British government was recruiting volunteers for its killing fields in France. They used guilt to coerce them, like the poster of a man with his son on his knee and the boy asking 'what did you do during the war, daddy?' One day, maybe, but without the loaded tone, people will ask us what we did during the first big Shutdown (or maybe it will be 'Shutdowns'), 'what was it really like?... And afterwards, was it hard?' And if a child asks why it was called by CoVid-19 we can say that Co=Corona V=Virus D=disease and 2019 was when it began. But 2020 was when it knocked everyone into the beginning of a new vision of reality. It helped to have a name for it, even if we didn't know much about it or how to cure it. Maybe it will take us decades to see its meaning. 'Well,' we will say wisely, 'it took us all by surprise and it was something of a mystery'.

As to the question, I would answer, 'I was in Bonnevaux, locked up in a beautiful prison with a group of very nice people. We were faithful to our existing daily rhythm of life, of prayer, work and study (including meals and the occasional movie) which our ancestor Benedict designed wisely to take us through both good times and bad times. I stopped travelling except through the internet, which was easier than flying but earned no airmiles. Because of the technology of online meetings, I have been busier than usual working with our amazingly dedicated international team as we try to respond to the spiritual needs of our global community and of those who have met us for the first time through the crisis.

In ten days, we made a new website to help people face new chal-

lenges (*A Spiritual Path through the Crisis*) which is run by some of our younger teachers. We have had many meditation sessions online, dialogues with other faiths, intellectually stimulating teachings by a variety of speakers. And we began streaming contemplative mass on



The beauty of spring at Bonnevaux

Sundays with a large congregation from across the planet, an online yoga class and live meditations in our daily schedule. Through all this interaction with individuals and national communities, we understood better how Bonnevaux is called to be a physical centre of a community that has no walls or borders, no need for visas, and in which even the barriers of language can melt in the experience of deep silence. So, we were contemplative but busy. Benedict said, 'idleness is the enemy of the soul'. We have not been idle but we found ourselves more clearly becoming what we kind of already knew we were: a centre of peace that is here to serve as a centre for peace.

The other question our descendants might ask is about meaning. Many are already impatient to

know what impact it will have in the world. Will it change how we live, work and respect the environment? It is too soon for answers, but from what Bonnevaux has taught me during these months, let me share some early reflections. I start with a thought of Simone Weil that struck

me recently. Every event in life is part of the language with which God speaks to us. All events are signs of God's love. If you drink a glass of water the water is God's 'I love you' to you. If you are two days in a desert and can find nothing to drink, your thirst is God's 'I love you'. As we learn this language at first, we think only some events mean 'I love you', the nice, desirable things that happen. But as we learn the language better, we see that the entire language, every event, means 'I love you'. God has only this one thing to say. God has no way of saying 'I hate you'.

This isn't an easy language to learn. But it could not be simpler. Keeping this in mind, struggling with the strange idea that Covid-19 could be a love message, let's try to reflect on what the message

'I love you' might mean.

## The Noosphere

Do you remember movies of World War Two that show people huddled round a radio listening intensely to the news? That was the early days of instant global communication. Before that, when major events happened, like wars or epidemics, people only really knew what was going on from what they saw in their towns or villages, the soldiers marching past or people dying. How this connected with news from other places was largely up to rumour, magic and imagination.

Life was local, which had advantages but could also be intensely limiting and oppressive. Now, rich and poor alike, we are all global citizens. Yesterday the BBC World Service had a sound clip of one of the million Rohingya refugees incarcerated in camps in Bangladesh. The first cases of the virus had just been discovered; the prospect of infection spreading through the over-crowded camps is horrific. The man spoke in his Burmese Rohingya dialect but the words 'Covid-19' were clearly audible. Evidently, he and we all face the same crisis and we know it and have invented a universal name for it.

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Jesuit scientist Teilhard de Chardin and the Russian scientist Vladimir Vernansky, coming with different perspectives, developed the idea of the 'noosphere'. We are so familiar with it in practice today – with 24/7 news, Zoom, Instagram and the worldwide web, that it hardly astonishes us. We live in this cocoon-sphere of consciousness unconsciously. In physical isolation we saw what a lifesaver communication technology was. The 'noosphere' has now become more conscious and

we must reflect on the meaning of a new kind of global communication. The Greek word nous means mind, so the noosphere is a 'sphere of the mind'. The technology behind it may dazzle us or we may get addicted to it, taking our cell phones to bed with us. But this crisis has made us wonder how this new immediacy of communication across space and time-zones affects our way of living together as one huge, multicultural family.

The noosphere has emerged from the biosphere – the physical world we share in which viruses spread. But

*... The 'noosphere' has now become more conscious and we must reflect on the meaning of a new kind global communication*

this new sphere is at a higher level of consciousness. As I am writing this at Bonnevaux I am looking out on the lake watching the ducks and herons. If I were closer, I would see the plump, swift fish. If I moved closer, they would feel the threat instantaneously. They would turn on a sixpence, change direction, take flight, rapidly, obedient to each other and all without anyone bumping into another. How could they do this without possessing a common mind? So why not us too? We are conscious; we have more in common than divides us. We can form a football crowd or a meditation community, pack malls as consumers, get addicted to the same soap operas. We do, however, bump into each other a lot but we can work together on ways to improve this. Is our common mind, our noosphere, evolving?

Is the sphere of reason, of conscious mind composed of intricate networks of interpersonal relationships, developing? Is it forming both through the glass of water we drink and the thirst we feel when deprived of it?

The materialist would say all this is simply a product of technology and that mind emerges from complex matter. There is no proof of this, of course, but it is a dogma of modern science. Whatever the cause may be, we are increasingly curious about this new consciousness and its implications. For example, it demands a higher moral responsibility because the risks it poses are as great as the benefits it promises. Fake news can be seeded in it like a virus. Confronted with his wilful stupidity or falsehood, a brazen politician has only to make endless soundbite denials to eventually plant them as a possible truth in the mass mind. This is not the fault of technology. We cannot *blame* technology - or a virus - for causing distress. They are only causes. It is we who misuse good things for bad ends.

The globalising of human consciousness calls for global institutions. Perhaps a logical consequence of the evolving noosphere will be a globally respected moral authority. If so, we will find conflict ahead. Not surprisingly dictators and dishonest leaders with totalitarian tendencies will oppose and undermine such global bodies by reviving outdated but still toxic nationalisms. In a spiritual analogy, it is the ego resisting the Self.

But this is why it is easier now to speak about spiritual consciousness. Survival depends on it. In contrast to the modern dogma of reductionist materialism, a universal wisdom is re-emerging. Rooted in a perennial philosophy it calmly says that mind does



not arise from matter, but that matter is manifested by mind. This is not a philosophical abstraction of no practical value. Fundamental ideas shape the world. It seems, for example, that some leaders, responsible for abolishing environmental controls and restarting the exploitation of non-renewable resources, feel justified by their fundamentalist religious beliefs. They hold extreme biblical views about the seven days of creation and the imminent Armageddon that will precede the Rapture. If an elect group are going to be beamed up soon, what difference does environmental damage make? Or, belief that all human beings do not possess equal, essential value. Some, the more successful, are worth more than others. Rational arguments can then be made for creating collateral damage, sacrificing whoever you feel are less important. It helps to have God on your side in such decisions. Believe in a God who punishes whoever breaks the rules made by His representatives and rewards those who keep them, and religion becomes a tyranny of the self-righteous. The glass of water shows that God loves you and your thirst proves that God hates you.

Covid-19 has shocked us into a new sense of human unity as we watched how a simple, miniscule virus has no favourites and no enemies. Good and bad belong to humans not to events. We have seen how human tragedy can be played for shameful political advantage. Yet we also see a daily outpouring of altruism and tenderness. Both extremes are visible at the click of a mouse. How we interpret it depends on the mind behind the hand controlling the technology. The crisis has shown us we need to fund our healthcare but it also exposes the weakness of our education.

Critical thinking developed by good public education opposes a tyranny that tries to prove that oppression is liberty and black is white.

Technology can assist the development of a global mind and of a more just society. It can also be twisted to block both. But what if the common mind, the unity of human



Contemplative Mass live from Bonnevaux every Sunday. More info here: <http://tiny.cc/liveevents>

consciousness, is on the march and cannot be stopped? What if it manifests at certain stages of evolution, helped but not dependent on technology? An absurd idea to the materialistic mind, but it helps to illustrate the Mind of Christ:

Let this mind be in you as was also in Christ Jesus (*Phil 2:5*)

Now I beseech you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (*1 Cor 1:10*)

The Self is One. Ever still, the Self is. Swifter than thought, swifter than the senses. Though motionless he outruns

all pursuit. Without the Self, never could life exist (*Isha Upanishad*)

To feel that we share in this universal mind, at the deepest level of reality described in these words, it is not necessary to try to know everything, to browse the internet all day, read every article, argue about every

opinion, become a news junkie. It is necessary only to pay attention to one thing totally. Training our potentially infinite capacity for attention forms the contemplative mind in individuals who then come to see how they are equal sharers in the whole of humanity. The contemplative mind is the birth right of all. Meditation is for everyone. The political benefit of this is that contemplatives are not so easily manipulated or misled; knowing what they belong to makes them participate more responsibly in the democratic process.

## The Personal Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis

Many, who did not fall sick or have people who were close to them suffering, will shyly say they enjoyed some aspects of confinement. Even

with anxieties about work or finances, they followed a balanced daily schedule of exercise, reading, meditating, chatting online, doing things they liked at home like baking or painting. They often felt relieved not to be rushing all day, commuting, jumping on and off planes or trains, shopping. Even though they also missed hugs and kisses they benefited by this time of slower living. Others, however, with tendencies to depression or issues like anger or addiction have found it excruciating. It brought the dark side to the fore and subjected them to much suffering. Everyone has learned something more about themselves. Some may even apply the self-knowledge they have gained to rebuild a healthier lifestyle.

Confinement, enforced stability and simplicity, confront us with our capacity to be simply content with what we have. Many political prisoners like Gandhi, Solzhenitsyn and Mandela attest to this. Monastic life builds degrees of solitude into its programme of spiritual development. Spirituality – however one defines it – begins with the often lonely work of accepting what is. Denial, resistance, rage or violence do not change reality to match our preferences. Eventually reality wins. It teaches us and we have to obey what is. Only then can we do good work for others. Until then, our efforts to change things are largely projections of fantasy. And so, at this basic level of accepting life itself as a spiritual journey, the crisis has been an awakening for many. Confinement and loss have been a deeper call to acceptance, self-knowledge and a spirit of service.

The frustration of normal habits and desires led many to realise how to control anger, handle restlessness, acknowledge our addiction to dis-

traction, expose our evasions, self-deceptions and our tendency always to blame others. It has been a desert experience – of more than forty days and is not fully over yet. Perhaps we glimpsed how our hunger for distraction, novelty and stimulation contradicts our innate hunger for God. This is true even if we do not have the word God in our vocabulary of meaning. God is present and we thirst for union with God, named or unnamed, invoked or not. Spiritual hunger is our most intimate longing, the reality check of all the distorted compensatory desires we pursue. It is also the great unifying bond between us all. If beauty, love, compassion, and

*Accepting our  
ordinariness and  
limitations unexpectedly  
becomes a strength*

justice unite us across all differences, at the heart of them is the thirsty hunger for God. It is the great privilege of the human condition to feel it. If we accept it for what it is, it contains its own fulfilment.

The deepest self-knowledge is not psychological awareness of our formative experiences and conditioned patterns of mind. Important though this is, the essential self-knowledge that effects permanent transformation and liberation, is not found in our thoughts, memories or imagination. It arises from a direct encounter with our being, at its source, in utter stillness and silence. This may sound like an experience for the few but it is much closer to us than we think and more universally accessible. Sometimes suffering pushes us into this space when our efforts to find it have

failed. The self-knowledge it brings is the greatest asset we have in our quest to be happy and free. It may come as the glass of water or as the thirst. It simply is. Knowing it once will forever change the way we cope with the swings of fortune that previously controlled and dominated us.

Humans are a mass of paradox. We belong to one human family. What happens anywhere on our home planet influences each of us. But we are also locals embedded in the physical and cultural conditions of our home and immediate companions. We are also solitary in the sense of being unique and unrepeatable. And we are all ordinary, too, however high we have risen or low we have fallen. We all need attention and love, even the hermit. Accepting this paradoxical ordinariness exposes our hidden glory and real value. This is the outcome, the humility of meditation. When they meditate the most intelligent, powerful or famous meet the same challenges as everyone else. Accepting our ordinariness and limitations unexpectedly becomes a strength and source of encouragement. Solitude then expands into communion. Experiencing equality, fraternity and liberty of spirit we begin to function maturely in community.

The crisis of the past months can teach us these essential lessons of life when it is understood as a spiritual journey. In confinement many people decided to learn something new, to restart a long-abandoned task, to be creative. It is vital to develop, until the end, to risk learning new things and change old habits. As we are enduring it now, disruption of life feels cruel. But it may also be a kind teacher and catalyst for change. Hard times have taught many already that they really can change: their sense of self

and their character traits can be repaired. It is never too late to have a conversion of heart. In the most challenging conditions, we are capable of transformation. Brain scientists say that plasticity is with us till the end. If we believe the Christian mystics, it continues even after the end, because in eternity we are transformed 'from glory to glory'. Limitations accepted push back the walls confining us. Weaknesses become sources of strength, of grace from God.

If this is true of us at the personal level, might it not be equally true for our communities, the church, our national and global institutions?

## Serpents and doves

When we pay attention to one thing, other than our self or what concerns our self-interest, we become a foot soldier in the contemplative revolution. All the spiritual teachers of humanity have seen and shown this. But to build a contemplative practice into life means to work continuously, humbly to come to an ever-purer degree of attention. At its fullest, purity of attention is the Mind of Christ.

The trick is not to see this as a heroic task but as a simple and ordinary one. Of course, it has an element of the hero's quest but heroes are never as heroic as they are portrayed and the real heroes know it. To meditate is not to be heroic but to be a disciple. This is a less flattering designation for the ego, so we resist discipleship; but dealing with the resistance leads to self-knowledge which makes us humble and more useful to others. This moment is always a crossroad in our personal journey. It returns periodically. If we make the right turn, we grow beyond anything we can



Online meditation and yoga sessions live from Bonnevaux, more info: <http://tiny.cc/liveevents>

imagine, by becoming the person we exist to become.

Is this also the crossroad where humanity finds itself now? The heroic path – mastering and exploiting the earth till its ecological balance collapses; embracing the hyper-individualism of the warrior pursuing glory and ambition in politics and business even when hiding behind Green camouflage; viewing the poor and powerless as cannon fodder for the march of a jungle deviant of capitalism; fuelling greed (the illusion that we can have everything) with gluttony (the attempt to stuff ourselves with everything); losing faith in the existence of truth because we have sold our soul to falsehood. We have felt this for some time.

We have also felt that a crisis was bound to come one way or another – through a financial collapse, a major environmental tipping point, a political collapse into totalitarianism. This may be only the first of a series of crises that awakens us to the failure of our outdated view of civilisation. But it may also trigger a new vision of reality. Individually we have to surrender egoism, collectively we need to sacrifice nationalism.

Personally, we need to rediscover poverty of spirit. Economically we need to let go of possessiveness and share. Meditation guides us to moderation. Materially, we need to reduce and simplify.

The values of contemplative consciousness and the new world order are aligned.

The more radical the spirit of revolution, the less force it will use. The contemplative revolution uses no force. It does not market itself. Its leaders know they are flawed and admit it. Jesus said that to advance the reign of God people would need to be as cunning as serpents and as simple as doves. It's a hard combination. It seems unlikely to succeed. But then success isn't what it's about. It's a strange goal and a weird time. But stranger things have happened. After all, as I write it is still the Paschal season which recalls a very strange event and time indeed. And Ordinary Time means travelling as if we have arrived.

With much love

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurence".

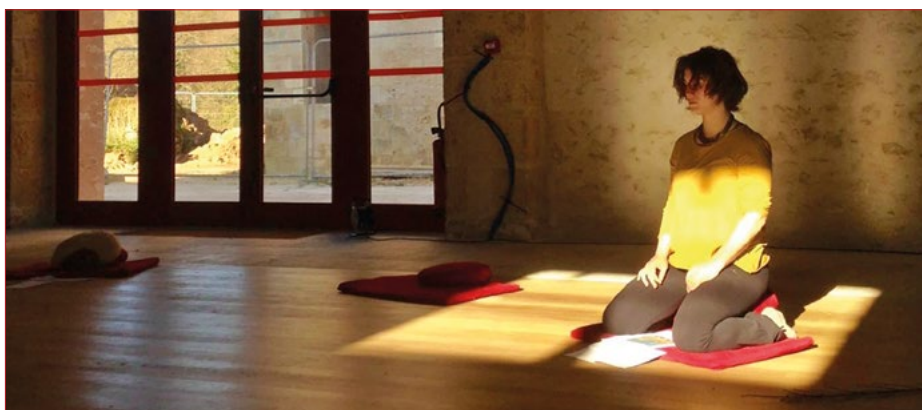
Laurence Freeman OSB



Special

Visit and join the Path at [www.acontemplativepath-wccm.org](http://www.acontemplativepath-wccm.org)

## A Contemplative Path Through the Crisis



Since the crisis hit the world the World Community has been approached by many people asking how we can help. We have consulted widely, reflected deeply, and we feel that A Contemplative Path Through the Crisis is a response that meets many needs in different ways. Meditation will not instantly solve all problems. But it changes how we view and deal with the challenges we face. It helps us to 'set our troubled minds at rest' and to find the authentic, interior peace that stabilises us when we are in turmoil.

For many who have a spiritual path and practice, this crisis is a call to deepen it. For those who never had time to

develop a path before, this is the opportunity.

The immediate need is to reduce fear and anxiety and – even in a time of social isolation – to discover a sense of connection with others. The 'Contemplative Path' programme grows from the essential teaching of the community about the daily practice of meditation. For a generation or more we have taught this simple way from the Christian contemplative tradition to people of faith and those who belong to no special tradition.

Building on this practice, the Contemplative Path online programme offers meditation sessions, contemplative eucharists, psychological insights about

how to deal with the feelings stirred up by the crisis, bodywork sessions, teachings and reflections from a range of people who follow a spiritual path while living and working in the world.

Each of us can build an inclusive contemplative response that makes a difference to everyone around us even when we are physically separated. Social distancing can bring us closer together spiritually. But we need to go deeper. To go deeper we need to be still. Meditation does both.

Following such a path also means becoming more other-centred, turned practically towards the relief of others' suffering. This is to be, in a Christlike way, what every contemplative path aims to be: 'medicine, physician and nurse to those in need'.

We need to get through the crisis but also to see the opportunities it offers. With a path, we can better see how to be ready to play our part after the crisis. A contemplative path commits us all not only to survival, but to a better human flourishing.

Welcome to A Contemplative Path.

Laurence Freeman OSB

## The impact in Bonnevaux



Because of the pandemic crisis, retreats between June and August will be offered in an online version. From September we will aim to offer in-person retreats at Bonnevaux. You will find further information at [bonnevauxwccm.org](http://bonnevauxwccm.org). In self-isolation the resident community continued the routine of work and prayer. Bonnevaux is a key part of the new programme A Contemplative Path Through the Crisis. The first online event was The Inter-Contemplative Dialogues (see page 9). The Holy Week retreat was also an opportunity for the global community to feel connected to Bonnevaux - with live mass and recorded talks by Fr. Laurence. The Bonnevaux website provides information on how you can join live transmissions for Sunday Mass, Yoga class and Online Meditation every week. The crisis paused the renovation work, but the good news is that the Barn (the Conference Centre) is ready and in use for meditation, mass and other celebrations.

## Special

# In response to the crisis, technology is helping communities to support their the practice with the feeling of connection

## Vibrant initiatives in Latin America

Besides the surge in regular online groups, we have been offering several live-stream events. In mid-March we launched a series of weekly contemplative masses in Spanish.

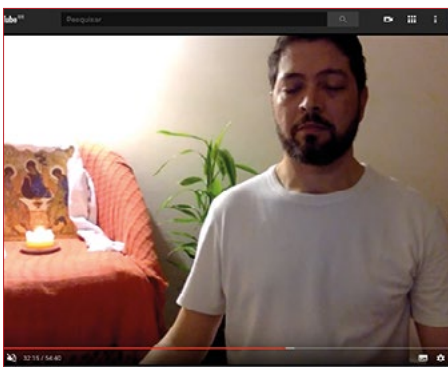
Another initiative we have recently launched is a series of live-stream sessions called "today we meditate with". The format consists of short interviews hosted by Elba. In the live clips we interview a member of our community, give pointers on how to meditate, and then meditate for 20 minutes. New or current meditators can join

us for the interview and the meditation session via Facebook Live or watch at a later time.

What came out of the latter initiative was an extension of meditation with children. Enrique, his wife Paty (WCCM Mexico), and Elba will be offering a live webinar series, streaming through Facebook, on Christian meditation with children. The format consists of simple talks and a five-minute meditation to help parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents during these trying times. **(By Elba Rodríguez)**



## Sergio Peixoto, Brazil: "I hope everyone takes this opportunity"



Some people asked me if we could go online after our group was suspended because of the pandemic crisis. I explored various means and finally decided to try live streaming via Youtube. Unlike Facebook and Instagram, I didn't need an account to join. The feedback is good so far, and we are exploring continuing an on-line group even after the crisis. It will not replace the actual group, but will offer an alternative for those who

cannot physically meet together. Crisis asks for change and people are looking for solutions. Some, of course, want to keep expanding, achieving and competing; they still want to "come in first" and not lose the competition. But mediation offers us another way to grow: the way of "not doing", of stillness and silence. I hope everyone takes the opportunity the crisis offers to seek true change within. **(By Sergio Peixoto)**

## Hong Kong: online meeting in Cantonese and English

Ever since the beginning of February, when Hong Kong people were aware of how contagious the Coronavirus was, it was clear that meeting weekly for meditation had to cease. Instead, we migrated online, to one Hong Kong-wide online meditation meeting. Now we have refined our presentation. It has become

bilingual, Cantonese and English, with each week's meeting involving members from various groups serving as the host and readers for the teaching and the Gospel of that day. We aim to have every one of our 14 groups represented as we continue, promoting a distinct feeling of community. In our meeting in

26 Mar we had 51 participants, a few of whom were invitees new to meditation. With confinement, people with time on their hands will likely turn to spiritual matters, and online meditation is an excellent way to introduce them to this type of prayer.

**(By Vivian Lee)**



Special

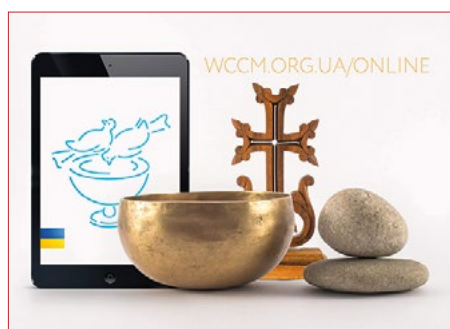
## Teaching meditation to Children and Young People during the Crisis

To reduce stress and loneliness when Young People are isolated at home or in schools only open to the children of key workers, meditation offers an inclusive and immediate solace and inspiration. From our work worldwide we know for certain that children can meditate, that they love it and ask for it. In collaboration with The Catholic Children's Society in the UK, the WCCM is introducing meditation into Primary and Secondary schools. We encourage you to share these videos with children, parents, grandparents and teachers



at home during this time of crisis. More info here: <https://rebrand.ly/medchcv19>

## Ukraine: a time to go deeper into the silence



These are strange and surprising times. Pandemic crisis has a special character - it brings silence to our cities, whether we like it or not. Here in Ukraine we understand that we are not ready to face this challenge, either internally or externally. Therefore, so many people now suffer from the effects of this disease, fear of illness and loss and the loneliness of quarantine. But for our local meditation community, this time has become an oppor-

tunity to go deeper into the silence. Now we can do it together online, forgetting about the distances between our local groups located in so many different cities. We have launched three weekly online groups, and we continue to translate the Fr. Laurence's Lenten reflections. Each time we meet in the Zoom chatroom, we recall that our meditation is part of our community's web of silence. We just want to thank every community meditator for our common presence. We hope that our local community will benefit from this time, using it as a free space where we will learn just to be. After the epidemic is over, we look forward to being with one another again, so we could see in our meditation and in each other the Word which has become Flesh. (By Albert Zakharov)

## Inter-Contemplative Dialogues

The first event of "A Contemplative Path" programme was a webinar, from 21st to 28th of March, with Alan Wallace and Eva Natanya (speaking from USA) and Laurence Freeman (from Bonnevaux). The five talks were webcast live and you can watch them here:

<https://rebrand.ly/ctdialg>



*In times of crises like this, which humanity has been facing for as long as there's been humanity, it's a time when the outer pursuit of happiness, everything outer, the sources, my problems and my happiness, are outside. (...)When things are going well, then the outside looks like a good bet. You don't need to have much of an inner life because outside it's just going fine. But then when something like this has happened and, of course, we've had so many of these sort of things—wars, pandemics, economic meltdowns and so forth... then suddenly that outer pursuit looks very very precarious. (Alan Wallace)*

Special

## Far from home, Emily found community support online

This meditator from USA was part of the Young Adult Retreat at Bonnevaux in 2019 and got stuck in Peru during the pandemic crisis.



In 2019, Emily Waters-Leiga was part of the first Young Adult Retreat in Bonnevaux. She also did the five-day walk in the French part of the Camino to Compostela. This year her life took another unexpected direction: she was in Argentina to study Spanish when the pandemic crisis worsened. On her way back to the USA she got stuck in Peru. She replied to some questions before finally getting back home, middle of April.

**How are you keeping the balance during this time in Peru?**

The main way I'm coping with the

situation is by trying to remember the bigger picture- that fighting this pandemic is much bigger than any one of us. Even everyone who is fortunate enough to be healthy is experiencing some type of loss or hard times right now. I try to keep in mind that all the sacrifices being made, including me staying here in Peru, are for the greater good. I have meditated several times, and every day, have taken time away from my phone and the news to just sit in the sun and journal, or just sit and think. This has been incredibly helpful.

I have been in touch with several people whom I was with on the Camino. Recently I participated in our Zoom catch up + meditation session, and a few of them have reached out to me individually to check in about how I am doing. They are such an amazing and supportive group of people.

**What are you learning from this personal experience?**

It's always been valuable to me to try to not take things in life for granted, but never in my life have I been

confronted with just how much can be taken away seemingly overnight. One of the hardest things I dealt with in Peru was not knowing if I would continue to have a place to stay. Having a place to stay was something I've always taken for granted, and now this experience has made me so appreciative of it. I hope that this time of uncertainty and loss ignites immense gratitude for the things in our lives that we all took for granted before. I also hope people are amazed at just how small our world really is. Everyone in the world is dealing with varying amounts of social restrictions and isolation, and most people are experiencing some type of anxiety or loneliness. When I participated in the video chat with people from the Camino, we were all in different countries, but experiencing the same thing. It's really uniting to think about how we are all in this together. I hope that moving forward we can continue this sense of unity to tackle other global crises, including climate change.

**ONLINE:** Visit Emily's blog here: <https://emilyabroad.home.blog>

## Brijji Waterfield, Director of Meditatio



Brijji was appointed as the new Director of Meditatio in March 2020. She is no stranger in the Community as she retired as Director of Special Projects in 2018 but has come back to this new role. Brijji was part of the initial team that launched Meditatio in 2010 and looks forward to taking meditation out into the secular world especially in the fields of Business, Education, Health, Religion and Spirituality, Science

and Social Justice. She will be working closely with The Meditatio Council whose members are professionals in these fields and with the national communities. She is still enjoying the joys of semi-retirement - walking with her dog, gardening, cooking, partying with friends and re-discovering her home country, India. She hopes to resume some of these social pleasures once the virus has abated!

## In Focus

# Angelene Chan, Singapore



*At River Jordan in February 2020 where I renewed my baptismal vows with Fr Laurence*

There is nothing like a crisis to put your spiritual practice to the test. In these last few weeks, as the world fights tooth and nail to contain a virus outbreak of a scale that has never been experienced in our lifetime, I find myself having to make many swift decisions amid uncertainties; decisions that will have far-reaching effects on the profitability of the group of companies I am entrusted with, and more importantly, on the wellbeing and livelihood of its 1200 employees. I constantly second guess myself: Am I doing enough? Am I doing too much? It is stressful, to say the least.

It is in these days that I came to realise how precious my meditation practice is to me. Twice a day, I am able to pause, shut out the noise and bad news, and withdraw inward. Meditation opens the pressure relief valve of my brain to release the steam, this is the best way I can describe one of the most tangible benefits of meditation. Because the pressure builds up over the course of the day, I find that the second sitting in the evening has become indispensable.

I am a beginner. My practice began in earnest only in 2016 after I attended a leadership course conducted by Father Laurence in Singapore. In January that same year, I was appointed the CEO of a large company. There were a lot of expectations, not least from myself, to do well. Besides the financial side of business, I want to make my colleagues happy and our company the best place to work in. Listening to Fr Laurence convinced me that contemplative leadership is the way to achieve the goals I have set for myself.

The profession I am in, architecture, is a highly demanding and competitive one that requires in-

tense creative energy and mental endurance. The work life of an architect is very hectic and it is very easy to burn out if we are not careful. Meditation started out as a way for me to find balance and clarity. By God's blessings, quite early on in my practice, I discovered an infinitely profound reward – personal communion with God that is deeper than what I had previously experienced.

Using meditation as prayer and as a way to deepen my Catholic identity was not my motivation when I started. But I find that the practice has deepened my faith, and my faith is the inspiration for me to persist in the practice. This became clear when I joined Fr Laurence's Holy Land tour in February. In tracing the steps of Christ, praying and breaking bread with my fellow pilgrims, the shared practice of meditation took us deeper into an inward journey that we were all undertaking. When we looked into each other's eyes, sometimes through tears, we witnessed the Divine in each other and in the physical world around us. Through meditation, we acquired the inner silence to experience God. It is His gift to us.



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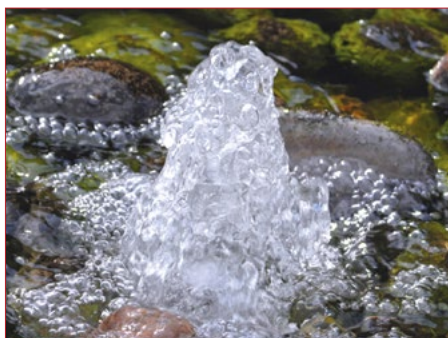
Editor: Leonardo Corrêa  
(leonardo@wccm.org)

Graphic Design: Gerson Laureano  
**Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is 20 June.**



## Resources & Events

### Online retreat



Given that most of our communication and exploration is - for the moment - online, what better time to take part in an online retreat? **Sources of Wisdom, with Laurence Freeman** is structured into one-and-a-half hour sessions: meditation, video of a talk, followed by a time for personal reflection.

Enroll now: <https://rebrand.ly/sowsdm>

### Books

#### Frankie The Still Fox

by Ernie Christie & Mary Hosking

More info: <https://rebrand.ly/fkfox>

When you turn the pages of this book you will learn how to become still and silent. Even when the world around you is so noisy and busy and distracted, you, like Frankie, can choose another way of being and learn to be attentive. This is a book for young ones to discover meditation and make friends with Frankie along the way.

### Audio & CDs



The latest Meditatio CD Series. Listen to or download the tracks: <http://tiny.cc/Med2020A>  
Order a copy of the CD: <http://tiny.cc/WorkSA>

### Meditatio Series goes digital only

The distribution of the Meditatio Talks series in physical CDs will be discontinued starting from the 2020-B Apr-Jun issue. Postal services worldwide have been disrupted or even suspended in some countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A set of talks will continue to be released every quarter. The audio tracks and their corresponding transcripts will be available from this link <http://tiny.cc/MeditatioCDs> and soon also on the WCCM app. A simple step by step guide on how to access that talks will be made available on the WCCM website. It will be possible to listen to the talks from a computer or mobile device and also to download the talks for listening to offline.

### WCCM retreats and events affected by the pandemic crisis

The Monte Oliveto Retreat in July cannot take place but in 2021 the dates are June 26- July 3 (Registration fees may be transferred to next year). For more information contact [monteoliveto@wccm.org](mailto:monteoliveto@wccm.org).

We will soon be announcing a weeklong Bonnevaux online retreat to replace this year's Monte Oliveto Retreat.



The John Main Seminar 2020, in October, in Mexico, was also affected and it will be hosted as an online event. The theme will be the same "One Heart, One Hope - Indigenous Wisdom and the Future of Humanity", as well as the speakers. The keynote speaker is Fr Alex Zatyryka SJ. All new details and registration information will be available soon at the JMS website: [www.johnmainseminar.org](http://www.johnmainseminar.org)

**To order:** contact the resource centre nearest to you. Our centres are listed below



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# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMMUNITY



## Newly Formed Christian Meditation Group

*Front: Amy Gagne, Sister Ann Marshall, Mary Bechberger, Paul Tratnyek.*

*Back: Sister Pat Hogan, Teresa Tratnyek, Sister Jean Moylan, Mary McKee, Liz Martens, Mary Anne Ryan*

**See Page C2**

### SPRING 2020 ISSUE

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## A Renewed Desire to Learn More

The early Christian martyr St. Ignatius of Antioch states in his Letter to the Romans that “there is a living water that murmurs in [us], ‘come to the father’. The Holy Spirit is certainly moving among a newly formed Christian meditation group for Catholic educators in London, Ontario.

Following a professional development workshop in the fall by Paul Tratnyek and a subsequent presentation by Andrew Burns, we are witnessing in the London District Catholic School Board community a renewed desire to learn more about Christian meditation and how to integrate this practice in our lives and in the lives of our students.

Thankfully, this desire was met with an invitation to participate in a small prayer group during Lent and a few of us gratefully accepted. Under the guidance of Sister Ann Marshall, CSJ and Sister Jean Moylan, CSJ our group met for the first time on November 26 at the residence of the Sisters of St. Joseph in North London. We will continue to meet for prayer every Wednesday evening during this Lenten season. Our time together

includes an opportunity to offer intentions, listen to a teaching on meditation by John Main, meditate, and dialogue. We have been blessed with a community to pray with and support us as we continue to learn how to integrate Christian meditation into our daily practice.

In this short time, we have come to appreciate the amount of discipline required to enter into meditation and the “prayer of the heart.” What has strengthened us on this new journey is the reassurance of the community and the encouragement from Sister Ann and Sister Jean. We are challenged weekly to persevere; knowing that in the silence, stillness and simplicity, we encounter God.

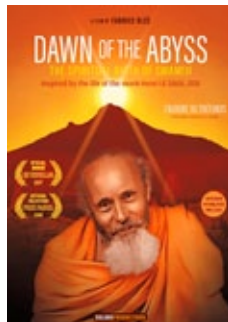
We look forward to our upcoming gatherings and this time of spiritual renewal as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ, in a new way into our lives at Easter.

**Mary Bechberger**  
Curriculum Coordinator of Religious  
and Family Life Education, LDCSB

## Meditators turn out for film on Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux

On January 27 the Christian Meditation group at Emmanuel United Church, under the leadership of group leader Bill Meek, sponsored the showing of the film *Dawn of the Abyss: The Spiritual Birth of Swamiji*. The evening included a meditation period, followed with a discussion by Fabrice Blee, the film’s producer, and professor of theology at St Paul University.

The full one-hour documentary Canadian film *Dawn of the Abyss* presents the spiritual awakening of the life of Henri Le Saux, who was born in France, where he became a Benedictine monk, but then spent half of his life in India. His studied the spiritual riches of Hinduism, and as well in his book “Prayer,” he emphasizes the practice of meditation in the contemplative Christian tradition. He spent his time in India as a wandering sannyasa (holy man) and felt that the Indian sannyasa way of spirituality was similar in some aspects to the tradition practiced by the early Christian desert monks of the fourth century.



In this regard, le Saux once wrote: “The spiritual person is anxious to interweave their whole life of prayer with moments of silence; silence during work and routine occupations of the day, silence above all during meditation, whatever format it may take. The silence will first be silence of the tongue, then silence of useless thoughts and desires, and finally silence of any thought, even of the highest. The last and highest silence is the one which has to be sought as often as possible during times of meditation or contemplation. This silence will be a simple listening to the Spirit within and without.”

The film, in English and French versions, was initially premiered in Canada, Switzerland and France to enthusiastic reviews, as well as other world locations.

**Paul Harris**  
Ottawa, ON



## FROM THE NATIONAL COORDINATOR

# Living With The Weeds

It's planting season in the part of the world where I live. During the early days of the pandemic lockdown when snow still covered the ground outside, my family started from seed growing vegetables and flowers indoors.

Two months later we can now plant the tiny seedlings outside. The days are bright, warm and long. Soaking rains nourish the earth. And the seedlings have more room to grow.

But before long, they will be sharing the earth with other uninvited guests. The weeds will soon compete with the tomatoes, cucumbers and nasturtiums. And the overwhelming challenge begins for the avid gardener.

Days can be spent in the yard or garden doing nothing else then pulling the weeds. Here in Canada the enemy is usually the evil dandelion, especially if a major concern is how the garden looks to passersby. For the self-conscious in us – usually ego-driven – wants to make a good impression to our neighbours. After all a yard dandelion-free is a yard to behold!

Jesus tells a story about weeds and wheat. When the weeds grow alongside the wheat, the workers immediately want to get busy pulling those weeds out from among the wheat. They assume there can be such a thing as a pure existence, one completely free from blemish and corruption. But the landlord calls for restraint. 'Let the weeds and wheat grow together until the harvest.' (Matthew 13:24-30)

When we learn to meditate, we may encounter anxious moments when all manner of repressed

memory, much of it disturbing, may float to the surface of our consciousness. Our fears, our woundedness, our anger and shame may all compete for our attention when we still our bodies and minds in meditation.

Our immediate reaction may be to rid ourselves of impurities in our heart, soul and bodies. Our lives then become a battle of using all of our resources to cleanse our awareness of all these upsetting realities – of pulling up those dreaded dandelions of the heart! We assume a spiritual life of dedicated, faithful and intentional practice in meditation must be free of these internal cacophonies. And it's up to us to do this!

And yet, this is not the message of Christian Meditation. We say there can be no *koinonia* without *kenosis*; that is, there can be no community of love without letting go. Yet, letting go means acceptance not riddance.

In the journey and faithfulness of meditation and saying the mantra, we learn not to resist what emerges. Rather, we practice being present to it. We give permission for the weeds of our hearts to grow alongside the good and the true within us.

During this time of seclusion many of us are discovering what actually matters in our lives. It's difficult to embrace fully what matters most because we have become so accustomed to our distracting ego impulses and reactive ways of being in relationship. When we see these parts of ourselves as competing then we

*Continues on page C5*

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Send submissions to newsletter coordinator Carolyn Boerboom at [newsletter@wccm-canada.ca](mailto:newsletter@wccm-canada.ca).

*échos du silence* and the French version of *Meditatio* are available from Méditation chrétienne du Québec, 105 ch du Richelieu, bureau B, McMasterville, QC J3G 1T5, 450-446-4649. [info@meditationchretienne.ca](mailto:info@meditationchretienne.ca).

Page design and layout: [www.katemcdo.com](http://www.katemcdo.com)

# A Weekend in a Day

The Essential Teaching Weekend (ETW) has been an important program of the World Community to help deepen the understanding and practice of meditation in the Christian tradition. We have held 25 very successful weekends in Canada in residential settings, usually at a conference or retreat centre. In recent years we have found that there are fewer retreat centres available, costs have increased and some people are not able to attend for a whole weekend. Following the John Main Seminar in BC in August an international group met to talk about the program and part of the discussion was about how we might be able to make it more accessible.

I decided we could try a pilot project in Winnipeg to do the weekend's program in one day. Part of the motivation was the realization that as a local community we haven't had much opportunity to get to know one another. For the past several years we have held regular silent retreat days. These have been wonderful and most appreciated. The main drawback is that we don't talk to one another! A workshop style event was definitely called for and the ETW program fit the bill. So we gave it a go on Saturday March 7 from 8:30 am to 8:30 pm.

One of the great advantages of a residential event is the experience of being together in community for an

extended period. The challenge was how to recreate that sense of community in a shorter time. One way is to eat together. We arranged for a caterer to do the meals for us and she did a wonderful job. Another unintended advantage was that the lasagne took longer than expected so we just had to make do with an extra glass of wine or punch. The evening sessions seemed to be quite relaxed – joyful even.

The schedule was tight but we managed to fit in all the important components of the ETW. Evaluations of the day were very positive and although the day was busy it didn't feel rushed. Some would have liked more time to go out for a walk at lunch, or to include a meditation walk. Overall the day was a great success and certainly met the goal of the community getting to know one another.

A residential format would still be my preferred way to deliver this excellent program. It is designed as a weekend event after all. But the one day workshop worked well for us.

One of the participants has written about the weekend on the facing page.

**Phil Barnett  
Winnipeg, MB**



Developing a sense of community



ENJOYABLE TIME OF FELLOWSHIP, FUN AND GOOD FOOD

# Meditation Day



Participants getting to know one another

Having attended a residential Essential Teaching Weekend several years ago, I was curious to know how all the topics could be covered in one day. Twelve hours also sounded a bit daunting! I needn't have worried. The day was most enjoyable.

There were 18 attendees, 8 men and 10 women, representing several meditation groups in the province. The venue was very accommodating, all on one level, with plenty of space for presentations, group break out areas and eating. The teaching talks were well presented, informative and very interesting. We reviewed and learned a lot. One of the highlights for me was the small group discussions. The questions

were thought-provoking and it was interesting to get to know other meditators and to exchange different ideas and experiences. We also meditated morning and afternoon.

Another highlight was the food. It was such a treat to have delicious and nutritious food prepared for both lunch and dinner. Mealtimes also provided times for much discussion, fellowship and fun.

It was a full day but not rushed. I left feeling refreshed and enthusiastic about Christian Meditation and would certainly recommend this format to others.

**Betty Currie**  
Winnipeg, MB

## *Living With the Weeds* continued from page C3

remain stuck in our inner divisions. We continue to fight ourselves.

Yet, as we discover what actually matters we still need to co-exist with all those impulses, pain, and passions emerging from within us. We will learn to live alongside the messy, less-than-ideal mixed-up-ness of our lives. On this journey of learning and practice in meditation, that part of ourselves that bothers us will eventually let go of us in the light of God's unconditional love shining over all of it.

Forgiveness, mercy and love are the blessed fruit of the practice.

We have changed so rapidly and significantly in the past few months to try different ways of meditating together. Whether by phone simply to check-in that we are praying at the same time if not the same place, whether by an online meditation group using Zoom or MeetUp or Google Meets, or whether we have taken a furlough from physical meeting but continue our twice daily meditation at home – we stay on the journey.

And we let things grow as they will. In trust that, in the end, all will be well.

**Martin Malina**  
canadacoordinator@wccm.org



# The gentle kindness and compassion of Squamish Elder Wendy Charbonneau

On my journey from St. John's in Newfoundland and Labrador to Quest University in beautiful Squamish, British Columbia, I experienced anticipatory joy tinged with a trace of anxiety. My late husband had experienced the extreme trauma of war in Vietnam and throughout our marriage he shared vivid stories of the war and his dramatic escape with seven siblings on the deck of a Korean warship.

My husband and I were both physicians, who met and married in Toronto. We shared a passion for human rights and social justice. He was deeply touched by interactions he had as a resident with some patients, who shared their Indigenous knowledge and heritage with him. We were both very hurt to learn of the great suffering endured by missing Indigenous Canadian women and girls and their grieving families.

During an especially dark period of grief and loss, I stopped meditating. I did not stop listening, reading and reflecting on the teachings of contemplatives from both Christian and Buddhist traditions. In 2016, I discovered the website for the Centre for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, C-CARE, founded by Dr. Jim Dotey at Stanford medical school online.

Soon after being diagnosed with breast cancer, requiring intensive treatment in 2017, I took this CCT course online. In this six-step course taught for two hours weekly for eight weeks, one learns to settle the mind, cultivate loving-kindness and compassion for a loved one, for oneself, a sense of our common humanity and a sense of appreciation for others, active compassion practice and an integrated daily compassion cultivation practice. Returning to a

regular meditation practice helped me cope with the miseries of intensive chemotherapy and irradiation.

Arriving in Squamish, I was deeply moved by the beauty of the landscape. Father Laurence, Rev. Bachelard, the Cullens, our musicmakers, leaders and volunteers gifted us with a sacred space.



Squamish Elder Wendy Charbonneau with Fr. Laurence

Dr. Bachelard also gifted me with encouragement on my Compassion Cultivation Training journey. To my delight and relief every aspect of the silent retreat surpassed all my expectations.

At the completion of our retreat, I was enthralled listening to the Squamish Elder Wendy Charbonneau. After two years of intensive study of the new scholarship of gentleness, kindness and compassion, it is abundantly clear to me that Elder Wendy and the members of the World Community of Christian Meditation embody the qualities of

gentle kindness and compassion that I wish to cultivate and share. I could not believe my good fortune, when I was invited to share a car ride to Vancouver with Wendy and Leo Cullen and thus to have the honor to meet her family members and listen to more wonderful stories.

Since my return, I have begun to learn of the extraordinary collaboration between Elder Charbonneau and Elizabeth Carmack, the founder of the Cambridge Music Conference: <http://www.cambridgemusicconference.org/migration/wendy-charbonneau.html>. I feel honoured to have made these extraordinary connections and welcome further connections and collaboration moving forward.

**Dr. Frances Scully**

# Sharing the Gift of Meditation Worldwide

Our Friends Program provides vital annual financial support to the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) towards sharing the gift of meditation worldwide. This financial support is critical to all of our activities and especially helps in teaching and nurturing the practice in both established and emerging communities, particularly those poor and marginalized. Tax receipts will be issued for donations over \$25.

**Where does the money go?** To meditate costs nothing but to create materials, to travel, and teach meditation in countries near and far costs money.

The Friends Program enables Fr. Laurence to offer retreats, talks and presentations in emerging countries, when financial sponsorship is unavailable from local sources.

The funding supports the **School of Meditation**, a worldwide organization that trains meditation teachers and provides the resources to support and nurture meditators globally. **Meditatio** is the outreach of the community consisting of programs, publications and events that brings the fruits and benefits of meditation to the wider world. It seeks to bring universal spiritual wisdom and values to bear upon a world in crisis; from politics to medicine, church, science and the economy. Through seminars, media and the formation of young contemplatives in the world, it takes meditation to the worlds of business, mental health, addiction, education, environment, prisons and interfaith dialogue.

The Friends Program also funds distribution of regular resource materials including this quarterly

WCCM Newsletter to thousands of meditators in more than 120 countries worldwide. The Program supports translation of resource materials into many languages to support our local community and reach out to the world community. It also funds publication of books and audio/video resources which may not be commercially viable but are necessary.

The fastest growing segment of meditators is children. In over 60 countries, more than 100,000 children now practice meditation. A whole generation of meditators is emerging who could potentially change the world!

**How can I become a friend?** You can make a donation to the Friends Program and introduce the program to others in your meditation group. No gift is too small. All gifts are much appreciated and will have a direct impact on sustaining our community's work and mission.

Donations can be made by cheque, by credit card, or on line through CanadaHelps: The Canadian Christian Meditation Community – Friends Program in support of the WCCM International Office.

As Father Laurence has said, “No monetary value can be linked to meditation. It is freely given and freely shared, like the gospel, and this is why the teaching of meditation is, for us, a form of evangelization. Because of this we are aware how precious the gift is. And that is precisely why we feel the urge to share it with others and be part of the communion of meditators across the globe.”

**In peace,**  
**Ibolya Agoston,**  
**Coordinator, CCMC Friends Program**

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# Peaceful Twilight Retreat

On November 21 about 30 meditators gathered at St. Elizabeth Roman Catholic Church, Ottawa, to share a peaceful night with readings from the gospel and John Main, talks, meditation and song.

In one of his talks, Fr. Martin Ndyanabo, Pastor at St. Elizabeth's, spoke about the approach needed when something is lost. He told us not to fixate on the fact that it is lost but to forget about it and carry on because it will turn up at some point later. For some of us, this may be very hard to do, however, the message is to be patient because we don't always get what we want the moment we want it. Not only that but to have confidence, trust and faith that it will turn up. Yes, patience, trust and faith are key in contemplative prayer. We must not give up during the time of meditation, just keep returning to the sacred word.

A highlight of the retreat featured the Lord's prayer, 'Abwoon d'bwashmaya', sung in the original Aramaic. It translates as shown above.

In the introduction of Fr. Martin we learned that he was born in Uganda and that his second name, 'Kirabo

Kya Maria', meant "The gift of Mary." This made me wonder about Mary and her connection to contemplation.

Later, I researched and found the answer in Paul Harris' book *Thirty Questions and Answers about Christian Meditation*. To the question of what is the role of Mary on the contemplative journey, he points out that John Main saw her as a model and mother of the contemplative life because she is described in the gospel as a person of prayer. Her interiority and other-centredness exemplified poverty of spirit, the heart of our Christian Meditation practice.

In addition, in 1999, at the "Practising Dying" retreat, in Toronto, Fr Laurence gave the talk entitled "Mary as a Model of Prayer." He said that in the Gospel of Luke, Mary's contemplative journey, like ours, has a beginning and a goal at the end but it is not a straight line. She shows us the fidelity, courage, openness and grit to persevere.

**Theresa Ziebell**  
Ottawa, ON

## DONATE ONLINE

Donations can be made online through [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org) and [www.wccm-canada.ca](http://www.wccm-canada.ca)

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