



# WCCM

*Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation*

Registered Charity No. 1182213

## *Does meditation make a difference?*

IN HIS *UKRAINE JOURNAL*, WRITTEN DURING HIS VISIT TO LVIV, LAURENCE FREEMAN SUGGESTS IT DOES AND DESCRIBES WHAT IT FEELS LIKE WHEN CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION UNITE



*Meditation in Lviv during a session led by Laurence Freeman (Photo: Maria & Albert Zakharovy/WCCM Ukraine)*

***This issue***

***6 News***

When WCCM Ukraine met the worldwide community

***II In Focus***

The personal journey of Sérgio Peixoto Junior, National Coordinator for Brazil

***12 Events***

Young Adults Retreat at Bonnevaux and the John Main Seminar 2022

## Dear Friends

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

After Holy Week and a conversation with Maria and Albert Zakharov, I decided to visit our meditators in Lviv to show our solidarity with Ukraine during these dark times. Different kinds of sessions, including interfaith conversations, were organised by Maria with local meditators and a local monastery. Many around the world joined online for a day's teaching on meditation, and our global Sunday Contemplative Eucharist, usually broadcast from the Barn at Bonnevaux, was celebrated from Lviv.

These days were a teaching for me. For many others worldwide, they opened an experience of communion between a local community and a global community. And so, in a small way, these days became a sign of the unity that underpins the peace we are all seeking, and a teaching in itself of the role meditation can play in building this unity beyond division. This is why, instead of a regular newsletter, I offer my own journal kept during those days.

### Arriving

29 April

We have just entered Ukraine. I am with Krzysztof, a member of the WCCM Guiding Board, director of a hospital in Poznan, and our brave driver in his newly-acquired second-hand Alfa Romeo, and Malwina Okrzesik, WCCM National Co-ordinator for Poland. A young Ukrainian woman who fled her home a few weeks ago with her children is catching a ride with us to visit her family in Lviv and bring them some supplies.

What an immense difference it is crossing a frontier, an abstract political line dawn on a map to define earthly identities. And it's a heavy task getting from Poland to Ukraine. Thinking we are done with all the paperwork, we are then sent back to the first border post on the Ukraine side. A vital slip of paper we had been given lacks a red stamp. We are not told what that means or how to get the stamp.



*Military check posts at the arrival in Lviv*

Those with childhood memories of the Communist era, or readers of Kafka, recall the vague feeling of guilt and dread created by bureaucracy when it accuses you of failing and threatens sanctions but does not tell you how or why to get it right. Somehow, we get a red stamp on the paper.

This is a part of the world where humour has long been a weapon as well as a consolation for the impact of a dehumanising system. After the end of the Soviet empire, Ukraine freed itself from that, but its cold cruelty is being felt again as a real threat to its national survival.

It is physically darker here too, with fewer and weaker streetlights; roadblocks with soldiers hunched over night fires, keeping warm and checking for Russian saboteurs who sneak into cities to wreck whatever they can and paint guiding signals for their aircraft to strike.

Suddenly a different world. What we have been reading about in the news now becomes first-hand impressions, strange and familiar and immediate.

It feels as if there's been a terrible mistake. A movie has leaked into real life. But it hasn't. Here, for now and for however long, this is what is real. A long or 'frozen' war is a fearful prospect. It is like wak-

ing from a dream and becoming aware of the real things around you that a few moments before filled your dreamworld. 'Better believe it,' it whispers maliciously, 'I am for real.' Lives have been turned upside down, inside out, in a matter of days and weeks. Yet even with death around, and the fear of death and the destruction of the familiar, life goes on. Doesn't it always, at least for others?

A roadside billboard with cartoon characters looms up in the dark, advertising a children's theme park. A funny face says, 'Adventures Await You!' We laugh but the cartoon figure lingers like the memory of a nightmare. Yesterday, in time to benefit my understanding now, I learned that the 'mare' part of nightmare is not a horse but an Old English word meaning a dark demon, an incubus that lies upon the breast of sleepers and suffocates them.

Danger is uncannily closer, and I feel it on my skin. Under threat that gets under the skin. It is not the visible signs of a world under threat that creep over the skin but the tickle of a dark non-negotiable dread and the horror that it could wreak. A society, a family which lives in fear cannot live long without suffering harm. Fear eventually suffocates hope. Then, a feeling of anger and resentment: 'Whoever has the

right to deliberately inflict this on others? Can they possibly know what they are doing?

A black American congressman once said of the white supremacist racists that he hoped they could 'lay down the burden of their hatred'. This insight already contains forgiveness and wants only to re-establish normal human relationships.

I naively feel outraged and personally hurt by this senseless war. It reminds me of when my pocket was picked and my phone stolen on a crowded train in London. Who has the right to steal? Why not ask and, if refused, maybe ask in another way? Who dares to turn the ordinary problems of life - that now one looks back on with nostalgia - into seriously sinister fears and matters of life and death? Who dares to desecrate the holiness of the minute particulars through which each of us lives, grows and finds others to share life with?

Darkly, on the road to Lviv, as we weave between military check posts, there is a brief respite and consolation - if that is the right word - let's say a healing consequence, for the nightmare inflicted on this country maliciously. Like any other society, it was dealing with its problems and now it is fighting for its survival. The members of our little group in the car communicate honestly about many things in our lives, opened to each other by this shared nightmare. In the silent spaces between our exchanges, some meditate. These are sweet silences that renew our minds as the chocolate and fruit nourished our bodies.

We lost time at the frontier and arrive at the hotel only minutes before the curfew. The Poles remember this from their childhood, recollecting that they called it the 'police hour'. The young receptionist is made nervous by our late arrival. He is tense but tries to serve us professionally.

Doesn't life always have something unexpected to teach, even when it becomes crazy and turns upside down? Suddenly, as he gives us the keys to our rooms, air raid



Session in Lviv, the coming together of a local and a global community (Photo: WCCM Ukraine)

sirens sound. We are alarmed and then notice he is much less so. He takes us to the basement and shows us where to go. 'If you want,' he says, 'you don't have to.' The whining of the sirens is like an intrusive stranger interrupting a conversation. He tells us they sound when the Ukrainian radars pick up any objects they don't recognise. They may be missiles, and there have been several recently, but there have been no large airstrikes in Lviv for some time. Seeing some of our group look anxious, I ask the clerk if he feels nervous when they go off. 'I did at first,' he said, 'but now not so much.'

We go to bed. Perchance to dream.

### Talking and Meditating

30 April

A lovely spring morning in Lviv. The plum trees are in fresh bloom, some pure white, others in playful pink. The trees line the roads within the Łyczakowski Polish cemetery, founded in the 18th century, filled with a beautiful art of death that one can only take so much of. It is one of sights of Lviv. As it is near our hotel, I took an early morning walk there in the sunshine. It portrays civilised dignity, pride in human achievement even in the face of death. I

suppose not many are still alive to mourn for those buried there. It is now a communal, tribal place. It is death without tears.

But, just outside the walls of the famous cemetery, there is another memorial of death: a plain square field with newly dug graves recently set aside for the burial of soldiers from Lviv who have been killed in Eastern Ukraine. Here there are real tears and fresh mourning. There are no grand mausoleums or operatic sculptures, just the real thing, painfully new and raw human wounds. Small groups of family and friends, torn from those they loved who had their young lives before them, stand or kneel by the fresh graves. Wondering 'why?'

Lviv, close to the EU border, has been spared the vicious laying waste of the eastern cities and the deliberate targeting of civilians in Mariupol and the Donbas region. Before we meditated today with people who gathered from the city and other parts of the country for our seminar, we looked at photos of the brutal, decivilizing realities of war inflicted on people's bodies and homes and places of social gathering. Life seems to be going ahead fairly normally in Lviv, but everywhere on streets and in conversations there are sharp reminders of what is happening in

the south and east. And despite the relative normality, life there is fear. No one is unaware of what could happen to this, one of the oldest and loveliest cities of Europe. Soldiers check the identities of young men sitting in the sunshine, sandbags are packed around buildings and fountains and statues of the city's heritage. Many of those I meet have come as refugees from the other half of the country, displaced and uncertain of their future.

Fr Anastasy is a young priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with two young children. He has been teaching meditation for some time and spoke to us of his life in Kherson during the last two months of war before he came here to work in a village church run by a friend. He described the courage of the unarmed men of Kherson who faced up to soldiers on the streets and told them to go home. Russian soldiers have been captured by the defending army and appear in widely circulated interviews that help the Ukrainians to avoid hating them as individuals. As the invasion started, the recruits were told they were coming on training exercises. Soon they found themselves attacking a people they are related to by generations of marriage, language and culture. Their captors help the prisoners of war to call their mothers and say if they – that is to say only their mothers – can come here to collect their sons, they will be allowed to go home.

Most Russians, however, have swallowed the story that Putin is defending Russia against the fascist dictatorship of Ukraine. This news about fake news adds to the surreal quality of the time. In reality – whatever that is - since the 2014 revolution, the country has begun to flourish, funding new public spaces in cities, better roads, streetlights and parks, and a growing sense of the dignity of personal citizenship is unfolding. They had been feeling a new wave of confidence and, for the first time, elected a leader by a solid majority.

And they are already talking about the

reconstruction of their shattered country and better ways of tackling public corruption. Maybe it is precipitate, but it is a lusty hope. The serious interest in meditation and interfaith connections among the younger people at today's seminar feels as if it is driving this rising tide of social hope and resilience. The future, as always, is uncertain. But something deep within the heart of this diverse people of twenty language groups and enrichingly diverse ethnicities has awakened a stronger sense of unity and purpose, a spiritual hunger.

It should be not only a responsibility but also a privilege for the whole world to protect, nurture and support these people. Even while mindless destruction is being inflicted on one side of the country, on the other a deep and painful compassion has been woven into trying to keep ordinary life going for the sake of the whole country. What hope lures one now, even while violence rages, could be an experiment not just in the reconstructing but in the re-imagining of society.

Maria and Albert tell me of two young men who drove across the country to escape the chaos. When they arrived in the safety of Lviv, they underwent a change. For some weeks, they have been driving to and from between Lviv and their home city, in real danger, ferrying medical supplies and food.

The darkness of a dark night is only the inability yet to see how bright is the light of hope. That is what many venture to hope is happening.

### **Uniting and Leaving**

1-2 May

For the online contemplative Eucharist today from Lviv, there were fewer than at yesterday's event, but a common faith and the mystical technology united the Ukrainian community with its global family.

Yesterday, many of the questions had an interfaith flavour – a Buddhist asking, 'how do you explain why God allows this war and these atrocities to happen?', or an

Orthodox priest with a perspective gained from seven years as a Hare Krishna monk. Today we united, almost beyond the realm of forms, in a sign of universal agape excluding no one, taking us, like meditation, above the lines that politics and religions draw between people. Touching in the tangible symbol of unity of the Eucharist, opposing poles combine. The answers to yesterday's questions have no closure. But bread, wine, scripture and silence, they unite in a way that leave the questions open and that satisfies and pacifies the mind ever searching for answers.

After the Mass, we drove across the city through checkpoints, passing patriotic billboards targeting and reassuring, firstly, young military volunteers but also the civilian population. Images of youth, strength, weaponed determination and steely confidence stare at us in strong eye contact. But I can't see the testosterone of violence usually associated with this kind of propaganda. People share a self-awareness that they are fighting heroically but also reluctantly. They are hard fighters but motivated by love of country not by hatred of aggressive outsiders. Of course, I am biased - can one not take sides here? Yet war, like other confrontations with the harsh, unwelcome sufferings of life, brutally exposes the actual values we live by, not the propaganda we mouth. Such self-knowledge comes at a high price.

At dinner with Albert and Maria last night, I saw how realistic they are about Ukraine's social faults and corruption before the war. Forced to compare the Ukrainian and Russian psyches, however, they had no doubt that they were part of a real democracy even if a far from perfect one. A few years ago, the popular 'revolution of dignity' as it called itself, toppled a government servile to Russia and reset the failing democracy. It led to an election by 70% of the population of an actor with no political background who has since been cast by events in the role of a Ukrainian Churchill. Militarily and politically, what is outstand-

ing about Volodymyr Zelenskyy is not a leader cult manipulated by propaganda and repression, as it is in Russia, but the Ukrainians' collective ability to unite beyond their many differences reflected in their multi-linguism and their Cossack gift for rapid, flexible self-organisation.

When their darkest hour is over, they may discover themselves to have become a teacher of the nations, an instructive example of living democracy to those societies who in their unhappy complacency and scepticism about meaning have lost faith in themselves.

Maria and Albert have a small apartment. They share a large untidy garden with a refugee couple from Kiev who live downstairs. Their apartment is materially poor but rich in love, quietly filled with the energetic presence of their daily meditation and their two cats, one of them a ginger called Patrick. It is the marital home of two contemplatives, not overlaid with religious symbols, but tingling with spiritual life. In one corner their computer and equipment for graphic design shows how they make their livelihood. Since the war, their time is mostly occupied with helping refugees. Albert now makes a living by delivering food on a motorbike. They are active in many of the voluntary organisations that have sprung up in recent years, especially since the war. With the help of fellow meditators, they are setting up a foundation to help heal those mentally traumatised by the war, using an approach that integrates the spiritual dimension of healing through the practice of meditation.

This afternoon, we visited a new Benedictine community of sisters and monks, built beside a busy road and industrial park, an unlovely location. In religious forms it is quite traditional, yet open-minded and eager to share the contemplative path with others.

After a talk on meditation to local people in the church, and in an unacted conclusion to the visit, I presided with

cope and incense at solemn vespers. Afterwards, they give us a tour of the new buildings and introduced us to some of the hundred refugees from eastern Ukraine they have taken in and lovingly share the monastery with. Children ride bikes and play around the cloister where food, toys and clothing donated by Caritas are stored, and nuns in full black habits kindly watch and care over them

nearly half a million Jews and gypsies. At the end of its nightmarish existence, it was ploughed over and disguised as a farm. But after the war, the truth was restored and today, it is a sombre shrine. Today, the truth is laid open, however painful and shameful it is. The unimaginable desecration of life and humanity is remembered as an indictment of the worst of humanity as this war against



Maria with a Benedictine sister in a local monastery which is receiving refugees

while also leaving them to themselves. I remembered St Benedict's teaching on welcoming guests to the monastery as Christ himself. Like so many Polish families and many homes throughout Europe, the refugees of the war have found this.

This seemed a moving symbol with which to conclude my visit and a good way of describing the life-giving, hope-filled and transformative aspects to the cruel disruptions occasioned by this war that should not be happening.

The anonymous author of life, however, has a way of re-writing endings. After hitting a pothole on the road back to Poland, we had a puncture. Just over the Polish-Ukraine border, back in the safety of the EU, we stopped at a garage in the small town of Belzec. Between the Spring of 1942 and 1943, it was a Nazi killing centre which received and murdered

Ukraine will be one day.

The atrocities of Belzec, Mariupol, Kherson, Kyiv and Bucha should never have happened. But they did. They teach us how human beings can be fascinated by evil as well as by God. And unless our heart is filled with the love of God, we are always in danger of collapsing into this dark denial of our true nature and of the sacred meaning of all human relationships.

"We are in the middle of a war, and this is the time to speak of meditation," as Maria and Albert said. They showed me simply and powerfully during these days what this means.

With much love,

# News

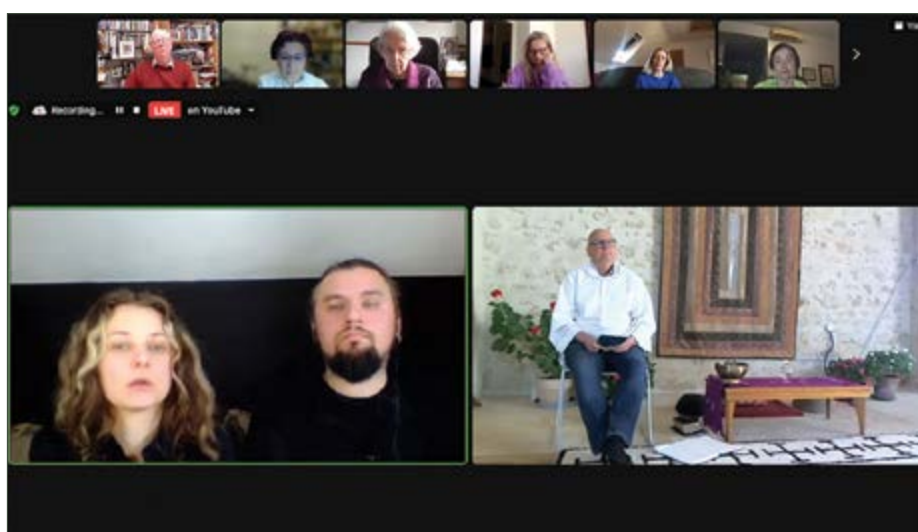
## In times of war... finding peace in our own hearts

ONLINE SESSION DEMONSTRATING UNITY AND SOLIDARITY WITH OUR FELLOW UKRAINIANS

The invasion of Ukraine on 24 February shocked the world and especially Europe. Since then, our community around the world has been united in solidarity with Ukraine and with all those suffering as a result of this war. Oblates and WCCM National Coordinators for Ukraine, Maria and Albert Zacharovy, are a source of inspiration for us in demonstrating the intimate link between contemplation and action, and the essential need for unified consciousness, the WCCM theme for 2022.

Maria and Albert, based in Lviv, some 70 kilometres from the Polish border, are helping refugees from all over Ukraine while continuing to keep the meditation community alive and active, notably through online meditation sessions. On 26 March, one month after the start of the invasion, they organised an online day event for Ukrainian and Russian meditators and the global community entitled "Peace in the Heart, Peace in the World". The event was attended by more than a thousand members of the WCCM around the world, and included the participation of Herman Van Rompuy, President Emeritus of the European Council.

Maria opened the session by sharing the impact of the war and emphasising how meditation represents a source of life and hope: "The war clearly raises the question that we were previously able to ignore in our state of distraction and slumber, as sometimes happens in meditation a moment before we notice that we are no longer meditating. This is the question that came to the



Maria and Albert speaking from Lviv and Fr Laurence from Bonnevaux

fore after meditation at the meeting of the Lviv, group: where is unity in this world of conflict? This in turn leads to another question, more familiar to our ears: where is God in a world of the Holocaust and the siege of Mariupol? In the Gospel, the lawyer asks Jesus the same thing: "Who is my neighbour? Where is he? Where can I look for him so that I can deal with him according to the law?" And Jesus gives an answer that is at once so simple and so difficult for us: "Become what you seek and strive for. Become this neighbour yourself." Speaking from the Barn at Bonnevaux, Fr Laurence offered words of support and compassion: "Thank you, Maria and Albert. Thank you all. As you were speaking, I was thinking of the Bhagavad Gita, one of the world's great religious scriptures and wisdom texts. Sometimes we forget that this dialogue in the teaching takes place on the field of battle. Some

of the great contemporary movements in history have been born in times of great social distress. And this reminds us of what you conveyed in your words, that the peace that we would like in the world must first be found in our hearts. I want to thank you for what you have shared, and for the authority of love and the wisdom of insight that you have shared with us. It makes me feel very proud to belong to this community, to have heard what you have said in this situation." After a period of meditation, Herman Van Rompuy spoke, reminding us that meditation connects us all without borders: "Meditating makes us strong and open. There is no place for hatred but only for determination and steadfastness to stand up and work for the good. We have no personal enemies but are the enemies of evil and ethical emptiness. We are united in defending

# News

the good, all that we live for and those whom we live for. That is the meaning of our existence on earth. I repeat, dear Maria and Albert and all your fellow meditators, you are not alone.”

In conclusion, Fr Laurence invited meditators from the worldwide community to say a few words to Maria and Albert. The messages of caring and support that came from Hong Kong, Ven-

ezuela, Ireland, South Africa and Fiji provided a fitting closure to the gathering of a true global family in union with one of its members undergoing great suffering.

## Meditation during dark times: the inner light must continue to shine in you

BY MARIA & ALBERT ZAKHAROVY, UKRAINE NATIONAL COORDINATORS

During this difficult time of war, our community’s support reminds us that we can only be strong when we connect with others. The war has shown us this is true, both on the scale of spiritual practice and on the level of international politics. John Main taught us that meditation creates community, and now we are watching this meditative community complete the cycle - creating Unifying Consciousness.

How do we meditate during war? Of course, meditation is not easy to practise during times of great stress. However, as experience shows, if you are able to overcome dark emotions or powerlessness, devoting time to meditation, your vision of what is happening gradually begins to change. The inner light, lost in the darkness of the hearts of Russian soldiers, must continue to shine in you. This can’t stop the war but it helps us focus on the suffering of others and on doing whatever is necessary to ease it. It also helps us to remember the deep place within us that cannot die and that connects us to everyone else - to those who suffer because of war, and even to those who destroy the divine network of unity by robbing, raping, and killing the innocent. As we continue to meditate today, we find the treasure of God’s presence in everyday life. Our everyday life may be terrible,

but this does not change the fact that it continues to be a reality. We need to accept this reality and, having accepted it, transform it from within.

Meditation does not change external reality; it changes us from within. And this can be seen from the way we begin to relate to others – rather than focus on who can be considered a neighbour to us, we ourselves become a neighbour for others. The help that meditators from various national communities are now giving us is the fruit of our meditation together. Your kind words give us strength to continue to live, protect our country, and meditate. Your donations become the embodiment of divine compassion and mercy which gives hope to people fleeing the war and suffering its effects. Thanks to your generosity, exemplified in the activities of our community, we were able to launch the actions of the “WCCM

Fund to Help Ukrainian Refugees”. Since March 26, we have been using these funds to buy food and medicine for refugees stranded in Lviv and for Ukrainian meditators stranded in the Russian occupation zone. We are also buying food and medicine each week for the Lviv Benedictine abbey where a small community of monks and nuns is providing shelter to more than 100 refugees, many of whom have lost their loved ones and their homes. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our meditation experience in the simple language of compassion and mutual aid.



**ONLINE:**  
WATCH THE RECORDINGS OF THE RECENT ONLINE EVENTS WITH WCCM UKRAINE AND LEARN HOW TO HELP THE FUND FOR REFUGEES: [HTTP://TINY.CC/WCCMUKRH](http://tiny.cc/wccmukrh)

## Outreach

# Emerging from Trauma: Teaching Meditation to Children, an upcoming webinar

Meditatio's third annual webinar for Meditation in Schools will take place on June 24, 2022 from 1:00 – 3:30 p.m. UK time. The webinar is entitled, "Emerging from Trauma: Teaching Meditation to Children"

Today many children and youth are experiencing adverse conditions through violence, war, separation, and the covid pandemic. Dr. Tamara Salmen from Venezuela will be addressing the physical and emotional health needs she experiences with children in her practice as a pediatrician and in her outreach. She is a member of the Central Board of Directors of the Venezuelan Society of Childcare and Pediatrics, and National Coordinator of the WCCM in Venezuela. Dr. Salmen will be looking at what meditation can do for children to help them through trauma. More information for registration will be coming soon.

A new flyer for meditation in schools has been produced by Meditatio. It describes what meditation has to offer to



children and youth in schools and how the WCCM can help bring meditation into schools. It will be introduced at the webinar.

Along with the flyer, a new booklet has been produced by Meditatio which will be launched online on Thursday 30 June from 8pm UK time. It offers international guidelines for the standardization of programs for meditation in schools. Our hope is that these guidelines will inspire and encourage WCCM leaders teaching

meditation to children and adolescents to develop their own national standard program in collaboration with their WCCM National Council and that they can be shared by all those working in the field.

**For more information** about the webinar and Meditation in Schools outreach please contact [meditatio@wccm.org](mailto:meditatio@wccm.org) and visit: <https://wccm.org/outreach-areas/children-and-meditation/>

## The Joy of Encounter - a Meditatio retreat to be held on 21 and 22 June 2022 at Ampleforth Abbey, U.K.



With Terry Doyle and friends

Welcome to a Meditatio retreat with a difference! Please join us to experience the joy of sharing time with people from the margins of society, listening to people who have experienced addiction and mental health problems or homelessness or are fleeing persecution.

Come and meditate, drum, sing, walk, eat and share together in the tranquil beauty of Ampleforth Abbey

and Retreat Centre.

This 2-day Joy of Encounter Retreat will help us all come to discover our common humanity in spite of different backgrounds and to experience what John Main said- that "Meditation creates Community".

There are limited places available so please book now by visiting <https://wccm.org/events/joyofencounter/> or contact Kate at [meditatio@wccm.org](mailto:meditatio@wccm.org)



# Outreach

## The Young Council's first steps

THE NEW GROUP MET WITH FR LAURENCE ONLINE IN EARLY MARCH

BY TAYNĀ MALASPINA

On March 11, we held the first meeting of the WCCM Young People's Council. The Council was born with the objective of bringing the community closer to the young adult public and helping WCCM build actions and initiatives aimed at this public.

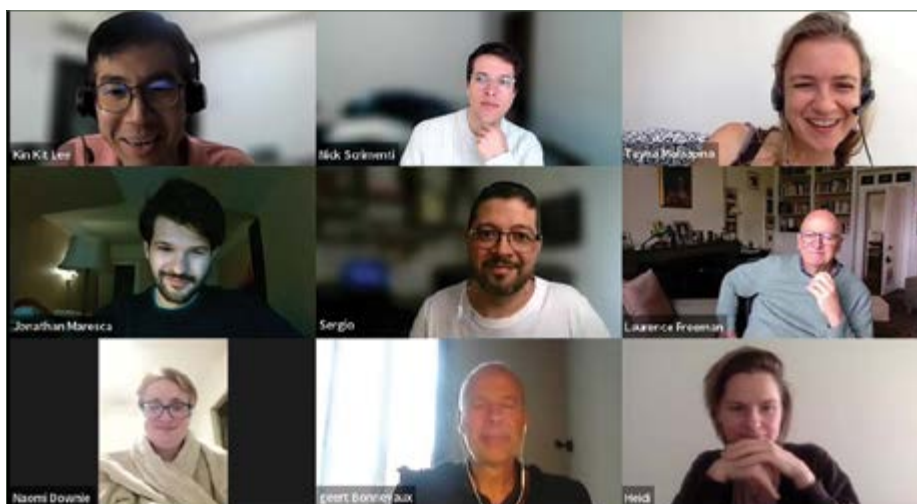
The Council is represented by young people from different areas of the world: Taynā Malaspina (Brazil), Heidi Ector (Belgium), Kit Lee (Singapore), Naomi Downie (Australia), Nick Scrimenti (USA), Jonathan Maresca (USA) and Sergio Peixoto Jr (Brazil). A representative from Argentina will be joining the board in the future.

At the meeting, Father Laurence spoke about the importance of this initiative in the current context, and each participant brought ideas about new projects for the community in addition to the initiatives that have already been presented, such as:

- Meditation and Study Group for Young People
- Meditation Project for Young People in Situations of Social Vulnerability
- Meditation in Universities
- Young People Page Website and Platform
- WCCM Young People Retreat (more on page 12)

The meeting was inspired by the wisdom of St. Benedict that reminds us of the importance of intergenerational dialogue in building our community:

*"As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course. The reason why we have said all should be called for counsel is*



*that the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger. The brothers, for their part, are to express their opinions with all humility, and not presume to defend their own views obstinately. The decision is rather the abbot's to make, so that when he has determined what is more prudent, all may obey."*

(Chapter 3: Summoning the Brothers for Counsel/ Holy Rule of St. Benedict)

WCCM knows how much the inspiration, sensitivity and creativity of young people are called for in this difficult time. Throughout the year, the board will meet to

discuss the progress of the various projects and the need for new initiatives.

The first step has been taken, and we are fully aware of how important this project is for both sides. On the one hand, WCCM recognizes that connecting with this audience is vital for us to learn and grow as a community. On the other hand, in a world marked by distractions, stress, burnout, wars and a lack of unified consciousness, young people have never been in greater need of an opportunity to embark on a contemplative path.

### New Visions for Today's Leaders

**An in-person retreat: 1-4 September, Kloster Fischingen, Switzerland**

The programme will include experiential workshops and meditation.

What is the retreat about? Meditation, connection, inspiring talks and experiential workshops. Speakers include: Irene Albrecht, Angelika von der Assen, Laurence Freeman & Christian Kobler.



More information: <https://wccmretreat.ch/>

# Outreach

## WCCM Trinidad’s New Ministry in Prisons

BY SANDEE BENGOCHEA, TRINIDAD NATIONAL COORDINATOR

My first experience of Prison Ministry was in St Vincent and the Grenadines four years ago. Our WCCM Caribbean team was there to introduce meditation, and Bishop County and the prison chaplain invited me to teach in the prisons.

It was one of the most moving experiences of my life. There were at least 40 prisoners present in the hall. There was no seating for them and so those of us present decided that we would also stand to meditate. At the end, many of the men were in tears. However, the most awesome thing was that when the guards came to take them away because our allotted time was up, the officer in charge, who had stayed in the room, stopped them and allowed us to finish our session, including answering questions afterwards. Many of the inmates asked us to continue to pray for them. It was a sacred moment.

Four years later and following two years of negotiations by our Caribbean

Coordinator, Sr Ruth, during waves of the pandemic and push backs because of the challenges of ‘live’ sessions, faulty internet connections, etc., we finally got the green light to start.

On Wednesday February 2nd, 2022, we had our first online meditation with 6 Prisons in Trinidad. The group included inmates from the Maximum-Security Prison, The Remand Yard, as well as the Women’s Prison, the Youth Prison, the Royal Gaol, and Carrera Island Prison. We had approximately 70 inmates and their officers present, and for many this was their first introduction to meditation.

Once again, the experience was overwhelming. There are times when you realize that God just wants you to say yes, and then He takes over. Many of the participants shared that they had experienced moments of peace during the meditation. We were even asked to stay on and repeat the session with some inmates who were late because the prisoner officer thought it



would benefit them.

We have a schedule to practice with them once a fortnight, and we are grateful to be able to share the gift of meditation with our brothers and sisters so that they can experience a piece of heaven in spite of their unfortunate circumstances.

### In the Stillness of Time – Talks for Prisoners

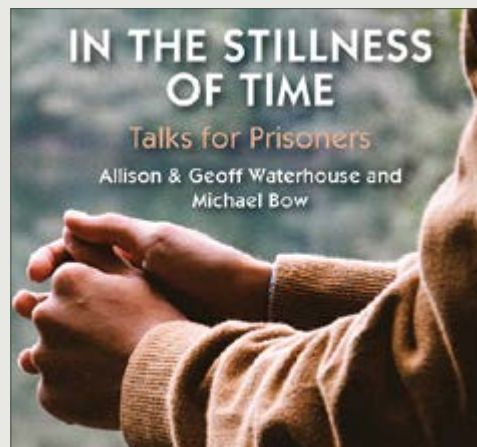
By Allison and Geoff Waterhouse and Michael Bow

These clear, challenging talks are specifically designed to inspire prisoners to develop a regular meditation practice. They can be used for personal times of meditation in-cell or at a group meditation. They are also appropriate for use at any meditation group.

The authors have for many years been leading meditation groups in prison and Geoff Waterhouse is currently the WCCM UK Prison Coordinator.

Available from WCCM’s online store:

<https://mediomedia.com>



*In Focus*

## Sérgio Peixoto Junior, Brazil

NEW BRAZILIAN NATIONAL COORDINATOR



Recently, I was watching the evening news to get the latest updates on the pandemic in Brazil. My five-year-old daughter, sitting next to me, suddenly said, "I know why Jesus sent the coronavirus to the children." It wasn't the first time she surprised me with her words. "What do you mean, dear?", I asked while turning off the TV. "When children do ugly things, Jesus gets very angry and loses control, so he sends the coronavirus so the kids don't do it anymore."

"Honey, Jesus loves all people, especially children." So, I told her the story of how Jesus told his friends to allow the children to stay close to him and that in order to be truly happy, we need to learn to be like them. And, gaining her

attention and curiosity: "He also told us to love each other and take care of each other and, before leaving his friends, he said that we can always find his love in our hearts. For that we need to be very still." She concluded excitedly: "That's why you meditate! To listen to your heart!" "That's right, let's meditate a little?", I risked. "No, now I want to watch a cartoon."

The daily practice has been for me a source of support, maturity, peace and joy. Perhaps my answer would have been different had I not learned from the experience of meditation. I first heard about Christian meditation through my friend Carlos Siqueira when I was 20 years old, although at that time it did not strike a chord with me. The "I" I was then thought it wasn't meant to meditate.

In 2008, when I was 30, the unexpected break-up of a relationship and the birth of my first niece made me question my perception of identity and direction. Events such as these can open up a great space on our inner horizon, shaking our certainties and plans. A sense of loss of meaning arose, and the inner division I had been feeling for some time became much sharper and less bearable.

I don't remember exactly how I came to the decision to try the yoga classes led by my friend Carlos, now an experienced

teacher. What I remember very well is the clear feeling that my body "spoke" to me during the initial asanas, rather like when we meet an old friend with whom we had lost contact. "Hi, how long has it been, huh?! Remember me and how we used to enjoy life together?", I heard from the sole of my own foot staring at me. And I recollect the peace that resulted from this reconnection.

After a few weeks, I accepted the invitation to join the weekly meditation group, also led by Carlos in the same space. A few years later, I was practicing meditation regularly and continuing to participate in the weekly group, always finding inspiration in the teachings of John Main and Laurence Freeman whom my wife, pregnant at the time, and I finally met in 2015 at a retreat near São Paulo.

In the meantime, my friend and teacher asked me to lead the group on a few occasions and encouraged me by his example to delve deeper into the practice. In the past few years, prior to the pandemic, we have conducted five silent retreats and a number of talks, and started a second group in our area. I am very grateful to him for sharing the gift of meditation and for continuing to teach me by his example, dedication, wisdom, and patience (and some justified prods).



WCCM Newsletter is published four times a year by the International Office of The World Community for Christian Meditation, St Marks, Myddelton Square London EC1R 1XX, London, UK.  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7278 2070

Editor: Leonardo Corrêa  
(leonardo@wccm.org)

Graphic Design: Gerson Laureano

**Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 10 July.**

## Events

### Retreats & Seminars

#### One in Mind One in Heart – A Meditation and Lifestyle Retreat for Young Adults

27 July - 03 August, online and in-person

This retreat will bring together younger people from around the world to reflect on the meaning of oneness for themselves and for the planet. It is designed to help us to emerge from the isolation and fear of Covid into a new engagement with reality and potential. It will be led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni. You can join in person at Bonnevaux or online. For more information, visit <http://bonnevauxwccm.org>



#### John Main Seminar 2022 will be held at Bonnevaux Led by Herman Van Rompuy

Save the dates: 14-17 November (Pre-Seminar Retreat) and 17-20 (JMS)

The 2022 John Main Seminar will be hosted for the first time at Bonnevaux. This traditional annual event in the WCCM's calendar will take place from 17 to 20 November and will be led by Herman Van Rompuy who is a meditator and President Emeritus of the European Council. As usual, a pre-seminar retreat will be led by Laurence Freeman. We will shortly be publishing the theme and more details about the event on the WCCM website.



Photo by Michiel Hendryckx (CC BY-SA 3.0)

#### Dwell in My Love – Monte Oliveto Retreat



25 June - 02 July, Italy  
Led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni

This retreat offers an opportunity to refresh and renew ourselves with friends who are also intrigued to know what dwelling in the love of the Trinity may mean. The silence and beauty of this place of contemplation, good simple food, yoga, teaching, and closeness to the monks of Monte Oliveto offer a wonderful combination to reset and revive our love for life's wonder. For more information and registration, visit <http://tiny.cc/moret22>

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

UK and EUROPE  
[www.goodnewsbooks.co.uk](http://www.goodnewsbooks.co.uk)  
[orders@goodnewsbooks.co.uk](mailto:orders@goodnewsbooks.co.uk)  
Tel: +44 (0) 1582 571011

CANADA  
[www.mediamedia.ca](http://www.mediamedia.ca)  
[christianmeditation@wccm-canada.ca](mailto:christianmeditation@wccm-canada.ca)  
Tel: +1-514-485-7928

ASIA  
[mimi@wccm.org](mailto:mimi@wccm.org)  
Tel: +65 9661 0362

AUSTRALIA  
[www.wccmaustralia.org.au/store](http://www.wccmaustralia.org.au/store)  
[jopanetta@gmail.com](mailto:jopanetta@gmail.com)  
Tel: +614 0978 4357

NEW ZEALAND  
[www.christiansupplies.co.nz](http://www.christiansupplies.co.nz)  
[order@pleroma.org.nz](mailto:order@pleroma.org.nz)  
Tel: +64 6 85 68378

VISIT WCCM's ONLINE STORE: <https://mediamedia.com>



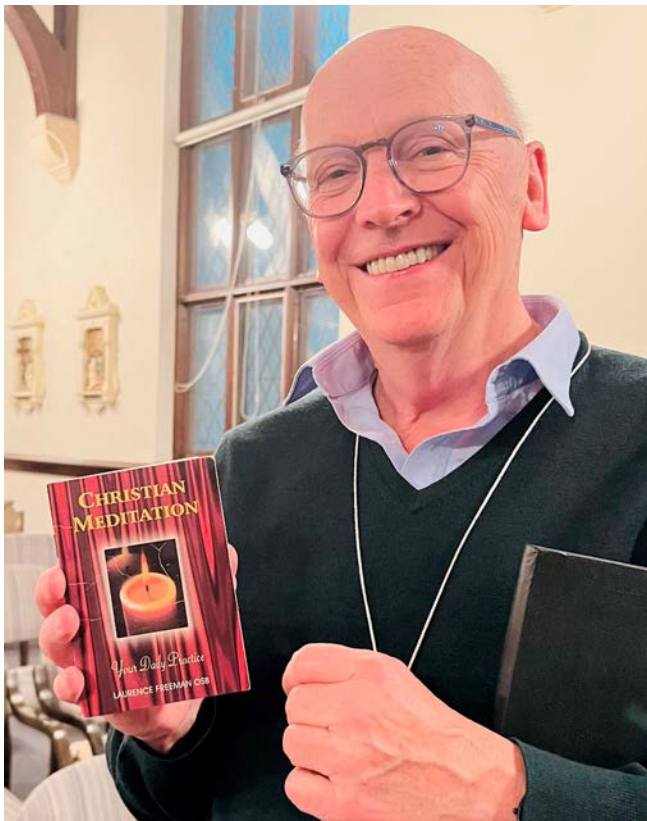
# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMMUNITY



## SUMMER 2022

Father Laurence in Ottawa .....	C2	Father Laurence in Winnipeg.....	C8
From the National Coordinator.....	C3	Father Laurence in Calgary.....	C10
Giving the Gift of Meditation to the World .....	C5	Order form.....	C11
Benedictine Oblates of the World.....	C6	Meditation in Schools.....	C12



## 2022 CCMC National Conference

# UNIFIED CONSCIOUSNESS: ONE MIND, ONE HEART

The theme of Father Laurence's conference was a bearer of hope. I hope here to make a faithful summary of it.

Are we experiencing a critical moment in the history of human evolution? The news of war, inflation, pandemic, climate crisis, spectre of a global famine, polarization of political and social debates in Western societies, seems to announce disaster and fuels our feeling of powerlessness and insecurity. And what about isolation, the loss of social consensus, the increase in mental health problems, the dominant role of social media, which lead us to maintain a negative discourse and makes us withdraw into ourselves? Unfortunately, we can probably all identify with certain items on this list.

However, Christian meditation is our contribution to the world in these difficult times. Day after day, the divine wisdom we seek, unites our consciousness with that of other believers and helps us fight division. We can, despite the many uncertainties in our lives, stay connected with reality, and live in the present. In this way, we engage more deeply in our relationships with others and remain open, as the Lord has been, to all people and situations, even those that are more negative.

Meditation allows us to restore the art of conversation, seek compromise, and avoid exclusions. It makes us agents of reconciliation. To be able to pay attention

and seek to develop this ability for the good of others is to be capable of love. Meditation allows us to make a difference in the world and work in the Spirit.

Father Laurence particularly wishes to introduce young adults to Christian meditation and encourages us to transmit this tradition to those around us. He announced that this year, the WCCM will be setting up a contemplative wisdom academy that will offer a two-year program. This program will be offered online, two nights a week, with three terms of eight weeks each.

In addition, he encourages us to participate in the John Main Seminar being held from November 17-20 in Bonnevaux France. The speaker will be Herman van Rompuy, a Belgian politician who served as Prime Minister of Belgium and later as the first permanent President of the European Council. For more information: <https://bonnevauxwccm.org/all-programmes/john-main-retreat-seminar/>

Finally, we hope and plan for 20 young Canadians to attend a retreat at Bonnevaux next year (2023) who will receive financial assistance whether from their churches and/or from the CCMC.

**Rachelle Fortin** is a member of the MCQRFC and is currently liaison with the national council of the CCMC, and lives in Ottawa. She attended, in person, the national conference meeting at St Paul's University in Ottawa in June and offers her perspective.

# From the National Coordinator



Pr. Martin Malina  
and Paul Harris

A new tradition was inaugurated at the 2022 national conference general meeting of the CCMC in Ottawa. It is called the **Feathered Friend CCMC Patron Recognition**.

The idea of a **Feathered Friend CCMC Patron** began with the Christian Meditation logo: One bird is feeding and the other bird is alert.

Iain MacGilchrist was featured in a WCCM program earlier this year in reflection on the 2022 theme: *Unified Consciousness: One Mind, One Heart*. He writes extensively on how the brain functions between the two hemispheres, left and right: the left-right brain relationship.

The logo suggests that meditation activates both hemispheres. The feeding bird represents a left-brain activity by the constant repetition of the mantra. The other bird is alert, and this is a right brain activity. A Christian meditator needs both birds in order to meditate.

**Feathered Friend CCMC Patrons** inspire members, give spiritual support, and are an example for the

community to uphold. The first Canadian Patron is Paul Harris. Paul exemplifies the dedicated Christian meditator. His contributions to the Canadian and World Communities are manifold: a teacher of the practice, supporting new groups, a writer of books on Christian Meditation and Paul's gentle manner and over many decades have blessed us all.

Paul Harris thanked Martin for the little bird statue as our first **Feathered Friend CCMC Patron** and was grateful for the honour. Paul said Christian Meditation and the daily practice was the greatest gift of his life.

The intention is that a **Feathered Friend CCMC Patron** will be recognized every time the national conference meets together. We anticipate gathering again in 2024 somewhere else in Canada for the next national conference of the CCMC. More to come.

**Pr. Martin Malina**  
National coordinator,  
Canadian Christian Meditation Community



---

## Canadian Christian Meditation Community National Resource Centre

P.O. Box 52, Station NDG  
Montreal, Quebec H4A 3P4  
514-485-7928

christianmeditation@wccm-canada.ca  
www.wccm-canada.ca

## Editorial Team

Phil Barnett, Joseph Clarkson, Jack Murta,  
Mark Schofield and Denise Connors

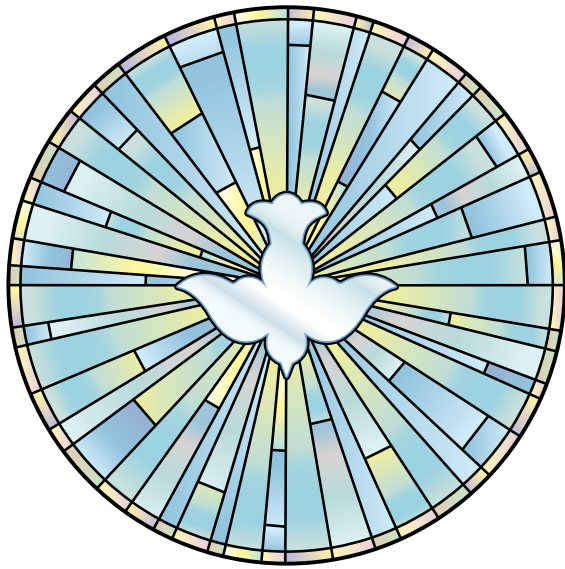
Send submissions to newsletter coordinator Carolyn Boerboom  
at [newsletter@wccm-canada.ca](mailto:newsletter@wccm-canada.ca).

*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)







# Giving the Gift of Meditation to the World

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. For the past year we were able to reach out to more people through our online platforms.

The Friends Program enables Fr. Laurence to offer retreats, talks and presentations in emerging countries, when financial sponsorship is unavailable from local sources. We are looking forward to resuming many of these activities as travel restrictions start lifting.

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 and the audio recording of talks,

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 to:

**Ibolya Agoston,  
11411 98 St,  
Fort St John BC  
V1J 7B5**

by credit card, or online through  
**CanadaHelps: The Canadian Christian  
Meditation Community.**

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

# Benedictine Oblates of the World Community

***The Spirit who is mind and heart and vast spaces, enfolds the whole universe, and in silence – is loving to All.***

***This the Spirit in my heart.***

For Benedictine oblates, indeed the meditating community, this Upanishad carries deep meaning. Deeply rooted in the origins of monasticism, the essential commitment of Oblature is the commitment of sharing the tradition of silence and prayer.

“A tonsure and a habit does not a monk make. We all have a monastic dimension to our lives,” Dom Main often said. The solitude, engendered by the silence we practice, is not a self-indulgent privacy, but a Bodhisattva-like presence in our world.

The year following the founding of the Benedictine Priory of Montreal in 1977, Dom John Main accepted the promises of the first Oblates to his monastic community. In 1991, under the direction of Dom Laurence Freeman, the World Community of Christian Meditators (WCCM), was called into being in New Harmony, Indiana. The Oblate Community has grown, expanding far beyond the monastery established by John Main in Montreal.

As Oblates, we remain the monastic heart of the World Community of Christian Meditators, and promise, as do monks and nuns (“nunks,” as coined by Dom Jean Leclercq, who often visited the Montreal Priory) who vow to be faithful to the three precepts of Benedict’s Rule.

**OBEDIENCE** – The capacity to listen and discern with the heart.

**STABILITY** – which for us Oblates, as for all meditators, is the fidelity to our twice-daily meditation, and

**CONVERSIO** – which calls forth from within us a fearlessness to follow our conscience, with ego left behind – a deep honesty with oneself – a reckless integrity, that defies religiosity.

Father John said that the greatest sin is to hand out, what he called “receipts for deceit,” misleading others in spiritual matters, however trivial they seem.

I am reminded of a saying of my favourite Sufi poet of the 14th century, Yunus Emre, who said:

*There is no truth in you if you are not honest.  
Everybody is honest if you are honest*

This is the childlike simplicity, yet uncompromising quality of the oblate path. The essential spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict is not static, but is the SPIRIT OF LIFE, and the VISION is one of UNITY. Its specific quality is that of a FULLY HUMAN LIFE. The whole person – body and soul – makes the pilgrimage. It takes maturity. It takes purity of intention.

One does not recruit oblates. It is never about numbers. Aspirants are kept waiting to test their resolve.

Once admitted, the candidate embarks under the guidance of a mentor chosen by the National Coordinator on a six-month postulancy, followed by a year of noviciate, after which the novice applies to the director of the community for full oblature. It might take longer, but time is of no great matter. The journey itself is the goal.

Dom Main advised not to write monographs on prayer, but to develop as women and men committed to a life of prayer in the fullness of the Benedictine tradition. When truly lived, monastic life, that of a Benedictine Oblate, cannot but communicate its inner experience to all around it, and to lead all who come in contact to participate in its mystery. The condition of the whole-hearted openness to love is the condition you and I and every human being is called to!



*Continues on page C7*



Canadian Oblate Community

## *Benedictine Oblates* continued from page C6

“Everything proceeds from love,” Father John said from his own experience, “is held together by love and returns with the realized gift of personal consciousness to love.”

This is our Oblate vision of life. It is a vision of unity. It sees that all creation is drawn into a cosmic movement towards oneness. Our commitment is to communicate this vision to our contemporaries – by living it.

Our main task, as individuals, and as a community, is to return and keep returning to our silent centre. This is the journey of our life, which begins in faith and ends in union – a Union within which one is one with one’s own Spirit. We come to realise in the profound silence, that the same Spirit enfolds the whole universe and is loving to all.

**Apollonia (Polly) Schofield**  
Canadian Oblate Coordinator  
Ottawa, June 2022

There are about 120 members of the Canadian Oblate Community dispersed across this vast country, meeting in cells, online or in person, meditating together.

Canadians participate in the Community at the international level, such as Benedict’s Well, meeting at Bonnevaux online or in person etc. The international newsletter – *Via Vitae* – with contributions from people around the world, is distributed by mail and electronically. Our annual Oblate retreat is held at the Cistercian Monastery in Rougemont, Quebec.

Contact:

**Canadian Oblate Coordinator**

P.O. Box 52, Station NDG

Montreal, QC. H4A 3P4

514-481-8746

[oblates@wccm-canada.ca](mailto:oblates@wccm-canada.ca)

[www.wccm-canada.ca](http://www.wccm-canada.ca)

# Father Laurence in Winnipeg



Fr Laurence, Elder Mae Louise Campbell, Deborah Diubaldo and Jamie Goulet

Father Laurence visited Winnipeg on June 5-8 to give two public talks and to meet with local community leaders. The talks were generously hosted by the Cathédrale de St Boniface community, who even provided security with the Knights on Bikes. I was most impressed to see them rolling up! Archbishop Legatt introduced Fr Laurence to the participants and stayed for the evening's program. Fr Laurence spoke to an audience of 72 in English and 42 in French.

His theme was *Unified Consciousness* and the importance of creating unity in today's troubled world. He quoted from his visit to Ukraine, where his hosts said *now is the time to speak of meditation*. So Fr Laurence did! He reminded us about our need for interiority and for silence. A silence that leads to action, which lies at the heart of the concept of Unified Consciousness. Meditation makes us aware of how we are connected to the whole of humanity, and humanity needs contemplatives. Fr Laurence encouraged us to continue our discipline of meditation twice a day because contemplatives are co-creators and what we do and what we say makes a difference.

Monday morning started with an excellent breakfast meeting with Anglican Bishop Geoff Woodcroft and

National Lutheran Bishop Susan Johnson. Also present were four Anglican clergy who are meditators and the Regional Coordinator, Barbara Bater. There was a lively discussion about meditation in general and, in particular, about Fr Laurence's suggestion about the formation of a group of younger meditators who could act as a catalyst for engaging with a younger constituency. Such a group could go to Bonnevaux for training. There was general enthusiasm for following up with this idea.

On Tuesday morning, Fr Laurence met with Daniel Lussier, CEO of Réseau Compassion Network and Jennifer Kilimnik, Director, Compassion and Culture. The meeting went extremely well with discussion about the possibility of holding a Meditatio seminar in Winnipeg. Jennifer will be paying a visit to Bonnevaux in early August to further discuss possible initiatives.

Later in the morning Fr Laurence had a very cordial meeting with Archbishop Legatt. The possibility of sending a group of interested young people to Bonnevaux for training as meditation leaders was discussed here too.

In the afternoon, Fr Laurence was treated to a VIP tour of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

## *Father Laurence in Winnipeg* continued from page C8

He was greeted by the President, Isha Khan, who then accompanied us for part of the tour. The building itself is stunning, and the exhibits are very informative and emotionally moving. The Indigenous Perspectives Gallery and the residential schools exhibit were of particular interest.

The effects of colonization and the residential school system on the Indigenous communities was brought home to us in a very personal way when we met with the Clan Mothers on Wednesday morning. Elder Mae Louise Campbell hosted us in the garden of her home in downtown Winnipeg, together with her helpers - daughter Jamie Goulet and Deborah Diubaldo. It felt like an oasis in the midst of an area where Indigenous people are living with the aftereffects of the multi-generational trauma caused by colonization and, in particular, the residential school system.

We learned how Indigenous practices have changed under the historical influence of Eurocentric

patriarchal controls. These changes have greatly altered Indigenous views on women and girls, who now are victims of sexual exploitation, human trafficking, racism, and unconscionable levels of domestic violence. The Clan Mothers are in the process of building a healing village where women and girls who are victims of these abuses can come to receive mid-term to long-term care, based on traditional Indigenous matrilineal principles and practices ([www.clanmothers.ca](http://www.clanmothers.ca)).

After Fr Laurence had talked about Bonnevaux, it was striking to note the similarity between elder Mae Louise Campbell's and Fr Laurence's worldview – the holistic approach, the need to care for the Earth, the breakdown of today's society and the need to promote a pathway to healing.

This meeting was truly an inspirational way to end an inspirational visit.

**Phil Barnett**



# Father Laurence in Calgary



Fr Laurence's Canadian tour began with his arrival in Calgary on May 24. On the morning of May 25, Fr Laurence and Patricia Harasym (Regional Coordinator for Alberta/Saskatchewan) first met with the Roman Catholic bishop for the Diocese of Calgary, William McGrattan. The conversation centered on the role of meditation in the mental health and well-being of children and on bringing Christian Meditation to teachers, parents, and children within the Calgary and area Catholic school districts.

After reconnecting with old friends and making new ones over lunch, Fr Laurence traveled to the Mount St Francis Retreat Centre in Cochrane to lead a seven-day intensive silent retreat. His visit to the area concluded in Calgary with meditation and a well-received public talk at the FCJ Christian Life Centre. That several people asked questions after the talk and that many more lined up to speak with Fr Laurence individually reveals how well his message of hope for individuals and the world at large was received by the audience of more than 70 attendees.

The seven-day intensive silent retreat in Canada was the first for the Alberta/Saskatchewan Region of CCMC, but surely not last. The Canadian team, composed of Martin Malina, Phil Barnett, Denise Connors, Barb Simoes, and Patricia Harasym, first met

with Kath Houston, Director of Liaison with National Communities one year out on May 31, 2021.

Kath impressed upon us the serious nature of the retreat, emphasizing that the retreat involves profound silence, is disciplined and strict, and that the criteria by which we would choose participants is intentionally rigorous. Potential participants had to have attended an Essential Teaching Workshop (ETW) or equivalent, be an experienced meditator with at least some silent retreat experience, and leading a group or willing to lead in some capacity in the future.

Regional Coordinators were invited to share the information and to submit nominations and provide the contact information of the registrar. Those individuals who expressed interest and met the criteria, then received a link to an online registration form on which they described in more detail, their meditation and retreat experience history, and reasons for wanting to attend. The registration forms were prayerfully vetted by the Canadian and American National School Coordinators.

The final cohort included 23 participants from across Canada (New Brunswick to British Columbia) and seven from the United States (Florida to Pennsylvania). Given that for many of us, this was our first

## Father Laurence in Calgary *continued from page C10*

seven-day intensive silent retreat, we were both excited and uncertain about how it would unfold.

Fr Laurence's opening remarks put us all at ease. He emphasized the importance of respecting the silence and to trust that out of the silence and through our serious practice, community would arise. He encouraged us to be open to the Spirit within and to write haikus and to sketch drawings and images to express the experiences that emerged. Fr. Laurence used the haikus and sketches as entry points for his daily reflections and contemplative eucharistic celebrations.

Though our goal was to make the retreat as seamless as possible so the participants could focus on deepening their meditation practice, we also respected and were attentive to COVID protocols including, for example, that all participants had to be fully vaccinated.

The flow and rhythm of the retreat schedule aided the deepening of our meditation practice. Thirty-minute silent meditation periods were complemented by group contemplative walks. The interior, closed, semi-dark, and mostly silent space of the meditation room, contrasted with the external, open, mostly sunny, and unremitting and beautiful birdsong space of the contemplative walks. A large crucifix stood tall nearby framed by the Rocky Mountains in all their glory and majesty in the distance. Participants also met with a mentor each day for support and to answer questions.

We were welcomed and supported by the generosity and grace of the Mount St Francis Retreat Centre staff and by the peaceful ambiance of the retreat centre environment. The private rooms were simple but comfortable. The food was both nourishing to the body and pleasing

to the eye. Numerous walking trails around the property beckoned to be explored during the free times strategically placed after breakfast and lunch.

All in all, the Spirit blessed us abundantly as a group and as individuals. We experienced that sense of community within the silence that Fr Laurence suggested would happen in his opening remarks. We also now have a documented process that could be used to plan and facilitate yearly seven-day intensive silent retreats in the future in Canada.

Maureen Bibby, one of the retreatants, expresses what many of us saw, heard, felt, touched and tasted in poetic form:

**SILENT MEDITATION RETREAT** at Mt St Francis  
With Fr Laurence Freeman WCCM  
May 25-June 2, 2022

The barefoot priest

from Bonnevaux France

Came to teach the SILENCE dance

We sat with chimes, we circled round

We ate, we prayed, without a sound

A Desert Day mid-week sounds great

I prayed four times instead of eight

Thanks be to God – this prayer I sound

For joy-filled gifts on holy ground

[written May 30, 2022]

Article by **Pat Harasym** and **Barb Simoes**

---

### Canadian Christian Meditation Community

P.O. Box 52, Station NDG, Montreal, QC. H4A 3P4

514-485-7928 · christianmeditation@wccm-canada.ca · www.wccm-canada.ca

I wish to:  receive/renew the printed Newsletter – suggested annual contribution \$15

receive the electronic version – suggested annual contribution \$10

A tax receipt will be issued for donations /contributions over \$25

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to CCMC or by credit card:

Card #: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Other methods of donating:

Through CanadaHelps, by E-Tx to the address above

# Meditation in Schools

*Once more, school is out for the summer!*

This concludes a third consecutive year of learning operated under a cloud of Covid. During these three years, concern for student mental health and well-being has become more and more a priority for school boards not only in Canada but across the world. It is now becoming much more common to see secular meditation and/or mindfulness practices suggested as classroom activities to assist teachers and students in managing stress and anxiety, building resiliency and enhancing mental health and well-being.

As Father Laurence explains, in the World Community for Christian Meditation's recent publication, *Meditation: A Gift For Life: Guidelines for Meditation in Schools*, "In many faith schools the leadership is also recognizing this because of the health problems rife among the students. Some have brought in mindfulness programs. Many have realised that within our Christian tradition there is a rich, accessible practice of contemplative prayer that children respond to eagerly and with quickly visible benefits."

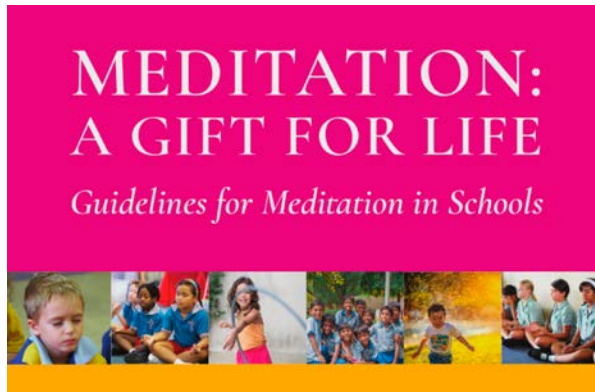
In Christian schools, meditation aligns well with the mission of Christ-centered learning. In these kinds of settings both the physical benefits and spiritual fruits of a practice of meditation can be naturally highlighted and discussed.

When some schools ask "how can we teach Christian meditation when our student body is either faith-diverse or have no home spirituality or religious belief?" Father Laurence responds, "The answer is simple. Don't hide how you see meditation as the prayer of the heart. But, to allay the suspicion of parents, reassure them the children are being taught meditation for their own peace and well-being not as covert proselytizing."

Today, countless research studies documenting the many physical benefits of meditation and mindfulness has made these practices quite acceptable in secular society. Today, it is likely you will hear more about meditation from your medical practitioner than your pastor.

We were delighted with the official release of the WCCM document *Meditation: A Gift For Life: Guidelines for Meditation in Schools* in June. It will assist us in our Canadian context with sharing the gift of meditation with teachers and students. There is lots to consider. Good things are happening.

Peace,  
**Andy Burns**  
Canadian Lead for Meditation in Schools



---

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:  
Canadian Christian Meditation Community  
P.O. Box 52, Station NDG  
Montreal, Quebec H4A 3P4  
Email: christianmeditation@wccm-canada.ca  
Tel: 514-485-7928  
www.wccm-canada.ca

Past issues of the Newsletter can be found at:  
The Medio Media Canada Bookstore:  
www.mediomedia.ca

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40007931