



# WCCM

*Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation*

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## Looking into the Year Ahead

INSIDE: WCCM'S 2025 ONLINE AND BONNEVAUX PROGRAMME, FR LAURENCE'S NEW 'MEDIUM CHANNEL' AND HIS NEW BOOK



Photo: Laurence Freeman

*This issue*

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Plan your 2025 with our programme guide, including retreats at Bonnevaux.

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Joan Forrester shares her insights from a lifetime of practice

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Meditation Round the Clock: three "Days of Peace" planned for 2025

*Deeper Friends*

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

*On January 1st, I launched a Medium channel as a platform for a new array of writings, from my personal reflections and meditation teaching to pieces on wider-ranging topics such as art, chance encounters and how to change our direction. One of my photos will accompany each piece. You can take a look and join at: <https://laurencefreemanosb.medium.com/>*

*I thought to include in this first letter of the new year a taste of what you will find there.*

*The only thing we can be certain about is that nothing is certain. We may try to deny, repress, cover up or otherwise escape from the uncertainty principle of human reality. Or... we can accept reality and rise above anxiety to find peace in the simple art of contemplative living which is: to identify the next thing we have to do, do it and prepare for the next thing after that. The beautiful landscape of life and the mystery of its ever-bursting spiritual seeds then lights up as focus moves from Uncertainty to the Present Moment. I am reading a remarkable novel at present called "Orbital" about a small group of astronauts orbiting the planet sixteen times a day. Nothing much happens except the discovery of the glory of the planet they are circling and a peace that they had not experienced before. May our daily round awaken the same reality in us.*

## Rothko Chapel

We cannot know what silence is until we meet it. In such a noisy world as ours, where every empty space is filled with advertising or graffiti, we are imprisoned in such noisy minds that we cannot be still and listen. Silence becomes incomprehensible. We think it only means turning down the volume.

Early in my treatment here in Houston I was delighted to discover that I am staying just about a thirty-minute walk from the Rothko Chapel, a space for all where silence comprehends you. Over many years, previous visits here left an abiding sacred impression of its unforgettable spirit of place. I gave a talk here some years ago which I was worried might offend the profound, dense silence we were in but, perhaps because we meditated as well, I knew the silence was no match for my words.

I intend to walk here daily when I can and meditate here, something I have started to do. So perhaps I will write more about Mark Rothko's last great work in the coming weeks. For now, I will start this new column as a fresh year comes out of its shell. I will try and fail to describe the tangible power, the invisible energy field, the sheer concentration of silence in this sacred space.

There are fourteen panels around the walls. As you first enter the space,



Photo: Alan Islas (CC-BY-SA-4.0)

illuminated with natural light from above, the panels seem black. But as your eyesight adjusts they become dynamically dark. In places dense mauve is seen below the skin of their surface. Thank God, what a relief, I feel, no images, no explanation. The pictures are so vast they are intimate and welcome you in as they envelop you. He painted them with four-to-six-inch housepainter brushes and the brush strokes are alive, like the inside of a dark cloud.

Surrounded by these paintings a force-field of silence is created around and inside you. This dissolves the veil between the inner and the outer. Pure silence is boundless and empty and so it also emanates a full, real presence.

Either you quickly want to go back to your noisy mind and the world it generates, or you are pulled more fully into the waters of silence and want to drink it though it will never satisfy your thirst for it.

It is greater than me yet not threatening. Is this what the fear of God means? It is without coordinates or proportions because it is immersive in all directions and dimensions. Nothing to hold onto. Yet at the core of the silence is tenderness, a welcome. You are home.

In such deep silence, time is gathered into the present, into the presence of what is present now and everywhere. Of course, it is easier to meditate here because meditation is already underway.

## Waiting Room

I decided today to start the treatment straightaway even though it means I won't be able to celebrate Christmas at Bonnevaux. The doctors are optimistic of a good outcome. It will likely be an eight-week course. I am very blessed by the kindness of Anne and Tom, members of our very loving Houston community, who have given me shelter in their home and extraordinary attention.

As I was sitting in the crowded waiting room this morning listening, with everyone, for their own unique name to be

called, it became clear to me we were all keeping an appointment. We formed a field of suffering, like a battlefield indifferent to defeat or victory. But I also felt an oceanically tender compassion on which we are all supported, exceeding by far the pain, if only we can see it. An old man with a mucous cough sat in his wheelchair beside his middle-aged daughter, looking blankly forward. A young man with a woollen cap pulled low on his head, leant forward on his knees, his eyes closed. Each person carried a world of sorrow but a

golden thread of hope wove itself around the cross each carried. This was the silent communion of illness that can form among us. There is also a communion of the revitalising life which is born of the awakened presence of the Kingdom of God and which every contemplative community knows because it belongs everywhere and can transform everything.

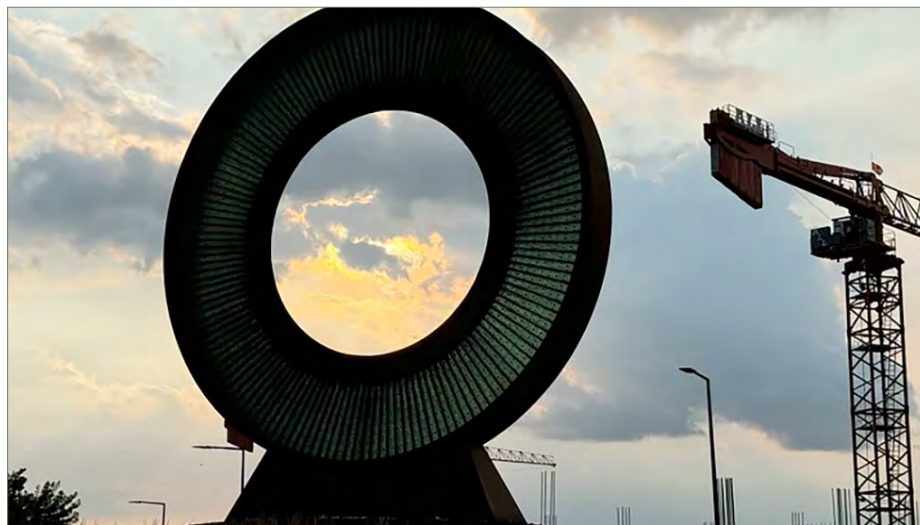
So, all things going well, I expect to be home before Easter. Thank you all for such warm and loving messages circulating my way through our waiting room of Advent.

## Night Chapel

Most of the patients have gone home for Christmas already. The ones remaining seem confined to their room. As the hospital day winds down, a big, welcome emptiness rolls in and fills the place. From a factory of health it is becoming almost a monastery where the community has all retired.

I feel fine and need to walk but am linked to my intravenous stand which is dripping fifteen hours of hydration into my body to flush out the chemo. Otherwise, I am free to bend the rules. I go downstairs, out of the building unchallenged. The pavement is not friendly to the friend I am attached to but I can pull it over the gaps and bumps around the entrance. Two women are sitting on a bench talking. The younger is narrating an outrage about something, the other, perhaps her mother, is listening passively. I overhear a common phrase in this culture, something like 'I said, I am not taking that. I won't be treated like that by anyone.'

As I walk past, she notices me and asks directly 'Are you having chemotherapy?' I say I am and I am taking my friend for a walk. She hesitates and laughs.



Back in the building I walk the long, silent deserted corridors, all their daily bustle and purposes suspended. A sign to 'Chapel' draws me. I feel a refreshing hunger for sacred space. As I approach the doors a tall young patient quietly appears. His head is wrapped in bandages; perhaps a brain tumour. His face is radiant, joy-filled and his eyes beam with kindness, the sort of disarming smile that comes directly from and travels directly to the heart. We engage silently and he says,

'Everything will be ok.'

I acknowledge his word and reply 'and I hope with you.' 'Yes, it will,' he says. We look at each other in an intimate silence imbued with love. An easy pause. 'Good night' 'Good night'.

In the empty chapel, familiar symbols are waiting faithfully. A light burns discretely beside the tabernacle. I meditate until my friend (the mobile stand) beeps and I realise it too needs to be plugged in and recharged.

## *A Thousand Shades of Humour*

There are a thousand shades of humour and the more of them we understand the better. I am wondering if a healthy sense of humour isn't always linked to the discovery of something new. Then it has the effect of repairing a broken world, restoring fractured relationships and refreshing hope.

It could be a story that leads to a punchline, an unexpected twist or connection and then (so the teller hopes) to the eruption of laughter which is as involuntary and enjoyable as a sneeze. Laughter releases tension, relaxes, restores perspective, brings strangers together, gives a fresh start. Women, they say, are attracted to men who make them laugh. Men, I know, like women who laugh at their jokes. There are several shades of laughter in this gender aspect of humour alone

There are darker shades, too. We all like to see a pompous oaf or bully slip on a banana skin. He deserves it and it brings him down to earth with rough justice. But news reels from Nazi Germany showed neighbours and passersby standing laughing as a family of Jews were dragged out into the street, humiliated and beaten. How to understand that shade? Or a presidential candidate's mocking mimicry of a handicapped person during a public speech getting a laugh from the crowd.

There may always be a small trace of cruelty even in the lighter shades of humour. But, as in children's laughter



at funny stories, it remains essentially good-humoured; it avoids the sadistic and avoids kicking someone repeatedly after they are down or picking on the old, poor or vulnerable. There is a line along the spectrum of humour. Crossing that line is risky, whether it's merely to test the limits or to deny such a line of self-restraint exists at all. Is there really nothing that can't be laughed at? Getting it wrong has cost more than one comedian their career. The public thirst for stand-up comedy, a contemporary form of the boundary-pushing court jester, is funny, in another sense, when we encourage an entertainer to test our limits.

We don't laugh at things we know well unless a new perspective on them is exposed which then makes us see the familiar in a different light. The old is re-made we are happily saved from

staleness and boredom. Humour can save relationships in this way. When a discussion or relationship has slipped into a stalemate or standoff, for example. Nothing new is happening and the familiar has become toxic until a wave of humour from the right side of the line, restores connection and celebrates life even in pain, suffering and injustice. Then healthy humour declares a truce, the resumption of communication helps the divided to see each other in a new light.

Our polarised public landscape needs this kind of breeze of humour rather than the cynical and cruel 'humour at what ceases to amuse' that T.S. Eliot associated with the dark side of ageing. Rage disguised as humour.

Healthy laughter is medicinal and in gentle ways works small miracles.

## *One Step Prayer*

When the body fails to perform as it should (or as we would like) it can be terrifying: as if a friend turns away from us. Our way of seeing and relating to everything is disrupted. When it happened to me, I became more self-cen-

tred and therefore, of course, felt more alone. The self-protecting line between inner and outer began to dissolve.

There is no real distinction between the inner and the outer. The magnificent temple of the body teaches us this

whether through affliction or pleasure. Nevertheless, we are usually lop-sided, unbalanced and so too 'outer-directed'. We feel compelled to look for the way of truth in the activity of the external dimension. We think that it is there

that problems are solved. Problems are actually dissolved through a change of perspective.

And so, it is useful to talk about the 'inner path', the 'journey within' and so on, not because it exists separately but because it brings us home to the nature of reality, the complementarity of inner and outer. Of course, the very idea of interiority can be irritating when we feel under pressure to solve problems externally. To open to a healing wholeness through the 'interior path' may make us feel that we are losing opportunity, wasting time or risking ourselves in new ways we are not prepared for. Better to be prepared with an 'inner practice' so that when challenging times come we are prepared. Fix the roof while the sun is shining.

'I am sorry to have to tell you...' the doctor will say one day. It shocks, shakes and disorients us radically. Yet it is the dawn of an opportunity to expand and deepen. To be plunged into this new and uncertain perspective through physical sickness can be cataclysmic and painfully lonely even if you are fortunate to be held in a communion or community of love (as I was). Vivid new forms of the old questions arise: Who am I? What am I becoming? What next? What's going to happen? These questions flood in as our usual sense of self and perception of others tremble like an earthquake. The wonder of the true self will eventually emerge through this process but the journey will take us through rough, uneasy, uncertain and powerless places.

There were times when I also felt freed by it and I embraced my times of meditation with great peace. Other times, I felt almost unable to meditate, maybe falling asleep or feeling that

the connection we rely on for meditation had disappeared just when I most needed it. This connection can never be broken. When it reappears we understand it better. Its absence, like the dark cloud of the Rothko paintings, needs to be entered not escaped.

There is one step, just one, in the simple, un-self-reflective 'prayer of the heart' which we call meditation. It leads into the boundless, gracious freedom and joy of contemplation which is the simple enjoyment of the truth. However, just as we have the inner and the outer to unite, or like every step we take when we are walking, there are two parts before it is complete. One forward, one waiting behind.

We may hope that meditation will help us get us what we want. Instead it shows the illusory nature of desire, then shows us that we already have what we really want and need. To desire is still praying 'for something'. True prayer is sufficient in itself. It is not instrumental or a means of achieving something, although of course it will change everything.

Jesus took this step in his existential crisis in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:39).

After going a little farther, he fell face down and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me..."

Key words: he fell face down. In the first step we have to fall flat on our face, wholly accepting and expressing what we feel and letting go. The more powerless we are the better. Then we know we are not performing, posing or bargaining with a projected image of God. The other half happens spontaneously: yet not as I will, but as you will.

Dante said 'nella sua voluntade è



la nostra pace': in his will is our peace. I am not sure if God has a 'will' but we get the point, which is that our ego-will must dissolve. With this our resistance to accepting reality yields and there comes peace.

Once we have taken this step, we do not need to take the first step again.

With much love

*Laurence*

# Medium

LAURENCE ON MEDIUM

Something new: <https://laurencefreemanosb.medium.com/>

*Programme 2025*

# Helping a peaceful tide to rise

A CONVERSATION WITH LAURENCE FREEMAN ON THE WCCM THEME FOR 2025

The 2025 WCCM theme is “The Risk of Living Together”. We asked Laurence Freeman to tell us why it was chosen by the Guiding Board:

**Why is there a “risk” of living together?**

LF - Because things can and will go wrong. When people work together, live together, conflicts can arise even from the best intentions. The ego sneaks into everything. We know this at an individual level, at communal levels and at the global level. We are surrounded today – just look at the environment and politics for not having prepared for this risk. Seeing the risk and preparing is wisdom. Where is wisdom today?

**What does it mean to “live together?”**

LF - It means that we fully accept each other's differences. We respect different beliefs stay aware of each other's diversity, recognising each other's dignity and right to express their point of view. This is risk management. Then we can form a community of faith composed of people holding different beliefs and then we'll see the common ground appear. This is God, the ever-present origin and foundation. Knowing it we can be fully alive.

**Why do we need to reflect on this theme?**

LF - It's because we've lost this experience of conviviality, which is the title of the first of the talks. We have in many ways been responsible for creating the breakdown of community, of conviviality because of our individualism. Our technology, of course, produces incredible individualism. This has become rampant, and it undermines the very nature of living together. At the personal level, we can see that in the breakdown of relationships, of marriages, the reluctance



to make the commitment that is necessary in order to live together. But we can also see it at the level of sectarianism and the polarization that has come to characterize our different political and cultural, religious and ethnic, perspectives. So whether it's at the individual level, the communal level or the global level, we are facing the same dangers.

As contemplatives living also as contemporaries, we have a responsibility, a personal, social and spiritual responsibility to our time. And this challenge affects people of every age group.

**What do we need to do in order to reconnect with what will help us?**

LF - If we cannot find that connecting point with ourselves, with others, with the Spirit, with God, with the environment, then we are living in the nightmare of uncertainty and danger. Life is uncertain. I've been through a lot of uncertainty myself in the last 12 months. But that's true of all of us. Every single person has to face the challenge of uncertainty. And we can face it with joy and with peace, as I've found, through trust and relationship and the kindness of strangers and the goodness of people with whom we are sharing life's journey, living together. We can change individually and we can contribute to a change in the world. We need to

ask, where does this deep loneliness, this disconnection from our true selves, come from? And why have we created, as a result, conflict and confusion and the horrific stories that meet us every day when we encounter the news of the world?

**What is the contribution of contemplative communities to that change?**

LF - We live together as people of different beliefs, respecting each other's perspectives, and at the same time contributing to the development of a common ground. That's what I think a contemplative community like ours can experience. Imperfectly, but we experience it and we can witness it. Can we build a peaceful tide? Can we create a gentle, powerful wave of contemplative consciousness which will transform and heal our disconnection and our brokenness? I believe we can, because we can see that on a personal level, and we can extend that outwards to share with others the kingdom of heaven on earth.

## The Risk of Living Together

OUR MAJOR ONLINE SERIES  
11 FEB - 11 NOV - 8 SESSIONS:  
8 EXTRAORDINARY VISIONARIES

*Programme 2025*

## Online Series, Deepen Your Journey

Beyond “The Risk of Living Together”, our programme this year offers diverse online series delving into specific topics such as Women Mystics and openness to LGBT+ individuals. Fr Laurence will also propose new opportunities for those wishing to begin meditating and establish a personal practice.

### **Women Mystics: Guides in the Life of Prayer**

8 MAY - 27 NOV - 6 SESSIONS



**Dr Jane Williams**, alongside renowned practitioners of prayer and theology, will lead a six-part series on prominent women mystics.

The WCCM has years of evidence that people long for guides and companions on their journey with God. Yet, much of Church practice and theology tells us about God without necessarily helping us to meet God or to trust what we do when we pray and meditate. In this series, we will encounter some of the most courageous and revolutionary adventurers in the life of prayer. Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Evelyn Underhill each profoundly lived from the reality of God encountered in prayer. All of them wrote for

their time to deepen and test their experience and practice of living with and for God, but their advice and descriptions of what they learned have provided maps to the pathways of the spiritual life for all succeeding generations.

The speakers who will introduce each mystic are all themselves practitioners of prayer and theology. They will lead us through the diverse contexts and styles of these fearless women of God.

### **No More Special Pleading Openness to LGBT+ people and their issues is fundamental to Christianity**

23 JAN - 24 APR - 4 SESSIONS



**James Alison** has written an important new book on this topic, shaping the profile of ‘being Christian’ today. In four sessions, he will explore the main themes of the book, entitled “You Can If You Want To”. These themes include finding our way into the heart of basic Christianity through the traditional Christian account of how to learn about reality and the social history of how same-sex relations have been treated. He will also examine how the supposedly anti-homosexual “clobber” biblical passages, often used against LGBT+ peo-

ple, are unrelated to what we mean by “homosexuality” and should not bother anyone’s conscience. This is a refreshing wake-up course for those who like their false scruples of conscience relieved and their minds challenged.

### **Learning to Meditate**

17 MAR - 7 APR - 4 SESSIONS

### **Feeling the Way**

19 MAY - 9 JUN - 4 SESSIONS



These are new opportunities for those wishing to begin meditating and establish a consistent practice. **Fr Laurence** will lead two four-week online courses.



**For more information  
and registration for any  
of our online series, visit  
[wccm.org/events](http://wccm.org/events)**

*Bonnevaux 2025*

# Nourish Your Body and Soul at Bonnevaux in our 2025 Retreat Programme



Bonnevaux, the international home of the World Community for Christian Meditation, offers a diverse programme of retreats throughout the year. Led by experienced teachers, these retreats provide a sanctuary for deepening your spiritual practice, exploring contemplative living, and connecting with a supportive community. Whether you're seeking silent reflection, engaging discussions, or creative exploration, there's a retreat for you at Bonnevaux.

## 2025 RETREATS

**S'enraciner dans la force vitale de la Terre, pour réconcilier les écologies intérieure et extérieure** (in French)

**25 February - 2 March 2025**

Led by Christine Kristof-Lardet, Le groupe Meditatio Écologie and Thomas Litzler

This eco-spirituality retreat invites

us to restore our sacred bond with all living things, to forge a new alliance with nature, and to rediscover our life force with Mother Earth.

**The Promise of Joy**  
**6-11 March 2025**

Led by Liz Watson

A retreat for members of the WCCM Scandinavian communities to deepen their practice and connect with fellow meditators.

**The Academy Retreat**  
**18-25 March 2025**

Led by Vladimir Volrab

An opportunity for those engaged in contemplative study to deepen their understanding and practice within a supportive community.

**Rooted and Renewed: A Journey of Integration**

**4-7 April 2025**

Led by Kevin Wittoeck

A three-day retreat focused on harmonising mind, body and spirit through contemplative practices and self-exploration.

**Fully Human - Holy Week Retreat**  
**12-20 April 2025**

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

Journey through Holy Week with a contemplative lens, deepening your understanding of the Passion and Resurrection narratives.

**Everything Matters: Living the Questions & Daring the Present**

**29 April - 4 May 2025**

Led by Mark S. Burrows

Explore the profound questions of life and faith through the lens of Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry and writings.

**National Community Retreat**  
**(Singapore)**

**12-18 May 2025**

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

A retreat for members of the WCCM Singapore community to deepen their practice and connect with fellow meditators.

**The Academy Retreat**  
**27 May - 3 June 2025**

Led by Vladimir Volrab

A second opportunity to join this enriching retreat for those engaged in contemplative study.

**The Still Point of the Turning World: Finding Rest Amidst Suffering**

**10-15 June 2025**

Led by Roberta Stephens

Explore the intersection of philosophy and meditation, discovering inner

## Bonnevaux 2025

peace and resilience in the face of life's challenges.

### Fully Alive Retreat - A Contemplative Experience of Health and Healing 24-29 June 2025

Led by Dr Barry White, Laurence Freeman, Giovanni Felicioni and Therese Conroy

A unique retreat exploring a contemplative approach to health and healing, integrating mind, body, and spirit.

### Teacher Leader Programme 3-6 July 2025

A formation programme for those interested in leading Christian meditation groups and sharing the practice with others.

### Work and the Contemplative Practice 3-6 July 2025

Led by Sean Hagan

Explore the integration of contemplative practice into daily working life, fostering mindfulness, focus, and creativity.

### The Summer School 13-20 July 2025

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB, Stefan Reynolds, Brij Waterfield, and the Bonnevaux Community

A week-long immersion in Christian meditation, with teaching, practice, and community interaction.

### Caring for Oneself, for Others and for Us (for 18-35-years old) 29 July - 3 August 2025

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB, Patrio Lynch Pueyrredon, Tayna Malaspina, and Terry Doyle.

A retreat designed for young adults (18-35), exploring contemplative practice, self-care, and social engagement.



### Contemplatives who reconcile the Divided and comfort the Sorrowful 26-31 August 2025

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

A retreat for WCCM members of the Belgian and Netherlands National Communities to deepen their practice and connect with fellow meditators.

### Bonnevaux Meditation Group Retreat 4-7 September 2025

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

A retreat for members of the Bonnevaux Meditation Group to deepen their practice and connect with each other.

### International Oblate Retreat 9-14 September 2025

A retreat for those who have embarked on the WCCM Oblate formation programme.

### Four-Part Harmony: Listening to the Different Voices of the Gospels Retreat 23-28 September 2025

Led by Rowan Williams

Explore the richness and diversity of the four Gospels through a contemplative lens, deepening your understanding of their unique perspectives.

### A Wisdom School 30 September - 5 October 2025

Led by Cynthia Bourgeault

Delve into the wisdom teachings of Christianity, drawing on contemplative practices and insights from various traditions.

### Feeling the Way - Deepen Your Meditation Retreat 18-23 November 2025

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

A retreat for experienced meditators seeking to deepen their practice and explore new dimensions of contemplative living.

### God's Poverty - Advent Retreat 2-7 December 2025

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

Reflect on the themes of Advent and prepare for the coming of Christ through the lens of contemplative practice.

For detailed information about any of these retreats, including registration details, costs, and accommodation options, please visit the Bonnevaux website:  
**[bonnevauxwccm.org](http://bonnevauxwccm.org)**

## Christianity

# Signs of Spiritual Regeneration for Christian Parishes

BALALLY PARISH HOSTED A HYBRID EVENT WITH DIFFERENT CONTEMPLATIVE VOICES IN DECEMBER

“Building a Parish rooted in Contemplation and Ecumenism”, an event held on 2 December 2024 at the Church of the Ascension in Balally - Dublin, featured a global conversation with individuals and communities pioneering contemplative approaches to Christianity in diverse settings.

There was a shared yearning for deeper spiritual engagement within established churches. Speakers like Father Guerrick from Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina and Reverend Sarah Bachelard from Benedictus in Australia described how they address this hunger through contemplative prayer groups, retreats, and alternative worship services. Their experiences highlight the growing need for spaces that prioritize introspection and spiritual growth, even outside traditional monastic settings.

Balally parish itself is presented as a model for this integration of contemplation and action. Father Jim Caffrey, inspired by his time at Mepkin Abbey, has spearheaded initiatives (with the support of Cinzia Angius, his Parish Pastoral Leader) like contemplative masses, Christian meditation groups, and the “Monastery Without Walls” vision that



emphasizes service alongside inner reflection. This approach resonates with the Benedictine emphasis on balancing prayer and work, as articulated by Abbot Columba from Glenstal Abbey.

The event also underscored the power of ecumenical collaboration. Reverend Jane Burns from the nearby Church of Ireland parish in Taney spoke movingly about the “blessed” relationship between the two congregations, exemplified by joint services, community outreach, and shared pilgrimages. This local partnership reflects a broader ecumenical spirit embraced by the speakers, with many emphasizing the universality of contemplative practices

across denominations. The insights from Father Laurence Freeman (Director of WCCM and Bonnevaux), provided a thought-provoking framework for understanding the significance of these developments. He highlighted the importance of “being local” and drawing inspiration from both Benedictine and Celtic monastic traditions. He sees initiatives like the one in Balally as signs of spiritual regeneration, offering a potential model for a church grappling with declining attendance and a crisis of priesthood.

ONLINE: Watch the full recording of the event at Balally Parish here: <https://wccm-int.org/balallydec24>

**SAVE THE DATE: 3-9 November 2025**

## John Main Seminar

Hosted by WCCM Ireland, coordinated by Fr Jim Caffrey and the Parish of Balally

More information shortly



FR. JIM CAFFREY

*In Focus*

## Joan Forrester, Australia

A LIFELONG JOURNEY LEARNING WE DON'T HAVE TO EARN GOD'S LOVE



I first encountered the John Main method of meditation in 1991. I was at a silent retreat at a beautiful Redemptorist Monastery in Galong in countryside near the East coast of Australia. At this retreat, the late Irish priest, Father Gerry Pierse, gave all the participants an excellent grounding in meditation. To understand why I set out on this journey which led me to silent meditation and the WCCM, I need to go back to my childhood.

I was the daughter of a dedicated Presbyterian minister in Cooma, NSW. My mother was also very involved in church work. My parents were loving and yet, in the busyness of church life, I somehow got the impression that I

had to earn God's love – that love was conditional on how I behaved and how many good deeds I did. So, this was my grounding as a child.

So, I needed to learn through my spiritual journey to move from head to heart. I had to learn to listen to the still, small voice of God and allow it to gradually take over the voice that said I must 'earn' God's love. And this, for me, has required quiet contemplation and has led me to many silent retreats and some WCCM conferences worldwide.

The French 17th Century philosopher, Blaise Pascal, wrote – "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room." In a world of internet, smart phones and busy lives, I think that is just as true now as it was 400 years ago. So, I would like to share some aspects of my spiritual journey and the integral role that the WCCM and John Main method of meditation has played in deepening my understanding of God and my relationship with God.

My husband, Brian, and I attended our first WCCM conference in Belfast in October 2000: "The Way of Peace" seminar, run by Fr Laurence Freeman and the Dalai Lama. I vividly recall how victims of violence – from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds – spoke of "The

Troubles" and how, over time, they were able to forgive those who had harmed them. I was struck by how each victim showed incredible grace in the face of the violence inflicted upon them.

In addition to the five wonderful WCCM conferences I have attended over the years since, I have visited Assisi, Iona, Lindisfarne, Taizé and many other retreats around the world. In 2024, in my eighty-fifth year, I have fulfilled a lifetime dream to visit both Bonnevaux and Monte Oliveto to undertake silent retreats to deepen my relationship with God.

This spiritual journey over my life has helped me to know the power of God's love and that God loves us all unconditionally. I have learnt that I do not need to earn God's love as I thought I had to do when I was a little girl living in Cooma. I have come to this realisation through the practice of contemplative silence, solitude and meditation with and through the wonderful and loving WCCM community. This is summed up for me in the beautiful words of Mark 6:31:

"Come then apart  
Into the mountains and rest awhile  
And gather in the very breath of God  
To give thee life again."



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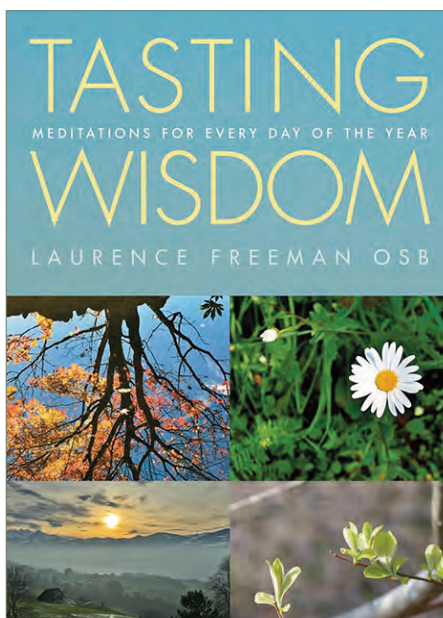
**Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 15 March.**

*Events & Resources***Books****Tasting Wisdom: daily dose of inspiration**

A new book, "Tasting Wisdom: Meditations for Every Day of the Year", is set to offer readers a daily dose of inspiration. The book, written by Laurence Freeman, is a collection of 366 daily reflections, including ones previously sent to members of the Community.

The book is described as a rich resource for anyone seeking to deepen their spiritual life and is accessible to people of all faiths and none. Fr Laurence's reflections are "grounded in the Christian tradition but also draw on the wisdom of other spiritual traditions".

Tasting Wisdom is available for pre-order now, for delivery after 31 March 2025. More information here:  
<https://wccm-int.org/twbook>



**SAVE THE DATE: 4 October**  
**- Spiritual Intelligence &**  
**Education Online Symposium**

WITH LISA MILLER, CINDY WIGGLESWORTH  
AND GUY CLAXTON

CONTACT TAYNĀ MALASPINA TO RECEIVE  
MORE INFO: [TAYNA@WCCM.ORG](mailto:TAYNA@WCCM.ORG)



Lisa Miller (CC-BY-SA-4.0)

**Events****A Day of Peace: three events planned in 2025**

WCCM's "A Day of Peace" builds on the response of last year's 24-Hour Meditation for Peace, which saw a thousand participants from around the world. This year, Kevin Wittoek, a Project Coordinator at Bonnevaux, will lead three global events, continuing to highlight the power of meditation as a path to peace.

These events aim to unite our global community and will offer opportunities to hear from individuals who have found peace amidst life's challenges and from artists who express the complexities of our world through beauty. Over time, we also aim to collaborate with other organizations. "A Day of Peace" invites all to join in this transformative journey, starting with the peace within, and fostering a deeper sense of connection to the peace we wish to see in the world.

Stay tuned for the event dates, and if you'd like to help spread the word, or if you'd like to find out about how you could contribute in different ways, please reach out to Kevin at [kevin@wccm.org](mailto:kevin@wccm.org).

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For all general enquiries about resources, please contact Kate Middleton or Elena Cass  
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The website is still the same: <https://mediomedia.com>

# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMMUNITY



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# Meditation in Tumultuous Times?

by Darrell Taylor

Spiritual Care Counsellor – Meditation Facilitator

If you are a boomer like me, you may remember the Byrds' 1965 hit song, "Turn! Turn! Turn!"

To everything, turn, turn, turn  
There is a season, turn, turn, turn  
And a time to every purpose under Heaven  
A time to be born, a time to die...

The lyrics were inspired by the Book of Ecclesiastes. I wonder if the biblical author was a closet Buddhist?

Buddhism teaches that existence is an ever-turning wheel. This is the wheel of life, suffering and death called "Samsara."

This wheel of suffering is driven by effort, by our actions. Action is one translation of the word "karma." Both Ecclesiastes and the Buddha teach that human existence is seemingly meaningless. Our karma eventually traps us in death.

As a teenager in the sixties, I began to question the meaning of life. Why go to school, get a job, marry, raise a family, retire, then die? It all seemed meaningless. Again, from Ecclesiastes, "vanity of vanities... generations come, and generations go, everything is wearisome beyond description. For all their labours (actions) under the sun, what do people get?"

Today, we seem to be turning the wheel of the world's suffering one more time as we enter another historical cycle. What's in store for the coming generations? Is there any hope?

The outer wheel of Samsara reflects the inner wheel of our own egos. The ego is meaningless. It is ever changing, but never gets anywhere. St. Paul calls the ego the "carnal mind." He says it ultimately leads to death. These two wheels reflect each other. The inner world mirrors the outer world, and vice versa. We're stuck in our egos, and we're stuck in history. We're like my grandson's pet hamster. We exist in a cage, running on a wiry wheel, going around in circles and getting nowhere.

In Christian terms, we are fallen beings, born into a fallen world. We carry the world's karma. It's part of us. Can we be liberated from the wheel of meaningless suffering? The good news is, yes. There is an answer. But it took someone from outside the wheel, from beyond our fallen world.

My grandson, despite his mother's disapproval, liked to open his hamster's cage and let it roam free. To break free from the cage of Samsara, someone from outside the wheel of suffering opens the door and liberates us;

someone who was not subject to karma. In Christian terms, our liberator must be "unfallen" or without sin; from the unfallen world of Heaven. Only this person could reach into our cages and set us free.

This divine, unfallen person is the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. He carried no karma. He knew no sin. He liberated humanity. But there's a problem. We still have egos, and we still live in tumultuous historical times.

The wheel of the world is still spinning. Thus, the need for meditation.

Meditation liberates us from our ego. Meditation liberates us from the cycles of history. Every time we say Maranatha, we are letting go of ego and allowing our minds to rest outside the circle of our worried thoughts. We rest in wordless acknowledgment of the One who reached into our cages and brought us liberation.

St. Paul says that when we are in Christ, we enter the "Sabbath rest." When we sit in stillness and silence, we allow our minds and hearts to experience that wordless resting from our vain actions, from our karma. We let go of human effort. We let go of ego driven politics. We are not working; we are resting outside the wheel of actions. When we meditate, we are not trying, we are trusting. Paradoxically, then we enjoy the good things that life has to offer.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and then all these things shall be added unto you." (Mt 6:33)

When we meditate, we are seeking the Kingdom first. Thus, the importance of meditating first in the morning. Then, when we re-enter the wheel of our daily actions, we carry Christ with us into the world. Meditation relieves our suffering. In a mysterious way, meditation also relieves the suffering of the world around us. What would happen if our politicians prayed more? What if they practiced meditation? The world would be transformed almost overnight. But even when non-politicians meditate, we send out a calm spiritual energy that changes the world.

Of course, we don't think about this wonderful liberation while we meditate. We focus on the mantra. We let go. We rest in the Presence of Christ. During these tumultuous times, it is even more important to say our mantra. It is important that we rest in God and sit in the silent Presence of the Divine Person, with Jesus, who is our liberation. He is our hope. Maranatha.





## *If you start it, they will come!*

Have you seen the 1989 movie *Field of Dreams* starring Kevin Costner? He's a farmer who builds a baseball field in his cornfield that attracts the ghosts of baseball legends, including Shoeless Joe Jackson and Babe Ruth. The line that Costner famously hears three times one night when walking in his cornfield is: *"If you build it, he will come."* The "he" refers to his deceased father with whom he had a complicated relationship.

I took the liberty of changing that line to apply it to our meditation adventure: *"If you start it, they will come."*

We know from John Main that the practice of meditation, although performed individually, will most likely not endure if practiced alone day after day, week after week. Joining an existing group or starting a new group is a way to ensure you pray with others; to "bring oxygen to the fire." Not just your own fire, but the fire in others, too. We are about to share an online calendar of weekly meditation groups taking place across the country open to receive new members from Abbotsford, British Columbia to Zionville, New Brunswick.



André Choquet

Throughout our 30-year history, the Canadian Christian Meditation Community (CCMC) has started new meditation groups using a 6-week introductory course. Do we find new ways to share this gift? Don't get me wrong, we can and should continue to offer the traditional 4-to-6-week course. Especially at Lent or Advent, when people are inclined to take on a spiritual discipline. One of our members, Wayne Short, has produced a series of twenty-one videos (approx. 40 min. each: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT5l4irLvOwGsHtmJ1xRdNA>) based on Mid-Day Prayers in the Bonnevaux Daily Prayer Resource that could easily be used in group settings.

Can we start where the need is? For instance, I have been volunteering at a local drop-in complimentary luncheon at my church, Corpus Christi, in the Beach district in Toronto. It runs every Monday from Thanksgiving to the end of June. Other churches in our area offer a similar luncheon on other weekdays. Since January 21, I started introducing the 4-week course

**Continued on page C8**

### **Canadian Christian Meditation Community National Resource Centre**

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### **Editorial Team**

Phil Barnett, Jack Murta, Mark Schofield and Denise Connors

Send submissions to newsletter coordinator Carolin Hwozdyk at [chwozdyk@sympatico.ca](mailto:chwozdyk@sympatico.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.katemcd.com](http://www.katemcd.com)

# Ora et Labora - Prayer and Work

“Prayer and Work” is the name given this space as a regular feature devoted to sharing information and news about the **WCCM Benedictine Oblates** (<https://oblates.wccm.org/v2019/>). It comes from the balance between prayer and work (and reading) that St. Benedict stresses in his Rule and that Oblates strive to follow in everyday life. You can now expect to see a new article in each newsletter. Enjoy!

If you would like more information about the Oblates,  
please contact Dorothy Wood at [dorogeo50@gmail.com](mailto:dorogeo50@gmail.com).

## Who is Saint Benedict?

Benedictine oblates look to St. Benedict and to his Rule, established in the 6th century, for guidance in leading their lives in the world. So, who is St. Benedict?

It is thought that Benedict was born in or around 480 C.E. of noble Roman parents in Nursia – modern-day Norcia – in Umbria, Italy. As a young man, he went to Rome to study. He was disappointed in his studies and in city life, so he left. He travelled to a place called Enfide at the time, located in the central Italian mountains of Simbruini. Only a couple of kilometers higher up the mountain was Subiaco. There, Benedict met with a monk named Romanus whose monastery was on the mountain. Following this meeting, Benedict put on a monk's habit. In a cave overlooking a lake, he lived for three years as a hermit.

During these years of solitude, Benedict became known for his character and wisdom, so much so that when the abbot of the monastery died, the monks asked Benedict to become their abbot. Resistant at first, Benedict finally agreed, but it did not go well. Legend has

it that, at one point, unhappy with the direction in which Benedict was leading their lives in the monastery, the monks tried to poison him, but he was saved miraculously. Following similar incidents, Benedict left

Subiaco in 530. Having founded 12 monasteries in the area around Subiaco, Benedict then founded the great monastery of Monte Cassino, situated on a mountain top between Rome and Naples. There he wrote his great Rule. Because of its moderation, balance and flexibility, especially when compared with other rules being followed at the time, it was later adopted by most religious orders and became the norm for monastic living in the whole of Europe. As a result, Benedict is considered the founder of western monasticism.

Benedict died at Monte Cassino in 547, shortly after the death of his sister, Scholastica, who was the abbess of a nearby women's monastery. They were buried in the same tomb. In 1964, Pope Paul VI named Saint Benedict the patron protector of Europe. His feast day is July 11.



Dorothy Wood in Meteora\*, Greece (approx. 2015)

\* In Meteora, Greece, perched at the top of tall rocky pylons, are several monasteries. For some, baskets must be lowered to haul up provisions!

## Daily Prayer and Meditation: Video Resources

### Background:

My journey with daily prayer began in 1983 as a seminarian in London, Ontario. This experience deepened during a week spent at St. Gregory's Benedictine Abbey in Three Rivers, Michigan. At the Abbey, the rhythm of work, study, and prayer centred on the daily offices (set periods of scheduled prayer throughout the day), integral to their worship life. Although their daily offices did not include a dedicated period for silent meditation, the community's commitment to silence permeated every aspect of



Rev. Dr.  
G. Wayne Short

their lives. Each day was divided between periods of greater and lesser silence, creating a profound atmosphere of peace and tranquillity.

### This Series:

Our daily meditation practice can be significantly enhanced by incorporating the discipline of the daily office, especially when these practices are joint. As a priest, I found observing the daily office to be challenging, particularly when working alone, as other tasks often took precedence. In my

preparation to become an Oblate, I made it my goal to integrate my daily office with meditation into a consistent practice.

When the Bonnevaux Daily Prayer resource became available, it felt natural to blend its music resources, scriptures, and readings on contemporary prayer—into my practice. But, due to my dementia, I found both the online and printed versions to be distracting, complicating my efforts to merge daily prayer and meditation. This challenge inspired me to develop a solution that would allow me to use this resource effectively.

Utilizing PowerPoint, video exporting, and YouTube, I created twenty-one videos adapted from the Bonnevaux Daily Prayer. Each video features a unique chant, psalm, and reading, followed by timed periods of silence. I discovered that these timed silences provided a seamless transition into meditation. The video

presentations are designed for flexibility, allowing users to engage with them as they are or modify them to meet individual needs.

In our fast-paced lives, practicing meditation twice daily can be challenging. Incorporating a daily prayer practice typically adds 15 to 20 minutes. But even an occasional practice can extend the benefits of regular meditation. I am pleased to offer this resource and hope to produce more videos in the future to express my gratitude for the gift of silent meditation, which enriches my spiritual life and supports my commitment as an Oblate. You can access these videos through my YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT5l4irIvOwGsHtmJ1xRdNA>. I encourage you to try this practice and would appreciate any feedback you may have. My email is [mcast709@gmail.com](mailto:mcast709@gmail.com).

## Are you being called to lead Christian Meditation?

Caveat: If you are already a “happy and satisfied” Christian meditation (CM) group leader, please skip the rest of this article.

The main questions to ask yourself are: Am I truly being called? What is my motivation? Is it to satisfy my ego’s needs or are there loftier reasons?

In the early 2000s, I co-led a CM group for several years. There were no Zoom options. The experience was rewarding, meaningful and fruitful, with several members becoming group leaders themselves.

Awhile back, I started attending Zoom meetings, but found them unsatisfactory. This led me to consider starting my own in-person CM group.

Another powerful motivation was having made my final oblation as a Benedictine Oblate in the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) last July 2024.

Now, to the topic: The pros and cons of starting a CM group.

### Pros:

1. Opportunity to develop and increase patience, compassion and commitment to the meditation process.
2. Having to keep control over the ego from overtaking us.



Lorena Claudia  
Vicente (Oblate)



Meditation Group

3. Deepening your knowledge of the meditation path in preparation for leading the group each week.

4. “Walking-the-talk”: becoming what we appear to be on the surface.

5. Being an instrument in God’s hands. Expanding the Kingdom by bringing others closer to Him.

6. And on a personal note, fulfilling my final oblation promise to serve the WCCM mission and share in its life and work.

### Cons:

1. Dealing with occasional disruptive behaviours.

2. Loss of personal time.

3. Showing up, come hell or high water!

4. Finding a replacement when illness impedes our presence.

A very important thought to keep us balanced and free from a bloated ego is whatever success is achieved, credit it to God, to the gifts He gave us, and whatever failures, to our unskillful application of those gifts.

In conclusion, if you feel the call to start a CM group, I hope you have the courage, confidence and trust enough to answer the call. If you do, you will never regret it!

# Season of Spiritual Renewal

The Diocese of Toronto (Anglican) is in the midst of a two-year “Season of Spiritual Renewal”.

The pillars of this season are: widespread prayer; a deeper engagement with Holy Scripture, a commitment to worship, and the practice of sharing the faith through word and deed. The Diocese is encouraging and supporting these practices in many ways.

As part of that initiative, last November 14, an online workshop was offered to local Anglican parishes: “Silence, Stillness, and Simplicity: An Introduction to Christian Meditation.” Over fifty people signed up (clergy and laypeople). The response was encouraging. A signal of a great hunger for contemplative prayer.



The Reverend  
Julie Meakin

Over thirty people attended the one-hour workshop and received a ‘crash course’ in meditation: the foundation, the practice, John Main and Fr. Laurence, for any age, a way of renewing the church, etcetera. Participants experienced meditating together for a short time, the most important part.

For those who registered, they received by email information on Christian meditation, weekly groups, and other resources.

“Religious renewal is a renewal in prayer,” stated John Main.

Four people from that workshop have joined a weekly meditation group. We continue to

pray that the seeds that were sown might continue to bear fruit.

## CCMC COMING EVENTS



### Retreat at Manresa Jesuit Spiritual Renewal Centre (Pickering, Ontario) July 2025

The theme of this retreat “Renewed in Hope” focuses on staying positive in uncertain times. By journeying deeper into our call to remain grounded, we join in solidarity with Pope Francis in this year’s Jubilee theme, “Pilgrims of Hope.”

We meditate six times over the weekend: Friday evening after supper, Saturday morning, midday, and in the evening before supper. Before each meditation session, we will listen to talks by Fr. John Main.

Between meditation sessions on Saturday, we will enjoy activities led by our fellow members on the theme of

HOPE, as well as a Tai Chi and Qigong session. As part of our schedule, we will also walk the outdoor labyrinth.

In compliance with our charitable status, the CCMC Board will host a very short annual hybrid meeting on Saturday afternoon. All are welcome to attend.

Our spiritual retreat will conclude with a private Mass on Sunday afternoon.

We pray that you will feel called to join us this summer in union with each other and Renewed in Hope!

Retreat details are on page C7.

Check out the beautiful [Manresa Retreat Centre](#). It’s so welcoming!

### Finding the Sanctuary Within: An In-Person Vancouver Event on Christian Meditation

Through the practice of Christian meditation, we learn how to be still and silent and accept simplicity. Meditation opens the door to our hearts, wherein we discover an inner sanctuary, home to the sacred.

We invite you to join us.

**When:** March 23, 2025

**Where:** St. Mary’s, 5251 Joyce St, Vancouver.

**Time:** 2–4 pm. Doors open at 1:30 pm.

**Fee:** By donation

For more information, contact JoAnn at 604-318-3429 or Maeve at [bccchristianmeditation@gmail.com](mailto:bccchristianmeditation@gmail.com).



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### Short talks for Groups

From 2005 to 2023, The Singapore Meditation Community distributed CDs of short talks to meditation groups around the world. These talks continue to be available for download at <https://meditationtalks.wccm.org/>. The Bookstore has many of these original CDs in stock for those who prefer physical CDs. These are available at \$10—postage included, or at \$8, plus postage, for multiple CDs. You will find the list of titles on the above noted website. Please send enquiries and orders to: [mediomedia@wccm-canada.ca](mailto:mediomedia@wccm-canada.ca)

## Canadian Christian Meditation Community invites you to a Summer Retreat



## Renewed In Hope

Friday to Sunday, July 25-27

Manresa Jesuit Spiritual Retreat Centre  
2325 Liverpool Road  
Pickering, ON L1X 1V4

Cost: \$295  
includes two nights' stay  
with 6 meals

Details and registration:  
<https://bit.ly/Manresa2025>



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# *If you start it, they will come!*

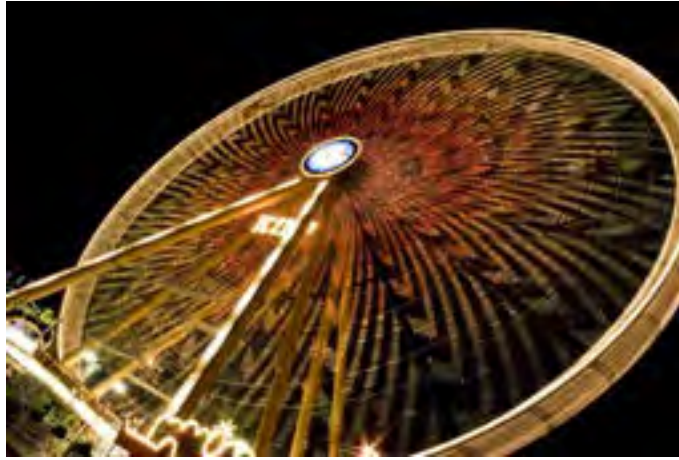
*continued from page 3*

in the last 20 minutes of the gathering, in a circle of chairs at the back of the parish hall. It's all voluntary. The actual meditation is 4 minutes long so far, but I expect it to increase gradually to maybe 10 minutes. I give a condensed talk based on the various sessions of the 6-week course. So far, the 3 attendees have enjoyed it tremendously. Someone taking the time to sit and teach meditation is a major part of the gift.

It's simple. There is no huge amount of preparation or promotion.

Now, think where you can "start it, and they will come?"

- Your Bible study group
- With your colleagues at work
- Your bridge club
- Your pickleball club at the local YMCA
- Your condo community
- Your retirement home community
- The hospital where you volunteer
- Your walking/hiking club



- Your family and friends
- For a heterogeneous audience, we can say when meditating we put ourselves in the presence of... and fill in the blank with: God, the universal intelligence, the great cause, the Spirit, etcetera. The thirst for spiritual discipline is so great your audience will not argue about its "raison d'être."

In these uncertain and anxious times, people have difficulty finding patience and time for a 6-week course, even when they recognize: "Yeah! meditation would do me good!"

But if we start slow, with a 2- to 3-minute meditation, and they feel God shining through our words and caring, they will be drawn to the practice.

For those who feel moved, please drop me an email or a line if you want to run an idea by me. If you have already started a group in an unusual place or circumstance, why not share your story in as little as 400 words and send it to our newsletter editor, Carolin Hwozdyk? We could start a new column with you as a feature writer!

"If you start it, they will come."

"If you start it, He will come."

**[achoquet@rogers.com](mailto:achoquet@rogers.com) • 647-680-8040**

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