



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)

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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 overladen 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,

Lawrence

News

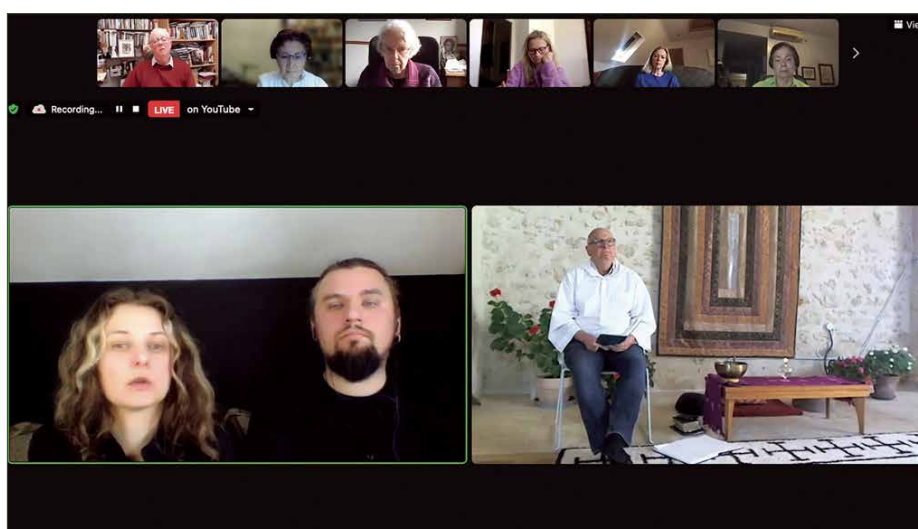
In times of war... finding peace in our own hearts

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

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A SERIES OF FOUR ONLINE TEACHINGS WITH FR LAURENCE

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 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

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.

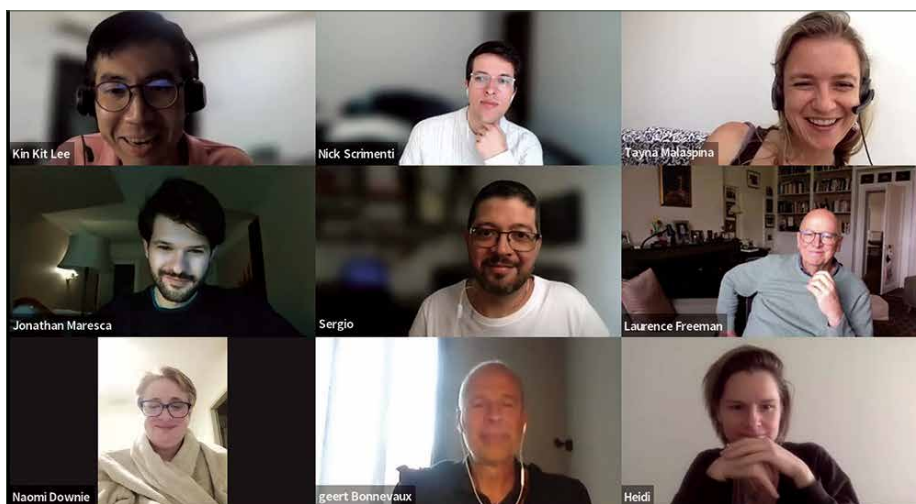
The Council is represented by young people from different areas of the world: Taynā Malaspina (Brazil), Heidi Ector (Belgium), Kit Lee (Singapore), Naomi Downie (Australia), Nick Scrimenti (USA), Jonathan Maresca (USA) and Sergio Peixoto Jr (Brazil). A representative from Argentina will be joining the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

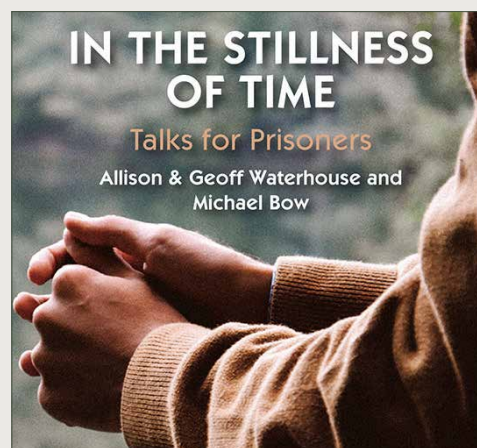
By Allison and Geoff Waterhouse and Michael Bow

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).



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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.

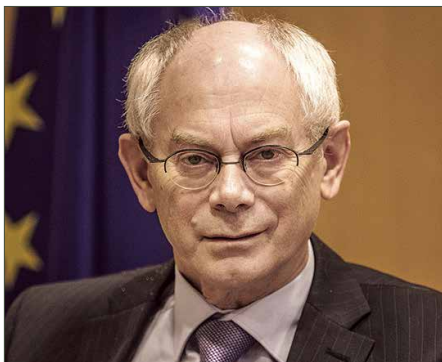


Photo by Michiel Hendryckx (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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>

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Celebrating Earth Day

“Creative Contemplation: connecting with the earth creatively”

by Naomi Downie

I have long enjoyed attending WCCM Environmental seminars and Earth Days and jumped at the chance to Project Manage Earth Day22. I feel passionate about YCM becoming more integrated with all WCCM events and climate change and care of the earth is of huge importance to all, but very much for young adults.

Recently I got called to be a part of a leadership team, National Youth Coordination with Deanna Klobas and Sarah Bishop. This NSW online retreat was an opportunity to come together. Both Deanna and Sarah supported my passion for *Celebrating Earth Day* and we were so happy to extend the invitation to the National and International community.

As an artist who is inspired by the local waterways and having observed my own soft relationship grow over hours of contemplation by its side, I wondered how other artists respond to nature in a reflective and meditative way.

The Parramatta River in Balmain, for me, has inspired two solo exhibitions, based on its wondrous changing colours, moods and atmospheres. (This year I am painting towards a third show in August with Paul Taylor and Gail Stiffe). After years of spending hours quietly witnessing the ebb and flow of sun and seasons over the surface of the deep, I heard a quiet small invitation from the waters to protect the space.

Paranga Reserve, the green way near the river edge, was threatened in 2021, by the inner west council, for over development. I joined an action community group protesting with



Painting by Naomi Downie

like minded politicians, to protect the community of native birds, fish and sanctuary for the local people who find peace here.

I wondered if other eco artists, who are inspired by their relationship to nature, have found themselves being charged and ignited to fight for its protection?

I have never forgotten Linda Chapman, one of WCCM Australia's respected leaders, she is also a Minister and Eco activist, speak about when we have a love relationship with nature and spend lots of time in it, there is a rising energy that emerges for us to want to take care of Earth.

It is so important for us to spend time in nature, breathing with it in quietness and being within the air, land and neighbourhood of insects and birds, listening. Miriam-Rose, Aboriginal Elder and Senior Australian of the Year, speaks about these listening places in the country that can bring a sense of awe and wisdom.

I reached out to four amazing creative women to reflect with me on these questions they all said yes. Below is a reflection on what each brought to the day.

Continued page 14.

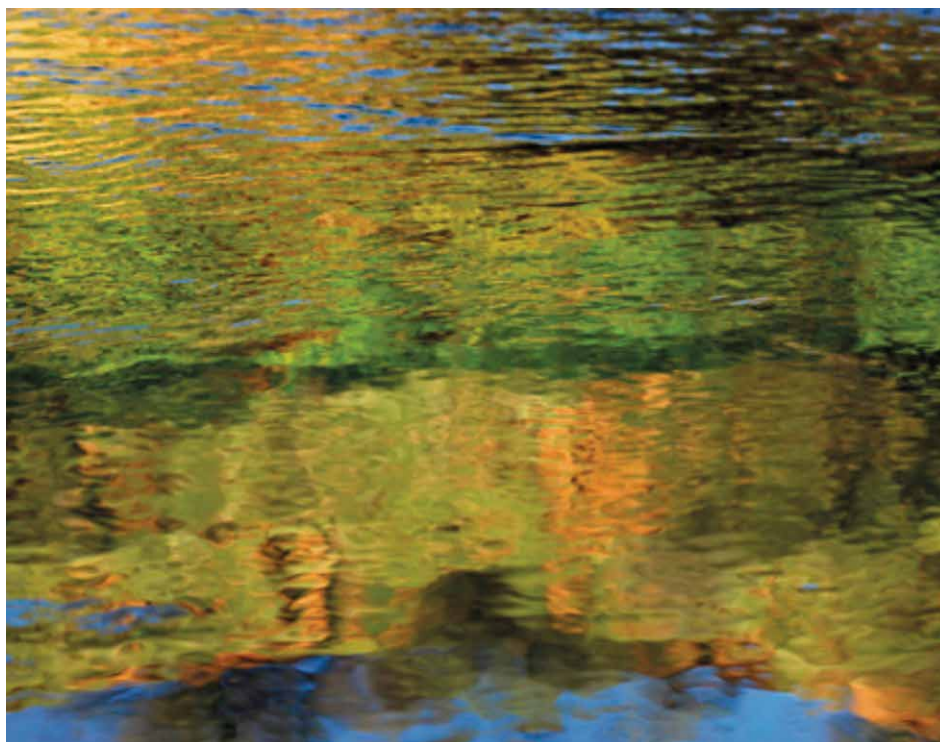
Celebrating Earth Day

● continued from page 13

Brooke Prentis is a proud Aboriginal Christian Leader from the Wakka Wakka peoples. I knew her to draw deeply from her country, as a poet and as a great thinker, as well as a champion for other creatives, alongside Helen Wright, at Annandale Creative Art Centre. She is also an active justice seeker for Indigenous Peoples, sharing a message of conciliation as friendship.

Brooke opened the day with an Acknowledgement of Country and got us to stand to attention to honour the custodians of the lands on which we stood. She led a Walking on Country guided meditation, allowing us to experience our senses and being observant to what's around us. Brooke spoke for 30min about her relationship with Wakka Wakka land and her love of Grass trees sharing a poem with us and photos of her land. Also, Brooke spoke about her climate change scarf project she led with Common Grace, for folk to knit, with various coloured yarns, the growing changes in temp of the earth over 100yrs that were then given to members of parliament in Canberra.

Celia Kemp is a writer, photographer and theologian with a passion for Christian community whose life was changed after experiencing Alice Springs, NT, at Campfire of the Heart. The landscape called her and she moved there. It affected her in a way that formed her theology and she found herself photographing her daily walks and writing poems about how the scenes were speaking to her. Celia has lived in Alice Springs now for many years. Sharing her photos and quotes of authors who moved



Streams in the Desert by Celia Kemp

'I wondered how other artists respond to nature in a reflective and meditative way.'

her was a highlight for me.

Rosie Lloyd-Giblett: I first saw Rosie on *Gardening Australia* ABC TV and her work was so striking I began to follow her on Instagram. I was so delighted she said yes straight away when I offered her a chance to share and reflect on nature, art and activism.

Rosie is a professional painter and art educator who lives on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, where her experience of place inspires her art practice. I found her abstract paintings and drawings expressed freedom and movement that is exhilarating. She works outside in the bush, on boats and in creeks, using marks to evoke the felt energy within subtle seasonal variations of her local landscape. Rosie's hope is to entice viewers of her works to "smell the foliage, view the colour pathway, and understand the tune of the natural world". After several videos of her studio and seeing her working in nature we did a question and answer session with the participants.

Janet O'Sullivan was not advertised on the flyer (oversight, deep apologies) but she shared an excellent short session on her passion for weaving and for up-cycling clothes. She spoke about her life changing experience living in Japan and being influenced by Zen gardens and their philosophy of quiet small moments of beauty. Over the years the environment and matters of the Earth have become very dear to her and she encouraged us with the different multi-faith environmental groups she is a member of, to actively defend the planet. Janet finished with her talk with the words *Community, Creativity & Contemplation* that were values that she lived by and they seemed to perfectly summarize the intention of the day's theme.



Brooke Prentis' climate change scarf project.

Celebrating Earth Day Response

by Andrew McAlister

One thing that struck me was the immediate connection between contemplative practice and nature that the day presented.

During this time when the issue of climate change has become one of climate changing, this bond between practice and nature needs to be emphasised all the more. While our mantra meditation does grow in us a deep and essential union with nature as creation, the practice itself does not have the immediate connection

with nature that, say, walking on grass or gazing at a leaf do. These practices are a kind of *lectio divina*, a 'divine reading' of nature, where being with an aspect of nature can cause a deep love and bond with nature to rise into awareness. This love, of course, is divine, it is God. We then might lose ourselves in this love while gazing at sparrows or clouds. Creation then becomes an icon and contemplation is. Maybe this *lectio divina* of nature is something of what Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann calls *dadidiri* ('dadidi').

The day helped me see that meditation, as an exercise of attention into the heart, is a practice that can ready attention for this divine reading of nature. Meditation, then, can be a preparation for a revelation of love, wherever it may happen – while meditating or while attending to a rose petal.

In all this, attention can become love; we can thoughtlessly experience ourselves as a human expression of Creation, a creation of love and full of love. Nature is the body of God, no matter its form.

WCCM WA Group Leaders' Day in March

by Grace Reid

Advertised in the Calendar of Events as a 'day', but in reality usually just a morning, this year's offering by the WA Committee for those who regularly lead groups of people in Christian Meditation, could have lasted a day.

For a number of reasons the scheduled time together is usually short, travel distances prohibitive and because in these Covid times actual events can be cancelled, the organisers/facilitators ventured to try something different this time around.

We imagined a gathering of these dedicated people sitting around a table or a campfire, yarning about their experiences relating to their own journey to Christian Meditation, how they came to lead a group and how they actually do that.

To encourage participants to recall and record their stories, we developed and sent out a series of questions that we hoped would engender sharing prior to the event and also give the Committee some direction for providing them with support in the future. The responses would be forwarded to the 33 local and regional group leaders, and we hoped this invitation would prompt them to recollect, record and tell their own stories, in the way they might do

during an extended period of time in each other's company.

Seven group leaders or their 'stand-in' attended the gathering, despite hot weather and being required to wear masks, which made speaking and hearing difficult. Only one regional group leader's response was received and he was disappointed not to have online access to the discussion. Online access has been noted as an important option for future events.

For various reasons, a number of those attending had not recorded their responses or their responses had not been received, so hard copies were distributed to be completed during the tea break and brought to the circle. The facilitators suggested participants give their responses to one question, each time around the circle. In different circumstances small group work would have been preferable.

Interesting accounts were shared of the various paths taken, in finding and deciding to make Christian Meditation a part of our lives and how the role of group leader was sought or thrust upon them! Topics prompted by the questions, ranged from finding an alternative to the title 'Group Leader', to the difference between Meditation and Contemplation, to starting up a new Christian Meditation group within a University setting. When the close of the gathering came around, it

seemed that had additional time been available discussion would certainly have continued.

That is something to be considered by the Committee for the future, along with information gathered and lessons learned. Asking questions and sharing the responses of those who lead a group of people in Christian Meditation in-person or online, prior to the gathering, was an experiment.

Within the small number of respondents, the first aim of the gathering – which was to enable Group Leaders to get to know each other and share information about the group they lead – was met albeit to a limited degree, given time constraints.

The second aim which was to determine the information and guidelines that Group Leaders would value was less well achieved – because of the time factor and also, perhaps, because of the wide range in experience of setting up and leading a group, amongst participants.

Concise word/phrase feedback from around the circle was positive.

Once collated, information from responses will be sent to all WA group leaders. Should they communicate that a strategy of this kind has the potential to provide them with ongoing support, in what can be an isolated role, then we as a Committee will be listening.

How did you become

The voices of ten group leaders from Perth and surrounds reflecting on *How did you become a group leader?* and *How do you lead your group?*

Early in February, the WA committee sent out a set of questions to all WA group leaders. “We hoped to elicit the kind of information that you might share, if you had spent some time in each other’s company.”

Below is an edited collation of the individual responses received.

I heard about Christian Meditation from a parishioner who ran the group about three years ago. I’m on hand these days to help lead the meditation if our regular leader cannot attend. We hold the session in the meeting room of our local church on Wednesday afternoons. On average 6 or 7 people gather.

* * * * *

Initially, I searched online and contacted the person who led a parish group about a decade ago. When Fr Lawrence visited Perth, I attended his talks. I have been available to lead the group in Christian Meditation as required.

Recently, I have been asked by the Multi-faith Officer at the university where I work, to offer a Christian Meditation group to students on Wednesday afternoons. My intention will be to keep the setting very simple, using the WCCM App for opening and closing prayers, talks and meditation timer. Students will learn of the new Christian Meditation group through social media and notifications from the Multi-faith Officer. We hope – if we are lucky – to attract 5-10 students. There is already a popular Mindfulness session at the Uni.

I find useful resources from the WCCM web site and have good contact with the Committee.

* * * * *

I first heard about Christian Meditation in the early 1960s as a student at UWA.

I heard more about it over the following years, including from Jenni Berg (current Co-ordinator for CM in WA) and a friend of my wife. My knowledge and experience consolidated during a 30

day silent retreat at St Beuno’s in Wales in 2015. The church I was attending was strongly ‘Bible-based’ and I felt was too ‘head orientated’, so I wrote a small summary of how I saw contemplative prayer and offered to begin sessions for the parish. The parish priest accepted my proposal and I have been a Christian Meditation group leader since late 2018. Awareness of the group was initially raised via the parish newsletter, latterly more by word of mouth and members are no longer confined to the parish.

At first we met on Thursday mornings in the parish hall, but when COVID began, I moved to online Zoom meetings. I prepare a short text for meditation each week and email it the day before to the 23 people who have registered an interest in receiving it, together with the Zoom link. On average, there are 4-6 people in the group. A brief greeting is followed by some music, usually by Margaret Rizza, followed by the WCCM App Opening prayer, chimes, timed 20 minutes of silence, chimes, a little more music and we say goodbye.

At first I developed my structure from other groups I attended and slowly learned various ways to use technology. I felt supported by my wife and others who attended in the early days. I often looked at the WCCM website and the daily thoughts of people like Richard Rohr and Joan Chittister.

* * * * *

I heard of Christian Meditation around 1990 by word of mouth and became a group leader after the Sam and Vesta Gamalatge days, around 2007. I am ‘fill-in and backstop’ for a person who has been leading CM for perhaps 30 years.

We meet at our local church on Thursday evenings. We set up a candle on a special mat, (a donation bag is available), hand out a prayer sheet with opening prayers and teaching materials. After meditation we use a modified closing prayer then finish with a social chat. Generally 4-12 meditators attend. They learned about Christian Meditation through CMC WA years ago although some have ‘always known’.

* * * * *

I first learned of Christian Meditation in South Africa at a Diocesan Retreat House near Capetown many years ago (in the 80s, I think). I then learned about Christian Meditation in Perth from googling WCCM, came to the church and saw the advert on the notice board.

I have led the group when the person who regularly leads the meditation was on holiday. We are a lovely group of 6-7 meditators who sit around a table in a small room. A cloth is spread on the table where a cross, Bible and picture of John Main are placed. Around 6-7 of us stand while a candle is lit and we pray after Acknowledgement of Country. I am enjoying the theme we are following through WCCM at present – about us all being connected. We each read a passage that we briefly discuss.

* * * * *

Around 2000, during a time of great despair, I saw a piece in the church bulletin about a course in Christian Meditation to be run by Sam and Vesta Gamalatge (who brought CM to WA) over a number of Saturday afternoons at the Migrant Centre in Victoria Square. I felt moved to enrol.

Sr Aileen Rafferty was given support

a group leader?

by the Redemptorists at the North Perth Monastery to form a group. I think the original hope was that city workers would stop in for Christian Meditation before heading home, but they have not been the mainstay of the group. Some years later, Aileen became ill and asked me to lead the meditations while she received treatment. I have continued in the role since she passed away. My style of leading the group became quite different from Aileen's.

We meet in a room in the Monastery building on Monday evenings. I have a key and am very aware of the responsibility to keep it safe, as this is the Redemptorist Fathers' home. We have a shelf where all we need can be stored, including CDs and player, flat-pack table, battery candles, donation tin, bookmarks and notebook in which I record the CD and track used for the session and, now in COVID times, who is present (just in case someone has forgotten to scan or record). Recently, having been asked to sight everyone's vaccination status, I had to tell an unvaccinated person not to join us, which was sad for both of us.

I have kept the format very simple, especially since I regularly ask another member of the group to lead in my absence. We use two CDs, one containing a talk and the other ('compiled' many years ago) has music by Margaret Rizza, gongs, timed silence for meditation and gongs and music to end the meditation. The opening and closing prayers are read from the WCCM bookmarks. We leave quietly as we pass the room where some of the priests are usually having their evening meal. On average we will have six meditators, but recently have had up to twelve, which requires tables be moved to enable social-distancing.

Some members of the group saw my details in the weekly Bulletin and made contact, the WCCM link is also there. But over the years, it seems that most have been invited by somebody who was already meditating with the group. I enjoy the potential that Christian Meditation has for ecumenism and that this group includes people of various Christian denominations and others of no faith group affiliation.

Some ideas that could be useful? A group member who had hearing impairment, appreciated being able to read from hard copy transcripts (found in 'Resources' on the WCCM site) of the CD tracks we were playing / The CDs and books on our shelf can be borrowed by entering name and date in a notebook / Money donated is used to buy books at Community Days and these are gifted to group members from the group ('Your Daily Practice' by Lawrence Freeman for new Christian Meditators and 'Silence and Stillness in Every Season' for those who seem committed to the practice) Remaining donation money goes to the Committee for WCCM purposes following discussion with the group. I forward WCCM newsletters to group members and always ask them to let me know if they no longer need or want me to do that.

I have downloaded the WCCM App and use the timer and prayers at home on my phone or laptop and 'subscribe' to have the Daily Wisdom by Lawrence Freeman and other seasonal resources delivered to my inbox.

* * * * *

I learned about Christian Meditation via a friend, became a group leader via my parish and have been doing this on and off since 1986. We currently meet via Zoom organised by Rev Stuart Fenner, who sends us a link. His leadership and guidance comes from a long association with Perth WCCM and of course his deep spirituality as a priest. We have been members of this group for almost two years. Along with the link, we receive a reflection written by a mystic. Stuart outlines the recommendations for meditation and we also have a psalm. On average, we are joined by 8-10 people from all over Perth and also from the ACT and Victoria, who learned about this group via word of mouth and the WCCM website.

* * * * *

Sam and Vesta Gamaladge came our parish in 1999 to teach us about Christian Meditation. I began to help them, became involved in organising groups and have been leading Meditation sessions now for 20 years. Our group of 10-12 – who learned

about Christian Meditation through Introductory Days and word of mouth – meets on Saturday mornings at our local church. Everyone helps set out chairs and we take turns to lead the meditation, starting with a reading from John Main.

* * * * *

I did an internet search years ago asking 'Is meditation Christian?' and connected up with the Christian Meditation community. Over the past two years, I have led the meditations when our group leader cannot make it and have appreciated the moral support I have had from the other members.

Our group of 6 to 8 – who learned about Christian Meditation via the church bulletin, word of mouth and the listing on the WCCM website – meets on Tuesday evenings. Chairs are placed in a semi-circle around a candle on a stand. The first 20 minutes is a silent meditation, then the second 20 minutes is a contemplation meditation on a phrase, picture or piece of music.

* * * * *

I learned of Christian Meditation through my parish priest, the visit by Lawrence Freeman in 1999/2000, Sam and Vesta, Introductory Days and CMC days. I was interested in forming a group and my parish priest suggested I seek out interested people and I led a group from there.

Ideas for how to run it came from Introductory Days. There are 16 people on the email list and 10 to 12 who regularly come together. All are welcome and we are not aware of their Christian background. They learned of the group from others and from the CMC group.

We set out thirteen chairs in a circle – well distanced – with a candle placed in the centre and start with the prayer. Each week, we take turns to read from *Silence and Stillness in Every Season* by John Main, meditate for 25 minutes, finish with the Our Father and the Closing Prayer. Chairs are put back quietly and we leave in silence.

We have an end of year morning tea as a group. This used to be at my home but as we have more members, now gather at another member's larger home. Everyone enjoys this gathering.

Meditation as a ministry of

Can meditation have any effect in a time of war? Author and long-time Christian meditator Dr Noel Keating* believes it can. By opening themselves to the compassionate love of God, he believes meditators can bring compassion to the world, touching people in ways we cannot understand intellectually.

Laurence Freeman, who leads the World Community for Christian Meditation, spoke recently about the sickening invasion of Ukraine. He said:

It's a really dark time for the world and we have to approach it with as much faith and hope and love as possible. The way forward is going to be difficult and unclear, but day by day, moment by moment, if we keep returning to our heart, that feeling of nausea that accompanies irrationality—cruelty, dishonesty and destruction of good relations and of decent negotiation and decent conversation ... can be transformed.

And then he posed a very challenging question asking: 'What is the link between meditation and this kind of world event?' His question has challenged me to explore what we can say about our contemplative understanding of the power of meditation, not merely in our own lives but on this broader stage. How can our practice of letting go, of sitting in silence, alone or as part of a group, open and vulnerable to Love, how can that impact on such an awful situation?

Thinking about it I recalled a talk from James Finley on his podcast 'Turning to the Mystics.' In a bonus episode for Holy Week 2020, he reflected on Veronica's Veil and I think it addresses this question very well.

The Stations of the Cross recall the passion of Christ over 14 stations. Each of these stations, bar one, draws on a scene described in the Gospels. The one exception is the sixth station, which is Veronica's Veil. It describes how Jesus is carrying the cross on the way to His crucifixion; the crowds are lining the

streets, and Veronica is there, just one of the crowd. Some are laughing and jeering; others are there out of mere curiosity or because such executions are public events. Jesus' distraught disciples were surely there too, and Veronica seems to have been one of them.

As she witnesses Jesus's suffering, she is moved by compassion to offer him solace so she steps out of the crowd to wipe his brow, to wipe away the blood, sweat and tears from his face. She probably did so at considerable risk to herself, both from the Roman soldiers and from the baying crowd.

She offers Jesus the only thing she felt she could in that moment, which was her veil. Finley asks us to imagine that single moment when Jesus buries his face in the veil which she perhaps held in the open palms of her hand, as a parent might do with a child. Finley writes:

There's this kind of primal moment where Jesus takes her veil, and he closes his eyes and lowers his face into her veil. And in

'How can our practice of letting go, of sitting in silence, alone or as part of a group, open and vulnerable to Love, how can that impact on such an awful situation?'



that moment, the softness of her veil is the only solace he can find in a world turned harsh. At a deeper level, the solace he finds is her compassion for him ... [Imagine, as might be shown in a movie in slow motion] that in the moment Jesus closes his eyes to lower his face into the veil, in closing his eyes and lowering his face, the world around him disappears. She disappears. Everyone disappears ... [We can reflect] that in that moment, Jesus, without going anywhere, descends down into the deep, infinite, tender mercy of God, the Father, sustaining him in that moment.

I'm sure all of us can recall incidents when we were deeply touched while witnessing the compassionate action of another person. Seeing, for example, how caring the people of Poland, and elsewhere, have been to those fleeing Ukraine, now refugees. Ordinary, everyday people like ourselves were moved to respond, to offer transport, or accommodation, or both, to people who were fleeing the vicious, inhuman, unprovoked attack. And I think so many

compassion in a time of war



‘Meditation, indeed all prayer, is a ministry of compassion that interiorly touches minds and hearts around the world.’

watching scenes like that on television were moved by their compassion to do something themselves. Compassion, like love, is infectious.

And so James Finley writes that such a moment, as experienced by Jesus through Veronica’s Veil, although it was a simple, single, limited gesture of compassion from her, was nonetheless experienced by Him as the solace of God the Father. And we can understand how

this solace may have re-awakened Jesus to the sustaining depths of the oceanic, never-ending tender Love of God. Indeed that simple gesture of compassion most likely touched all who witnessed it, awakening them too. And it can do likewise for all of us who reflect on it at a time like this in our own lives.

And it is over in a moment as Jesus is forced to move on. If we weren’t paying attention we might have missed it. The legend tells us that when Veronica recovered her senses she realised Jesus’s face was imprinted on her veil. But Finley asks us to consider as a metaphor that the imprinted face is a symbol of *her compassion*, her face in the world. He asks us to consider that every time we respond with compassion *‘it is your face and my face on the fabric of existence in troubled times’*, reminding us that we too are permeated by this solace and love that sustains us in the dramas of our lives, of our time. In other words, we can see the veil as a metaphor for the solace of faith in the midst of unresolved matters.

When you sit in meditation with the intention of grounding yourself in Love,

your face, your True Self is imprinted on the fabric of the circumstances in which you find yourself. Those circumstances may be filled with all kinds of suffering, the fabric of your life may be bloody and torn, but that same fabric is the fabric in which this encounter is occurring in the depths of our hearts.

I tell children that meditation makes them kinder; because in meditation we become deeply conscious – albeit at a level of consciousness deeper than ordinary self-consciousness – that despite the differences and division we can see on the surface, even when they hurt us deeply – we are nonetheless united at the deepest level of our being. At the level of the True Self, we are one.

And it isn’t just that when we rise from our meditation we go out into the world a little more kindly. But just as importantly, as we sit in meditation with a trusting heart, we know at a very deep level that through the very act of meditation, the solace of the veil is mysteriously permeated throughout the whole world, touching people in ways that we can never understand intellectually.

We discover that meditation, indeed all prayer, is a ministry of compassion that interiorly touches minds and hearts around the world. And so our commitment to meditation, to opening ourselves to the compassionate love of God, is itself an act of courage, an act of faith, bringing solidarity and compassion into the world.

This article first appeared on Roland Ashby’s blog ‘Living Water’. See www.thelivingwater.com.au

**Dr Keating has spent forty years in the education sector in Ireland, as a teacher, principal and education officer. He is author of ‘Meditation with Children – A Resource for Teachers and Parents’ (Medio Media) and voluntary coordinator of the Meditation with Children Project, which involves over 40,000 children, who meditate several times each week on a whole-school basis, across more than 200 primary schools throughout Ireland. He can be contacted at mnkeating@gmail.com*



www.wccmaustralia.org.au

Our People at WCCM Australia

National Coordinator	Jan Wylie 0418 655 291 · janwylie@tpg.com.au
National Secretary	Joan McKeegan
National Coordinators for Younger Christian Meditators	Sarah Bishop Naomi Downie Deanna Klobas
School of Meditation	Kath Houston
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