



# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2009

## “WHEN GOD DISAPPEARS”



*led by*

**ROBERT KENNEDY  
SJ**

Jesuit Priest and Zen master, Fr Kennedy's long experience of teaching meditation to modern Christians gives him powerful and much needed insights into the contemporary hunger for the experience of God.

### PRE-SEMINAR RETREAT AUGUST 26-28

The Seminar will now be held at the Christian Meditation Centre, St Marks, London and the retreat at the Christian Meditation Retreat Centre, Cockfosters, London.

For full information and Registration:

Visit: [www.jms09.com](http://www.jms09.com)

Email: [jms2009@wccm.org](mailto:jms2009@wccm.org)

Write: The International Office, St Mark's Myddelton Sq, London EC1R 1XX, UK

Call: Tel: +44 27 278 2070

## GROWING MEDITATION IN INDONESIA



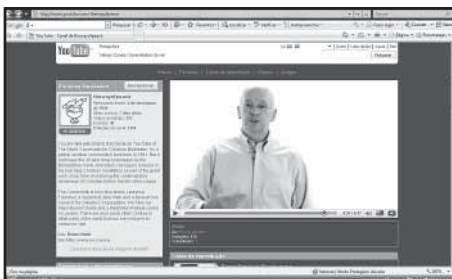
We were so grateful that Fr. Laurence was able to visit Indonesia again on his way back to UK from Australia and that we could launch with his presence some newly translated books and CDs. On this trip we gave him a little more free time and he was able to visit the renowned Borobudur and Prambanan temples. The first of these must have been a particular inspiration for him as he used its symbolism in one of his major talks.

The levels of the temple represent different ways of life and levels of consciousness. These are richly illustrated by carvings and sculptures. But at the highest level, representing the beginning of spiritual consciousness there are no images. The stupas on three of these higher levels also represent different degrees of distraction during meditation, with the highest admitting no external distraction. Fr Laurence made good use of this symbolism in introducing Christian meditation to a large and responsive local audience that knew of the temple but many of whom had not previously thought of it in terms of prayer.

In Indonesia we are blessed with the support of bishops and clergy. Mgr. Ign. Suharyo, Bishop of Semarang wrote the preface to the translation of “The Prayer of the Priest”. Fr. Laurence gave his first talk to a full church at Semarang Cathedral. He also spoke in Yogyakarta and in Jakarta where the talk “Meditation for busy people” at Atma Jaya Catholic University drew in the congregation of the International Catholic Parish. Before leaving Fr. Laurence introduced meditation to children at St. Theresia Church. The six-week program, Introduction to Christian Meditation, will follow up the visits in each city. We are also fortunate to have Fr. Tan Thian Sing as our national moderator, who serves as an excellent translator for Fr. Laurence.

*Hendra Widjaja, National Coordinator, Indonesia.*

[www.meditasikristiani.com](http://www.meditasikristiani.com)



### MEDITATION TEACHING ON THE WEB

In addition to our family of websites centered on [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org) there are these new internet resources: Talks by John Main, Bede Griffiths, Gerry Pierce, Laurence Freeman and others on iTunes (listen and download): search for “Christian Meditation”

Videos on YouTube search for “thewayofpeace”



# A letter from Laurence Freeman

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

*Dear friends,*

Friday afternoon did not seem the ideal time to speak to a large group of fourteen-year-old boys and girls seated on hard benches in a baroque chapel in Lisbon. They seemed more interested in getting out of their school uniforms and into the weekend. The translator was excellent but I gathered that the majority of the children didn't need one. It was a little heavy going, although after the talk the meditation was surprisingly still for such a group in such a place and time. As soon as I asked for comments or questions one eager boy thrust up his hand and, having politely thanked me, as his teachers would have approved, he went on to say that he found the meditation very peaceful but the talk beforehand was rather boring. You never know when the truth will strike.

## INCONVENIENT TRUTHS

There is the truth we seek at the intellectual level, refining concepts and language to come closer to the insight or intuition we feel attracted to know and express better. There is the truth we stalk through experiment and research, learning from failure and never giving up. There is the truth that we learn from our deeper feelings and relationships with others. And then there is the truth that suddenly appears in a quiet flash, revealing itself and illuminating everything around it in a new and transforming light, dispelling delusion and platitude – like the Resurrection, like the truth that is Christ.

Inconvenient truths we often try to push back into their hiding places. Politicians use spin, the psyche uses denial, and families use the silence of negation. But once the cat is out of the bag it can never really be put back in. The very effort of denial or evasion of the truth proves that the truth has indeed come and even if it has not yet set us free it has changed everything irreversibly. Perhaps this helps to understand the slow process of history in accepting and recognizing the truth embodied in the life and person of Christ and the meaning of the Resurrection.

One way of dealing with the disturbance created by the truth upsetting our old ways of seeing is to domesticate it, to convert it into the terms of the world as it was before the truth appeared. This seems almost inevitable at the collective level. Institutions

are notoriously prone to denial in the cause of self-preservation. The teaching of Jesus on non-resistance to evil gets diluted, his insistence on a non-hierarchical community gets rationalized to accommodate our need for power structures, his revelation of the truth of divine forgiveness gets reversed to support a punitive and vindictive deity. 'The distinction between the office and person,' said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'is wholly alien to the teaching of Jesus.' In the end, the truth is personal and it can only enter the world when it has conquered the human heart.

## THE TEST OF DAILY LIFE

And the personal is tried and tested in daily life. Perhaps this is one reason why we are so invasively curious about the private lives of celebrities. We think we will know them better or come closer to them if we know about their secret or mundane tastes and routines. Yet, we know remarkably little about these aspects of the lives of those spiritual teachers who have helped humanity to evolve and truly changed the human mind. It is their personal authenticity, not their personal diaries, that is the criterion for our trusting them and their transmission of the truth they embodied. This rare and powerful authority of the true teacher enables us to trust them and to try to put into practice what they taught.

Personal authority though is not the same as institutional force. For many modern people the dogmatic authority of Christianity is undermined by the insistence of orthodoxy everywhere, that 'you have to believe this if you are to be one of us.' As a child or an unself-realised adult we may accept it because it affords the security of belonging to a group with firm convictions and allays the fear of rejection or of being on our own. But the more closely it is examined the idea that belief can be enforced is absurd. Belief in any truth-revelation grows through a process that includes both personal experience and trust in the authenticity of the teacher. It is not that the dogma of Christianity are unimportant but that they are so important that they cannot be reduced to ready-made formulas set in linguistic forms that never change. They are not stamped party-cards or visas into the Kingdom. The dogmas need to grow in the soil of daily life like the seed of the Kingdom itself. Truth grows in us as we grow in relation to the truth. Any institution, political, educational or religious, that denies this, ends by losing the trust of its members. Good faith means trust as well as belief.

How, for example, can we understand this experience of the truth in relation to two of the central revelations that follow faith in Christ: the Resurrection and the Trinitarian nature of God? Are these truths merely at the intellectual, theological level, destined to be found boring, and not only by teenagers on a

Friday afternoon? Or are they experiences of reality that actually change our lives and seek expression, always inadequately, in words and concepts? If we understood why more people go to church on Good Friday than Easter Sunday we might be able to answer these questions. Does daily life seem to resonate more with the truth revealed in the very visibility of the Cross than with the truth and power released in the spiritual subtlety of the physical resurrection?

## CIRCLES OF TRUTH

Whenever I drive in Ireland I usually arrive late at my destination because I find it hard to resist following the many road-signs to stone circles and ancient monuments. Sometimes the diversion is long and unsuccessful as it takes second sight to find them. Often though I am rewarded by discovering a sacred site, maybe just a small collection of standing, usually fallen or leaning stones, that yet retains the aura of an ancient stillness. The stillness that the psalmist says leads to the truth of the knowledge of God is very present in these places where time seems to contract over many millennia. They do not try to convert – what could they try to persuade us of as we have so little idea of what their builders believed. Maybe they had their orthodoxies too but what we see now is their place of practice. Their solid presentness is movingly, authentically silent. You could dismiss the effect perhaps as nostalgia for the ancient; but the calming of the mind they lead their visitors to, at least those who stay longer than a snapshot, suggests that they are a truly sacred portal, unaffected by the way they have been catalogued or signposted. Like meditation, they are truth without the enforcing of dogma; but the source of dogma is contained in their silence.

It is interesting to see how naturally a group of meditators will often arrange themselves into a circle rather than into the straight rows of church benches. Sometimes a sacred symbol, a cross, icon or candle, may be in the middle of the circle, or sometimes it is part of the circle a point that is both its beginning and end. Truth likes the symbolism of circles and spirals. But it sometimes employs the more dramatic horizontals and verticals of the cross to open the mind to new ways of seeing. Sometimes it puts them together in the mandala or the rose window. The Trinity itself is a circular dogma, like a spinning triangle – the three persons eternally losing and finding themselves in each other – with an infinite depth dimension, the mystery of the Father, and an infinite outreach, the ever-expanding Creation.

Only a still mind can enter the circle - by realizing that it is already part of it. The first and fundamental work of prayer then is to calm the mind. Not to concoct beautiful words of praise or create beautiful images or to dramatise dialogues with the divine but, as the Desert Fathers said, to 'lay aside thoughts'. Easy to say, not so easy to achieve, especially when the mind has been agitated, distracted or wild for a long time and when the one who has that mind cannot remember it ever being different. It can then seem that calming the mind is impossible or self-destructive; and an introduction to meditation in this state often meets with fear and rejection. Even for experienced

meditators the achievement of a calm mind is rarely a permanent experience and never entirely predictable. You can go on retreat and think that the circumstances are ideal for contemplation. Then you find your mind is in turmoil the whole time. Or you can be meditating in an airport departure lounge during a blizzard with angry, noisy people around you, and find a depth of silence and lucid stillness that you would not have thought possible anywhere.

Can we – realistically - achieve this, generally, in ordinary, daily life? It is an important question because it means, can we ever personally experience the truth of our faith at a deep level; or do we always have to accept it on second hand evidence? Do we need to go to the desert or a mountain peak to find the mental calm necessary for the truth to emerge? Even the Desert fathers and mothers, who had fled the world and entered a life of radical simplicity and solitude, still encountered distraction and mental turmoil. We today are probably the most distracted, media-bombarded generation to populate the planet but distraction is generic not only cultural. The desert teachers even thought it was hard to distinguish distraction from original sin, our weird but universal sense of separation from God.

The work of calming the mind ('set your troubled hearts at rest' as Jesus said) can arouse strong resistance in anyone anywhere. The noisier the mind and the more imbalance and disharmony it causes, the more difficult it is to take the initial step just to sit and stay still. There's always an excuse not to, something else that needs to be done or read, or watched or listened to.

The seeds of the eight principal faults identified and analysed by the desert monks are always there. They can be germinated by daily activities, work, meetings, relationships and accidents. Our imagination, fantasy, addictive patterns or the shifting forces of our unconscious minds can equally activate them. Even the 'ideal' conditions for meditation can arouse these forces and lock us into mental states that make the work of silence seem impossible – look at any monastery.

## DAILY MYSTERY

The Gospel however is addressed to the multitudes not to gold medal spiritual athletes. If it were impossible to achieve the truth of what Jesus reveals at a personal level in ordinary life what would be the point of it? Of course levels of realization vary – perhaps as many as there are individuals to realize. Jesus said there are many mansions in his Father's house. Nevertheless, he was revealing a truth about human nature not a league table of spiritual perfectionism. The Kingdom of heaven is close at hand, within and among us – for us all.

For all, it is also true that sacrifices have to be made. If you seriously want to calm the mind you will need to control or at least be more aware of what you are letting in through a careless use of the mind – television, re-reading advertising posters, daydreaming, flicking the pages of celebrity magazines. The best use of time is essential for the spiritual life – not only the discipline of the daily meditations but also minimizing the superficialities of social distraction and entertainment. Days

"TRUTH CAN ONLY ENTER  
THE WORLD THROUGH THE  
HUMAN HEART."

not spent making money can be holidays or holy days, as one wishes.

It's possible but it demands discipleship of a serious kind to calm the mind. Whether we do it in marriage, marketplace or monastery is largely a matter of temperament. The steps are the same if one wishes to learn to meditate:

1. Meditate once. Even if you never meditate again in your life you will enter the next one with a small advantage because you will have seen what your mind is like.

2. Repeat step 1 every day

3. Repeat step 2 twice a day

The mantra is the focus of this daily mystery lived in the ordinary. It is an act of unity, an expression of love beginning with a new kind of love for one's self that may at first seem like tough love but which expands into the Trinitarian experience itself – love of God, love of others, the love of love. It leads to unity in oneself, healing the divided and conflictual dualities of the agitated mind (do I want this or that or both, that person is my enemy, that one my object of desire). As this inner division is repaired in the mind we are led into the Trinitarian heart through an immediate re-connection with the Mind of Christ in us.

Gradually the reality of continuous prayer unfolds and permeates all activity. Like St Patrick we find Christ as we walk, sleep, rise and work. Even in the midst of modern urban stress, waiting for trains, sitting in traffic jams, dealing with bureaucracy, hanging on the line for automated responses, the calm mind can be aware of the arising of agitation and take steps to defuse it. Not only is this a wonderful vision of prayer in the Christian tradition ('I am with you always till the end of time') it is little less than a necessity in the world of division and agitation we have created for ourselves.

How do we know our mind is calming? Simply because in situations of stress, confusion and agitation we are conscious of a peace, joy and clarity that confirm that the Truth is within us. Although we may forget or reject it, it never abandons us. Come back to meditation after a time of infidelity (being unfaithful to meditation or to anything else) and you will see how, once the initial layers of mental guilt or unrest are gone through, a wholehearted homecoming celebration has been prepared, a banquet of love.

## THE SPINNING TRINITY

This is the context in which the dogmas begin to make sense and become embodied in daily life. Without this calm mind some dogmatic drift into intolerance or fundamentalism is inevitable. I was shocked

to hear recently of a seven year old boy who had just made his first confession and woke up that night with a nightmare that God was sending him to the fires of hell because he hadn't confessed all his sins. One would have thought this demonic image of God was no longer being peddled. It is of the same order as handing drugs to schoolchildren. But its resilience suggests how easily the truth can be perverted and how important it is to prepare the ground of the calm mind for the reception of any spiritual teaching.

Meditation is iconoclastic. It dissolves every image and concept including those about God. This very 'emptiness' can even scare religious people uninstructed in the contemplative tradition into thinking that meditation is 'not prayer'. But experience shows that soon this calmness of mind becomes the open space in which the fullness of God is revealed. In place of the old and still prevalent monad model of God – an absolute monarch sitting on a distant throne disposing of the lives of his subjects – a new understanding of God emerges through the experience of love bestowed and shared as grace.

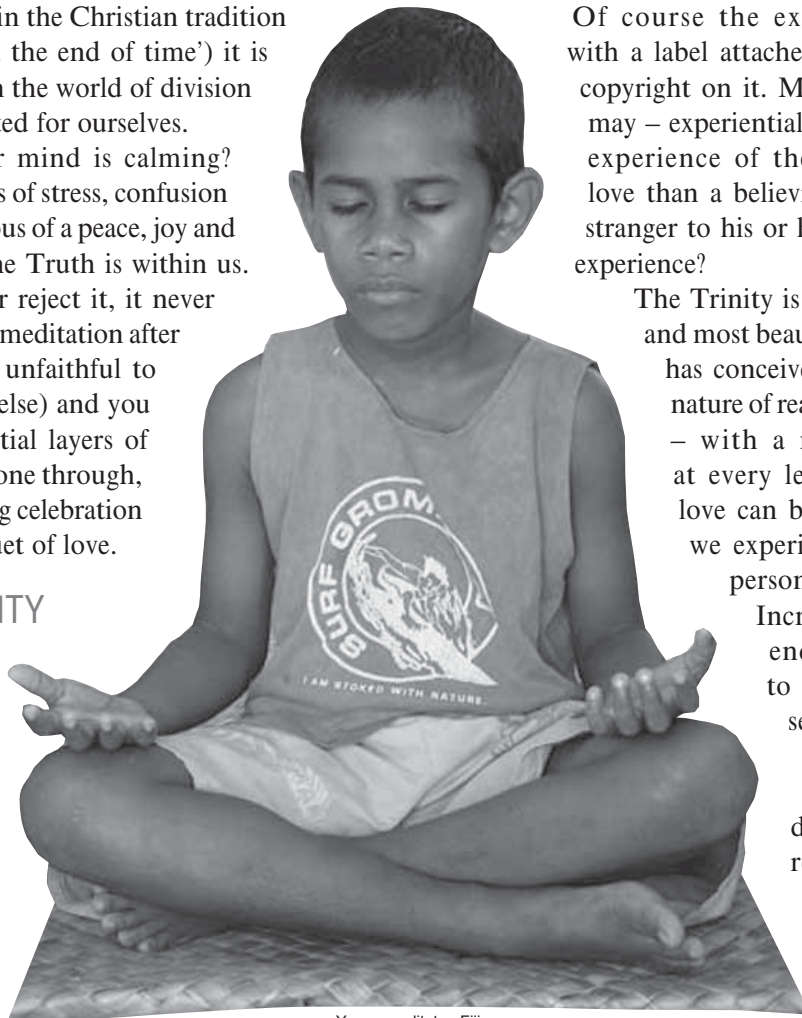
The monadic God is a single unit, alone and all-powerful, capable of mercy as all tyrants are but equally capable of revenge and even random cruelty. Anthropologically it reflects

certain kinds of primitive society (not always so absent in modern democracies) and is fed by the self-imaging of the ego itself. This is the 'imagination' that agitates the mind and that John Main called the 'great enemy of prayer'. As this is worn down it becomes easier, more natural, to discover the experience that is waiting for us in the heart.

Of course the experience does not come with a label attached and there is no religious copyright on it. Many a Buddhist or Muslim may – experientially speaking – have a deeper experience of the truth of the Trinity as love than a believing Christian who is still a stranger to his or her own heart. What is this experience?

The Trinity is one of the deepest, boldest and most beautiful insights that humanity has conceived. It explains the ultimate nature of reality – as far as that is possible – with a metaphor that resonates at every level of experience because love can be felt at every level. When we experience love it changes us as persons and how we see reality. Increasingly, if the experience endures and we are faithful to it, the boundaries between self and others are redefined, sometimes dissolving altogether without destroying the wonderful reality of unique identities meeting and merging and becoming distinct again

"THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN  
IS CLOSE AT HAND,  
WITHIN AND AMONG US."



Young meditator, Fiji.

in order to re-unite more deeply. Falling head over heels in love, not just romantically but in the deepest ground of being. What the Christian mystics call a sober intoxication, a luminous darkness. Only paradox can express the experience of love as the isolated ego is dethroned and a new sense of selfhood-shared is made possible.

There is always a mystery to love – where does it come from and how does it grow? This unfathomable dimension is expressed in the Father who is the invisible, ever unknowable, untouchable mystery of God. But it takes shape and form in individuals even as it transcends their individuality. This is the Word that seeks to become flesh. And love also spins out of the dualism of the relationship in which it is begotten into a transcendent creativity, healing, revivifying whatever it encounters. This is the Spirit. The intellectual labours of the early Church Fathers were dedicated to exploring this truth that flowed from the self-revelation of Jesus. They did so over centuries and in the context of contemplative experience itself. Above all they fought to retain the equality and unity of these three aspects of love and in doing so, helped us understand the truth of our humanity with greater depth and clarity. The calm mind can better see and recognize this because it is able to experience its own true nature as a divine icon. Seeing God in itself is the precursor to seeing God in others and in all things.

"LOVE CHANGES US  
AS PERSONS AND  
HOW WE SEE REALITY."

The agitated mind – like the fear that led the disciples to barricade themselves together into a room – cannot resist the unexpected grace of the coming of the Risen One. Suddenly he was there among them, unrebuking, empowering, revivifying depleted life. But the work of calming the mind begins at this point and must continue until there is no obstruction, no locked doors to hide behind, so that he can expand into the fullness of the empty space thus cleared. The Resurrection was an event that always happens, continuously, unexpectedly, unpredictably. It is as silent and still as a standing stone circle from a forgotten past. But it is also an explosion into presence like the sudden recognition of an old friend on a crowded street. He comes to us hidden, Simone Weil said, and salvation consists in our recognizing him.

Who recognizes whom first? What comes into the mind when recognition dawns? Not just another individual occupying a limited amount of mental and physical space. But a person, in relationship with whom we are in loving relationship with all because he is at the heart of creation and is the beloved of the creator.

*Every joy and the fullness of peace  
in these Easter days,*

## THE EVER-RISING CHRIST

As I write this we are preparing for Holy Week. As you read it Easter Sunday is behind us for another year. Each year I feel a certain tension and anticipation because it is another opportunity, but one of a finite series, to delve deeper into the meaning of the Resurrection through the rituals and symbolism of the Triduum liturgy. Because we meditate at all of these the impact of the liturgy always seems to go deeper and to feed us for longer.

Yet however potent this sacred time of Easter may be, the Resurrection is also part of daily life. It is not ultimately subject to scientific experiment, any more than the mysteries of human relationship, art or the calm mind itself. The Gospels do not show the Resurrection happening as an event because it cannot be seen from the outside or objectified. But they show it as an event that has happened, and is continuing to influence those in whom it becomes known as a personal truth.

*With much love,*

*Laurence*

*Laurence Freeman OSB*



### MONTE OLIVETO SILENT RETREAT - AUGUST 1-8, 2009

The annual Monte Oliveto retreat on the theme "The Shape of a Wave: Life Meaning and Meditation" will be held at the mother-house of the Olivetan Benedictine congregation from Sat 1 - Sat 8 August.

Led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni.

For registration: Contact the International Centre: [welcome@wccm.org](mailto:welcome@wccm.org)  
(book soon)

## NEWS FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY

The following is a small representation of the life of the Community. For weekly news and more information visit the Community web page: [www.christian-meditation.org.uk](http://www.christian-meditation.org.uk)

### UNITED KINGDOM

Fr Laurence gave his UK speaking tour in March this year, visiting Shewsbury, Oxford, Portsmouth, Winchester and Hove accompanied by a team of four from the international centre and the UK community. The overall theme was 'Meditation and Finding the Middle Way'. Briji Waterfield, regional coordinator for Surrey helped promote it and fixed several BBC Radio interviews and is helping with UK publicity and PR. See [www.christian-meditation.org.uk](http://www.christian-meditation.org.uk)

For the first time the UK annual conference will be held this in Scotland year, at the University of Stirling 12 - 14 June, the theme 'Leading the Mind into the Heart; the path of Christian Meditation'. There will be three main speakers. Shanida Nataraja will look at what happens in the brain when we meditate - 'The Blissful Brain'. Stefan Reynolds will speak on 'The Prayer of the Heart' and Gretchen Stevens will speak from her experience of meditation in healing. The Celtic singing duo 'Caim' will enrich this weekend in a Celtic land with their music. Fr Laurence will celebrate the closing mass and meditation. For more info and booking go to [www.christian-meditation.org.uk](http://www.christian-meditation.org.uk)

*Liz Watson, UK National Coordinator  
(lizwatson@blueyonder.co.uk)*

### PORTUGAL

#### FIRST MASS OF THE COMMUNITY

We had the first regular Contemplative Mass of the meditating community in Lisbon celebrated by Fr Luis Oliveira OFM. We ended by praying aloud the WCCM prayer. We were only 30 but all felt in tune with each other and the World Community. It was a very special moment for the community in Portugal and we intend to repeat it every three months. Advent Project: During the Advent we did something new: a small and beautiful Jesus in clay was handed from group to group as a gift, reminding us that we are asked to be gifts to the others. It was an effective way of enhancing the meaning of the birth of Jesus in our lives as well as of reminding us that we are a real community grounded in the practice of meditation.

Roots of Christian Mysticism Course II: The first session of this year's runs monthly January-July. Our themes are: Julian of Norwich, St. Claire, Meister Eckhart, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila and Simone Weil. After each conference there is a 20 min. meditation period. Fr Laurence's Retreat at the end of February was a strength and inspiration to us all. He also met with students and led an interfaith gathering after the retreat. A new group has started near Lisbon, so we are now 15 groups.

Visit: [meditacaocrista.weebly.com](http://meditacaocrista.weebly.com)

*Maria Cristina Guedes de Sousa, National Coordinator,  
Portugal (mcristinags@netcabo.pt)*

### IRELAND

In Northern Ireland Fr Martin McAlinden led a quiet day for meditators in Lurgan in March and Canon Timothy Kinahan will lead a weekend retreat in Larne in May.

*Philomena McQuillan, N Ireland regional coordinator  
philomenamcquillan@hotmail.co.uk*

'A Pearl of Great Price: Sharing the Gift' was the title of the first residential weekend of the Irish Council for Christian Meditation, the body made up of the regional coordinators and the members of the Executive Committee. Held in Cork in January, it brought together 10 regional Coordinators and 4 who work closely with them or the council and 6 of the Executive from various parts of Ireland. We met with Fr Laurence and Lukasz Gruszka, a young Oblate who helps lead the Retreat Centre in London. Fr. Laurence reminded us that silence and solitude feed community because even though meditation is a solitary practice, as we meditate together, a conscious energy and sense of relationship grow as community emerge. When they left on Saturday evening we took time to watch two community videos "Silence in the City" and "Quiet Mind" and discussed our ways forward in sharing the gift. The time together deepened our commitment. It led to simple resolutions, like encouraging a small library at weekly groups and becoming more computer-wise as an aid to communication. "It was a transfusion", "it reenergized me", "it confirmed the value of meditation", "it empowered me to spread the word". Overall it confirmed the words of John Main written on the Registration Form for the weekend: Meditation is a way of growth because what we are growing into is life itself. In March Fr Laurence spoke in Limerick and led the National Conference weekend in Dublin.

*Sylvia Thompson, National Coordinator, Ireland  
(sylviathompson@eircom.net)*

### FIJI

#### FR LAURENCE'S VISIT TO FIJI

"Christian Meditation: The Way of Peace" was the theme chosen



the by Fiji meditators for Fr Laurence's visit from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> February. On the evening of his arrival in Suva, Fr Laurence was accorded a traditional welcome with a kava ceremony at the Nazareth Prayer Centre. This ceremony was attended by several of the Patrons, Board and members of the Fiji Christian

Meditation Community. In his welcome address, Fr Denis noted that in Fijian thinking the ceremony which was performed cemented relationships between two parties and, in this case, Fr Laurence and the World Community and the Fiji community of meditators. A lot of people attended the seminar and retreat day in Suva as well as the evening in Nadi prior to Fr Laurence's departure to the Solomon's. Many people, both old and young had traveled long distances to attend and were delighted with the sessions. Fr Laurence also met and meditated with the children who attend a meditation teaching every Sunday in the chapel at the Prayer Centre following Sunday Mass. Again, there was a generous response from the children and several of them, since then, have gladdened the hearts of the community at the

Prayer Centre by joining the community for meditation. On the morning before leaving Suva, Fr Laurence visited Champagnat Institute, a school founded by the Marist Brothers several years ago for young people who have not been able to cope in the mainstream school system. Meditation has been part of the program at the Institute since its establishment and the teachers testify to its worth with the young people. Fr Laurence's visit was a time of grace, joy and many blessings for us here in Fiji and we are most grateful for his presence.

*Sr Denise McMahon (denisemc@connect.com.fj)*

## IN FOCUS

# My Cell in the OR

As I was thinking about writing this In Focus piece, I realized that what has come into focus for me has been the commitment to the practice of Christian meditation and to the Community that provides the structure and support where this commitment is nurtured.

When I was growing up, attending Catholic Church and school, I believed in God, but felt no need for a relationship with God. Progressively I felt more and more alone. Throughout my life, I had suffered from anxiety, paranoia and bouts of explosive anger. As I got older the paranoia worsened. During this period I met Jan, my wife to be. We both knew, not long after our meeting, that we would get married although we did not tell each other this at the time. Jan had this wonderful sense of who she was, which I later recognized as faith and gratitude. When we began having children she wanted to start attending church again. I felt a Catholic loyalty so we began attending the Catholic Church even though she had been raised Baptist. Attending church felt much the same as when I was growing up but on some level I knew it was important.

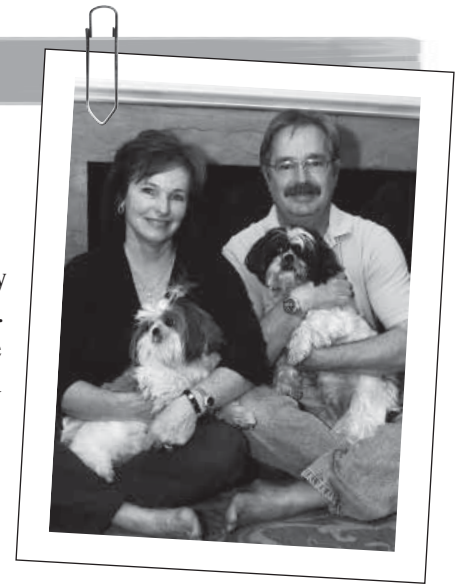
I heard of a retreat led by Laurence Freeman in 1993 and said to Jan 'we must go to this'. After meditating the first time, I knew that Christian meditation was what I had been looking for. And I realized I had been searching for this even before I was conscious of this searching. It took two years for me to be able to meditate twice a day, and that happened following a second retreat led by Fr Laurence and starting a meditation group. In those two years, I would often say the rosary to help my mind settle enough to say the mantra. Most of the time I could barely meditate once a day. As time passed, I realized the importance of participating in the Community as the way to maintain and deepen the commitment to daily practice. Participating in the Liturgy and the Eucharist took on new meaning for me. I came to love the monastic tradition. I also realized that all aspects of my life were and are becoming intertwined and integrated. Christian meditation has helped me become a more attentive husband and dad, and in my work as a physician I have a

stronger sense of what my patients are experiencing. I am also seeing the relationships involved in physical, mental, and spiritual healing. My family supports me and encourages me in my involvement in The World Community and Jan and I meditate together.

My job as an anesthesiologist allows a flexible schedule and I can spend good time with my family and with WCCM activities. It also allows me to contribute financially to the WCCM. My job requires me to spend many hours sitting in one place (my cell is the OR), which provides me the opportunity to say and listen to the mantra for hours on end (with my eyes open, of course).

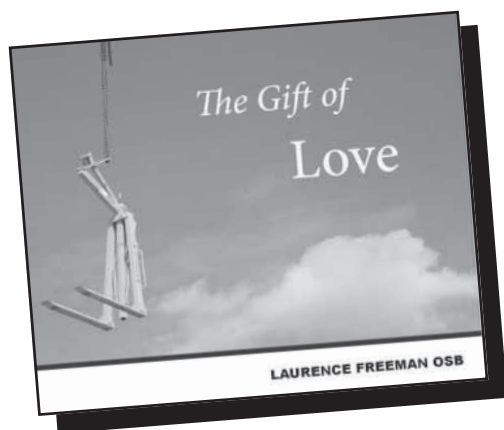
I have always wondered what it could be like to lead a joyful life. Through the practice of Christian meditation I have realized great joy in helping other people live their lives. During the US School Retreat 2006, Fr Laurence suggested that I reflect on what I would ask of Jesus. I didn't know but that evening it came to me that I should ask for a "grateful heart" (like Jan has). With great gratitude, I made my Final Oblation to the WCCM at that retreat. I never dreamed that, as a layperson, I would be able to take a religious vow. I thank God every day for Jan, my sons (Johnny, Philip, and Adam), our families, the WCCM, my job, the people I meet, and the practice of Christian meditation. Basically I now thank God for my life.

*Gene Bebeau, National Coordinator USA  
(gbebeau@gmail.com)*





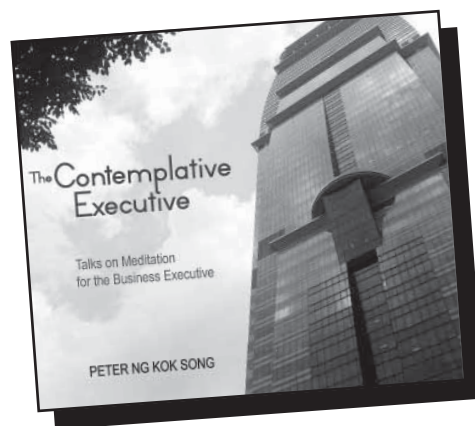
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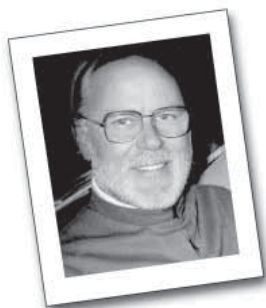
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## Words by John Main....

*The theology of prayer is the theology of the Trinity. From an experiential standpoint it is mind-boggling. The mind cannot hold it and therefore we must go beyond all concepts of God.*

*(Word made Flesh, Canterbury Press 2009)*

**PLEASE MAKE A CONTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO YOUR MEANS TO THE COST OF THIS NEWSLETTER AND IF YOU CAN TO THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE.**



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