



WCCM

Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Seeing with New Eyes

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF LIFE? LAURENCE FREEMAN EXPLAINS HOW IT IS TO SEE WHAT IS AND BE ONE WITH IT. MEDITATION LEADS TO A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS WHERE WE SEE WITH THE EYES OF CHRIST.



A view from the ferry, Bere Island, Ireland (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

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Leaver Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

Each morning, right after meditation at Bonnevaux, we listen to the gospel of the day. Today it was just three verses: 'Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources.' (Lk 8:1-3).

The early monks asked themselves 'What is the real goal of the monk's life?' In the confusions of our time, more and more I find it helpful to use 'monk' and 'meditator' interchangeably. With the spreading of a serious practice of meditation in all walks of life, the meditator is, in many ways, the new monk. So, let's ask 'What is the real goal of life?' and see what the monastic wisdom has to say. The Desert Teachers spoke of the goal on two levels. The *ultimate goal* is the kingdom of God. The *immediate goal* is purity of heart. These two levels, like the foreground and the horizon of life's landscape, unite to form a focused vision of human life.

Recently, we had a retreat on 'healing the broken heart'. Listening to the stories people told was heart-breaking: the death of children, the loss of a cherished relationship in which we placed great expectations, accidents that violently threw a peaceful life into turmoil. The meaning of suffering takes time to distil and, as it gradually dawns, it is felt strongly but usually escapes from the net of words. Meaning is more than an answer or an explanation. It is connection, but also perception. Meditating on good days and bad days, what do we come to as we are purified by processing things while performing our daily chores? We come to see what seeing God is really like. Then happiness, which we barely recognise when it



happens, takes us by surprise: happy are those whose hearts are pure because they see God. But God is always surprising: God appears as our ideas about Him dissolve.

The big dilemmas of life are embedded in ordinary daily routines and break the surface wonderfully and terribly in exceptional joys and sufferings. I think this is what today's gospel describes. Jesus is walking from place-to-place, preaching and proclaiming the Good News. The goal of life is being spoken of in a way never heard anywhere before. Truth is telling truth. To those who listen, it is something ultimate. But there are personalities and logistics too. He had companions on the road; people have problems and blind spots. We hear specifically about the women disciples rarely mentioned in the stories and we hear of the finances that kept them all on the road. Jesus did not charge for his teaching, and the price of gas was not a problem, but somebody had to pay for food and board. The details about his companions and their economy point to the 'immediate' goal of life. Purity of heart is gained by our way of dealing with them in the immediate flow of daily interactions, remembering the reason for being there and re-aligning them with the ultimate goal. The 'ultimate' goal is what Jesus is preaching and proclaiming, but even more in how he embodies it moment by moment.

The good news is that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. The hard truth is that it is always closer than we can think or imagine.

The kingdom is here and now, which shapes how we respond to life's immediate goals and problems. The war in Ukraine. Climate change. The degeneration of democracy and the rise of nationalism. Energy prices and unemployment. Being diagnosed with cancer. Failing mental powers. The loss of love. Dealing with these problems, often overwhelmed by them, we can feel we '*have to do something now*' to solve them. We grasp at easy answers and seductive solutions that promise quick success. However, there are no answers or solutions that work for long except perhaps to avoid imminent catastrophe. Every success sooner or later fades into a sense of failure.

The greater the challenge, the briefer the solution. Frightened and impatient, we veer to extremes, as today's politics show. We escape by denying problems, blaming dark conspiracies or in cynical judgementalism. Withdrawing from the social responsibility of citizens, we become consumers and the life of society becomes merely 'the economy'.

The alternative is new perspectives. The best solution is *not* to imagine that solutions are the immediate answer. Only metanoia changes things: a change

of mind happens when ideas loosen their grip. Then new perceptions, seeing new connections, expanding in fresh fields of understanding, the opening of the eye of wisdom whereby God may be seen, connect the immediate goal to the ultimate goal.

Why is this difficult? Because it involves the change we call death: the end of old ways of seeing, liberation from fantasies, and entering the new life, so strange and different it seems unreal, but that we call 'resurrection': it's the life we live here and now, after every death and that turns even death into a grace. Resurrection is turning over the apple cart; everything the cart carried spills on the road. But it opens the way into peace through the door of paradox, terminating the world of endless contradictions and conflicts. In this new world, death is revealed as birth.

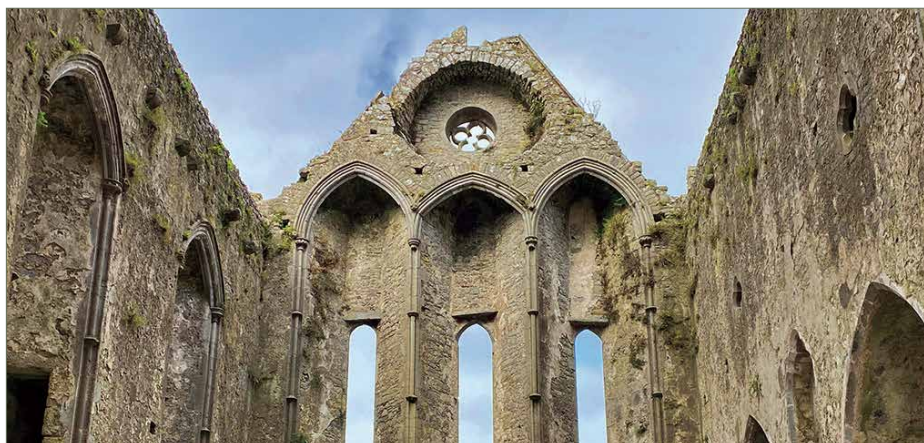
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Jesus preached and proclaimed this new perspective consciousness, calling it the 'kingdom of God'. It is not far away. It is within us and amongst us. It is the treasure we stumble across but also the quest we must pursue each day. It is not a solution but a revelation, an epiphany, something always there but now recognised. Jesus taught it within a group of students who became disciples by listening and staying with him, understanding a little more each day until he left them. But then, strangest of all, his absence showed them his real presence.

If the goal of life was an answer or a solution, he would have left books and systems behind. Instead, he left a spoken Word, a remembered transmission of perception, heart to heart. Experience is the teacher. Listening and remembering turn the experience into a seeing of things in a new way. This teaches us to transmit it in our turn, communicating it as a universal truth through the medium of the spirit, across all cultures and time zones.

Obviously, then, the kingdom is not the church. Yet, however frustratingly, the church is inescapable, just as our own body is inescapable. It is the facility for communicating the kingdom, despite all the faults and shortcomings of its institutional forms. Whenever it forgets the distinction between immediate and ultimate goals, the church constructs false ultimates, becoming churchy, self-fixated and even touched by pride and arrogance, contradicting everything Jesus taught. Were it not for the salt of proph-

command to love one another opens the way to understand that 'I am my neighbour'. Every day, this perception changes everything, subverting all constructed systems of power. Seeing it converts life at personal and social levels. Unified consciousness floods the soul of the world with an energy of peace more powerful than all the combined forces of anger and violence. 'For he himself is our peace. He has made the two one.' (Eph 4:18). How can we then wilfully harm another knowing that we are harming ourselves and



ets, martyrs and contemplatives, one of its many deaths would be its last.

A church lacking depth of vision dogmatizes Jesus and puts him on a pedestal. When the church becomes a school of prayer, guiding the pilgrimage to the kingdom, Jesus appears even to those outside the church as a new way of seeing, a new perspective for every life. When he is objectified, he disappears, yet when we keep faith with him while he is invisible, his nameless presence burns illusion away.

Our face is invisible to us unless we look in a mirror. Jesus is invisible until we see him imaged in the mystical form of his body, the church of the whole cosmos.

*

In the perspective of the life of faith he becomes visible in everyone. The single

the whole we belong in? This perspective explains why Jesus calls us friends. Our friend is 'another oneself'.

To see himself, a person must look at another and focus upon the other

(John Main)

As this perspective grows, life becomes a conversation of respectful equals. It feeds the growth of a just and peaceful society for which democracy, however imperfect and messy, is the best immediate tool. When democracy is practised, the faint shape of the kingdom even begins to be perceptible. On occasions, as in a community or a family, it may even, like a shooting star, flash forth visibly as when a whole people forget their problems and welcome strangers with greater immediate needs. In our John Main Seminar in November, we will affirm the spiritual values of democracy in a conversation

between the generations.

Yet, whatever we do is not a solution or even an explanation. Life cannot be reduced to generalities. Generalising about it doesn't make it real: it becomes real only when a new way of seeing dawns upon us and convinces us of its truth. Dawn comes before sunrise. Dawn itself is a process, sunrise is an event. The event itself is an undeniable, instantaneous, irreversible recognition: a perception that we may have long thought about is real. The dawning of reality is also important because were it not for the event, there would be no process.

Meditation is the immediate process that purifies our hearts daily and brings us into this most intimate and ultimate, unified, state of consciousness that we call the 'mind of Christ'.

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The Christian vision of reality is the seeing of everything as a whole, interconnected and growing together, and it makes no abstract division between the church and the world. The church can become painfully, ridiculously worldly and the world can be holy and sacred. It is a matter of perception, of seeing what is and how we relate to it. This dawning perception of reality is faith, the 'proof of things unseen' (*Heb 11:1*). Which is why in meditation 'we look not on what is seen but on what is unseen' (*2 Cor 4:18*). As it dawns, it moves the mountains of illusion within the mind and heals the wounds of division between ourselves and others.

Many people feel toxic associations when they hear the words 'church, Christian or Christianity', which makes it hard to communicate the essence of the faith. But it is also hard to see how the sickness of the world today can be cured without the spirit of Christianity participating in the rebirth process of humanity through a universal transformation of consciousness. Perhaps the contribution of Christian faith would be helped by seeing the



Fr Laurence during his visit to the Parish of the Ascension in Balally (Photo by Mary P O Connor)

word 'church' more as a verb, a way of seeing and being together, rather than as an institution or ideology. This can happen if sufficient Christians see themselves as part of a contemplative movement of change, part of a mystical body changing the way humanity sees itself.

I felt this strongly during a visit to the Parish of the Ascension in Balally, Dublin, described later in this newsletter. It is hard to describe the experience of the renewal of the community there. Even the word 'renewal' sounds like an insider's word whereas the experience felt equally interior and outward directed. With everyone involved in the process, I felt as if we were being carried up and beyond an old perception of church into something much older, closer to the source from which church-consciousness is born. Being renewed means returning to the wonder of birth and entering the river of life in a different way. It was not just a renewal of an institution but of individuals collectively sharing a deepening vision. I learned from this that the vision and commonality, not buildings or bureaucracy, is the real church, being surprised by the Spirit and their calling to change.

*

What kind of prayer is needed to trigger the new consciousness necessary for our survival and for turning this crisis into a dark night in which humanity will

grow into something different? We need prayer for sure, but what kind? It is the prayer Jesus taught in his great sermon on the mount, the 'pure prayer' flowing from him into the contemplative tradition that connects us to him.

Ancient teachers tell us that prayer itself is good, as necessary to human wholeness as is a healthy environment, diet and exercise for physical well-being. Many as are the styles, forms and expressions of prayer, what is prayer itself essentially? We need to know this to keep all its expressions – sacramental, scriptural, devotional, personal and communal – authentic and transformative. One of the essential elements of pure prayer is that it changes the person who prays. It is not an attempt to numb our anxious mind or to get God to change His mind. We hardly need to label some forms of prayer 'contemplative' because, if we know the essence of prayer, all forms of prayer become essential. Brick by brick, it dismantles the wall of the ego until it crumbles and union can be realised.

Augustine said to love and do what you like. We might say 'meditate and pray as you like.' Meditation gives us the taste of pure prayer and its fruits. It is found in poverty – through the laying aside of thoughts and imagination – then it leads into purity of heart. Purity and poverty lead into each and together become the

straight and narrow path to the kingdom.
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What I am trying to say here is not proposing new ideas. Prayer is more than a tool for church renewal, even though social transformation will be a fruit of personal conversion of heart. It is remembering what Jesus taught as the ultimate goal and that his way of teaching prepares us to realise it as he did it. 'We possess the mind of Christ'. In words, he especially used homely parables rather than dogmatic statements or subtle solutions. His way of teaching forms a particular kind of identity in his disciples. Learning, of course, always makes us see new aspects of the landscape of our minds and lives. To learn anything, a language, how to programme the TV, how to cook a good omelette, how to raise children, even how to make sense of the signs at Paris airport, expands our minds and the world we inhabit.

Learning is not being brainwashed. It demands a change of approach, a shift of perception and an openness to other points of view. The experience of pure prayer that meditation opens will change the way we understand the teaching of Jesus itself. In the parables and in the life-story of Jesus, we will still see the obvious, first level of meaning. But, with the pure and loving attention that changes our minds, we will see other aspects at more subtle and real levels. It is not about finding answers or solutions but of seeing what we did not see before. In this sense, life itself is a parable teaching us its meaning and goal. When it is lived to the full, it asks us to read its joys and losses, changing the way we see it and how we live.

As we hurtle, badly led, through climate change and political storms, we could be tempted to cling to prayer as an escape from reality. It would become a means of numbing fear and reinforcing delusions. We might console ourselves that we can bring about change just by

praying with good intentions. Prayer will change the world when we know how we, God and the world are one. When we are in the state of *metanoia*, the changing of our ways of perception will make us agents of transformation in our world, whether we know how or not.
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Not long ago, an American state passed a law forbidding the teaching of evolution in schools and imposing the literal interpretation of the biblical myth of creation. Today, Saudi Arabia and Egypt forbid the teaching of evolution and about 46% of Americans (Gallop 2012) now believe the world was made in six days. A belief they are free to hold.

However, it is as unlikely that they are right as that the earth is flat or that Elvis is still alive. People are entitled to believe what they wish, but are governments and other influencers entitled to deny people the right, the evidence and the educational training to choose for themselves? What is the political agenda in manipulating people's minds and trapping them in ways of perception of this kind? This is why meditation matters. False perceptions of any kind limit our capacity to open the eye of a purified heart
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Take climate change. We have the science and the finances to change our disastrous direction. But we lack the common mind and the will, the perception of human solidarity and, above all, trust in the common good transcending nationalism and greed. How do we help minds to open, to see new and deeper aspects of reality?

This is why our community has asked Herman van Rompuy, a rare meditating politician and statesman, to lead this year's John Main Seminar on the crisis facing democracy. John Main understood why meditation is connected to this question today. He understood how the ultimate goal of the kingdom and the

immediate goal of purity of heart meet *in this world* and in our responsibility to redeem it by love. Contemplation, he knew, is the foundation of civilisation, removing fear and opening a new vision of reality.

Meditation teaches us to learn, to listen, to hold different ideas in balance and to recognise the difference between illusion and reality, deception and truth. It allows us to see, with humour rather than fear, that the truth is greater than we think - as for example in this famous test of perception. Is it a rabbit or a duck?



Is it either/or? Or both at once? Does seeing both aspects frighten or expand you?

Seeing that the 'kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but integrity and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (*Rom 14:17*) is to be on the path that brings the ultimate and the immediate goals of life together in a marriage of contemplation and action, Jesus and the Christ, and all the rabbits and ducks of reality. Unity happens in an expanded space of perception. It restores the lost harmony of wholeness within and among ourselves.

We do not meditate merely to alleviate the stress and anxiety that our dark night has produced but in order to get at their root cause and transform it. As a medieval teacher of contemplative prayer said in the language of his time 'this work of prayer dries up the root of sin within you.'

With much love,

News & Articles

John Main Seminar 2022 - The Challenge TO Democracy: The Challenge OF Democracy

HERMAN VAN ROMPUY WILL LEAD THIS YEAR'S SEMINAR ON 17-20 NOVEMBER AT BONNEVAUX AND ONLINE

The John Main Seminar (17-20 November 2022) will be led by Herman Van Rompuy at Bonnevaux on the theme 'The Challenge TO Democracy: The Challenge OF Democracy'. Laurence Freeman will lead a pre-seminar retreat (14-17 November 2022) on the theme 'Our Conversation is in Heaven'. The option to join in person at Bonnevaux or online is offered for both the seminar and the retreat. Translation into Dutch will be offered to online participants of the seminar only. Because Herman Van Rompuy believes that 'conversation is the life-blood of democracy', he will lead the Seminar in a responsive conversation with other meditators of different ages and cultures from within our community. A diverse group of younger meditators will engage with him, as will a group of women and men from various backgrounds who share a conviction



(Photo by Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona on Unsplash)

tion that meditation makes a difference – both to the meditator and to the world we love and live in.

The talks and responses will explore:

- * Democracy, values and meditation
- * Global rivals: the Cold War between democracy and despotism

* Defending and supporting democracy in times of rising populism

* Government of the people by the people for the people: what changes are needed?

For more information and to register go to: wccm.org

Herman: “A revival of democracy cannot be achieved without a sense of community”



Herman Van Rompuy is a Belgian politician who served as Prime Minister of Belgium and later as the first permanent President of the European Council from 2009-2014. He is acknowledged as a seasoned statesman of stature and wisdom. He also contributes from his contemplative experience in regular talks to his fellow meditators in the WCCM. He reflects on the relationship between meditation and democracy:

“It is paradoxical that a seemingly solitary practice of repeating a mantra in silence transforms people: their ego diminishes,

and they become more open to others, they become stronger as persons, they are being empowered spiritually. A seemingly inactive practice is new energy to actively engage with others. The mantra pushes away fears and can make way for hope. Of course, meditation is not the only way to greater solidarity, but the contemplative path helps. Democracy needs that sense of belonging to the community. A revival of democracy cannot be achieved without this sense of community; new forms of dialogue, of participation at every level of government, can also help to revive the democracy from within.”

News & Articles

Taynã Malaspina on democracy and the young: “It is time for silence and reflection but also for action”

BY TAYNÃ MALASPINA *

We live in a period of democratic crisis. This context in Brazil has generated polarization. We live today in a culture of hate. We need to rescue human rights, which guarantee that human life is not destroyed and for this, we need dialogue and active listening; we need to rescue our capacity to pay attention, attention to the other, and our capacity to live. With the constant scandals of corruption and abuse of power, I realised that many young people have distanced themselves from these issues, from politics. So,

we need to dialogue about democracy openly and sincerely. We young people need to understand our role. Yes, it is a time to be in silence, to perceive the whole, to reflect, to contemplate everything. But it is also a time to act. We don't need reactive action, but contemplative action that comes from within our hearts. That is why it is so important to everyone to participate in the John Main Seminar 2022.

*Taynã, who is Coordinator for Meditation and Young Adults, will be part of the John Main Seminar 2022.



Democracy, an ongoing conversation...

Below are some other reflections on the theme of the John Main Seminar 2022 by meditators from different parts of the world:

Angelene Chan, Singapore: “Democracy is facing its most serious crisis in decades. The values that democracy embodies have been under assault in recent times and are fast disappearing globally. I am glad that these issues will be tackled and discussed in the upcoming John Main Seminar.”

Sean Hagan, USA: “Democracy provides a form of accountability for governments...The difficulty is that democracy needs to be protected, also from itself. Many

of the darkest chapters in history have involved dictators who have come to power through the democratic process. Democracy can also be an instrument of systemic corruption. Thus, democracy is a constant challenge in terms of effective implementation. This seminar focuses on both the promise of democracy and also the challenges democracy presents.”

May Ngo, Australia: “I think a seminar on democracy is invaluable right now because it goes to the heart of the Gospel. In the Gospel's concern for others is its directive to love our neighbor. It should provoke us to ask: What are the conditions for human

flourishing, both physically and spiritually, and how do we create these conditions for ourselves and for others?”

Kit Lee, Singapore: “What is our response to our world at this time of crisis? Jesus says: love one another as I have loved you. I would suggest that our collective contemplative response can be to understand the meaning of democracy at a deeper level. I believe we as meditators have an important role to play in our world today. To be attentive to the other, and to find a common ground in resolving our differences as a human race.”

Watch videos with reflections on democracy here: <http://tiny.cc/jmsrf22>



New Community Art Space on the WCCM Website

If you are an artist, poet, creative writer, photographer, painter, or some other kind of creative and would like to be featured on the WCCM website, please send your work and a short bio to Nick Scrimenti (nick@wccm.org).

News & Articles

A Parish in Dublin Builds the Church of the Future

BY NICK SCRIMENTI

Karl Rahner famously said, “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.” Fr. Jim Caffrey, parish priest of the Church of the Ascension of the Lord in Dublin, takes this statement seriously. The Catholic Church in Ireland is in a “do or die” moment. Faced with flagging participation, especially among young people, Fr. Jim has set his parish on a path for a remarkable transformation: becoming a centre for contemplative life in Ireland.

Once the “land of saints and scholars”, Ireland is no longer the bastion of Catholic practice and tradition it once was. In the 1970s, just as Ireland was joining the European Union, weekly mass attendance reached more than 90 percent. Today, propelled by many of the same cultural and economic forces that have contributed to the declining influence of the Catholic Church throughout the West, weekly church attendance tops out at around 30 percent in Ireland and even less in the Archdiocese of Dublin. The decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland culminated in the May 2018 referendum in which 66 percent voted in favour of legalizing abortion up to 12 weeks without restrictions, an outcome that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago.

Fr. Jim Caffrey, however, is aware of another reason for the declining influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland, namely the lack of a contemplative spirit. A diocesan priest of 16 years, then a monk of Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina for 5 years, Fr. Jim returned to Dublin in September of 2021 to serve as parish priest in Balally. As his own practice of meditation deepened,



Fr Laurence and Fr Jim (Photo by Mary P O Connor)

he grew more convinced of the potential for the contemplative life to renew the Church at the parish level. “I have always loved meditation, and this grew in the monastery,” he said. Once appointed to Balally, he believed that the parish was “open to renewal” and began to introduce meditation to parishioners and children in the parish schools. Fr. Jim was also inspired by a recent visit to Bonnevaux, where he could see first-hand an example of how a centre for meditation might bring about personal and ecclesiastical renewal.

The parish, with the support of the Archbishop of Dublin, now boasts a new mission statement - “Building Hope through Meditation and Service” - as well as a new Pastoral Council led by Martina Kavanagh and David Healy, two members of the parish whom Fr. Jim likes to call “contemplative elders”. The work of introducing meditation in schools is supported by Noel Keating, the WCCM National Coordinator of Ireland and an experienced leader in the work of teaching meditation to children. Fr. Dermot

Lane, a distinguished theologian and parish priest in Balally for 25 years, is also involved in teaching the practice of meditation. “It is a very special moment in the life of our parish,” Fr. Jim said.

Following a visit from Fr. Laurence, the parish in Balally is energized to become a national centre of meditation within the WCCM and is planning a visit to Bonnevaux. “I believe we are on the cusp of something wonderful, with God’s help,” Fr. Jim said. Fr. Laurence’s talk on Tuesday, September 13th focused on meditation’s place within the Christian tradition and the life of the church and was attended by over 300 people. “[Fr. Laurence’s visit] inspired us and convinced us we are on the right track.”

The parish in Balally is responding to the challenge to become a sanctuary for contemplative life, lest it sputter into irrelevance. With Fr. Jim’s leadership, Ireland can once again become a model for Church life the world over - new wine for new skins - and usher in the Church of the future through the practice of meditation.

News & Articles

Young Adults Retreat at Bonnevaux: a chance to be “surprised by joy”

BY SAMUEL PESTRIDGE, UK



I was fortunate enough to spend a week at Bonnevaux accompanied by the most wonderful young people. We shared times of meditation, yoga, creative activities, work and meals together. My experience of the ‘One in Mind, One in Heart’ retreat is characterised by hope, joy, peace and discomfort. But before I elaborate, a word on the space of Bonnevaux.

As soon as I arrived at Bonnevaux, I had a feeling of peace. A feeling of homecoming; of feeling totally free to be myself, knowing that I was held in the love of community. That’s without mentioning the beauty of the surroundings which cannot be put into words.

As I said before, the words ‘hope, joy,

peace and discomfort’ capture my experience during the retreat.

Hope emerged from my conversations with other young people who vulnerably and courageously shared with me. This showed me that a different path, not that of polarised debate, but of loving conversation, can lead us in a better direction.

If I may steal a wonderful phrase, I was ‘surprised by joy’ during the retreat. A sense of humour, humility and lightness was present throughout the talks, yoga and creative sessions, as well as our conversations and mealtimes. Whilst there was plenty of silence, when there was noise, laughter was never far behind.

Peace became real to me through spending time away from technology and shifting gears towards a slower way of life. Although it wasn’t compulsory to shut off our devices at all times, I felt encouraged by the beauty of my surroundings and the presence of the core community to do so.

Alongside this peace I felt discomfort at times. My attention had been subtly worn away by modern technology, and loosening its grip on my life was im-

mensely challenging. I often failed. More importantly, however, I also experienced moments of greater awareness and self-control. This was mostly thanks to the daily mentoring sessions where I could talk frankly about the challenges I faced as well as celebrate my successes. I was edified by this experience and grateful for the generosity of my mentor to give their time to support me.

Meditating three times a day for thirty minutes was hard, and sitting in silence at breakfast and lunch was initially boring and somewhat awkward. Nevertheless, after a few days of persevering with it (helped by the fact that everyone else was doing the same!), I began to look forward to savouring my meal and the silence of meditation. These are practices that I hadn’t incorporated into my life before the retreat. Now that I am back home, it feels much more natural and necessary to meditate regularly. For me, that is the beauty and power of a retreat. Although we are only there for a short time, the rhythm of life and nourishing practices that we begin or begin again, carry us through the following weeks, months and years. I look forward to returning to Bonnevaux soon.

Reflections from other participants:

Sarah Albino, 25, Brazil:

“Participating in the retreat, even if remotely, allowed me to be in spiritual communion with the whole community. In this modern world where we are overwhelmed by information, it is even more important that we practise meditation and live contemplatively.”

Oliver Mesmer, 27, USA:

“I felt very welcomed by the open heartedness of the Bonnevaux Community. The retreat gave me a structure to balance rest with the discipline of a spiritual practice.”

News & Articles

The Joy of Encounter: a retreat at Ampleforth Abbey bringing two worlds together

BY SUE WESTMACOTT AND KATE MIDDLETON

In our continuing Synodal journey, Pope Francis encourages us to get alongside people from the margins, to walk together and to listen to their stories. The vision for this two-day retreat (21 and 22 June 2022) was to give people from the so-called “margins of society” an opportunity to experience a therapeutic and welcoming environment including meditation and group activities in a beautiful place, far away from their usual circumstances. It was led by Terry Doyle and sponsored through the Eileen Cox Legacy Fund and Meditatio.

A coach brought 21 people from Middlesbrough, drawn from members of the North East Opera (NEO), which uses the power of music to help give disadvantaged people a voice; the Saltburn Addiction Recovery Group; and the Methodist Asylum Project (MAP). In solidarity with them were about 15 self-funded people with some experience of meditation who responded to the invitation extended by WCCM Meditatio to join the retreat.

The schedule was carefully put together to have at the heart the mission of the event, The Joy of Encounter. Communal times of meditation and prayer were interwoven with the timetable at the Abbey. With plenty of time to talk and enjoy other activities together, a trusting bond was formed very quickly between us, and we were able to relax and deeply share with one another. The facilitators of North East Opera, Emily Smith and David Pisaro, came to lead us all in a superb session billed as ‘Freeing the Voice



with The Joy of Singing’. Using a variety of songs they encouraged us all to participate enthusiastically, often at full volume. This uplifting experience reinforced the feeling of being a family. We also had the opportunity to take part in an Art Therapy workshop, making our own mandalas. The repetition entailed in forming a symmetrical pattern was also calming and satisfying.

Another of the beneficial group activities offered was Tai Chi & Zen walking with Terry. People really responded to this embodied prayer, offering us a focus, and enabling deep peace to come. Paul Golightly came too, to lead 2 sessions on Capacitar (<https://capacitar.org>) which focuses on healing from trauma. He taught us a few different helpful exercises as a group around wellbeing.

After Compline in the Abbey, we all met in the Crypt and were joined by a group of sixth form students from Ampleforth College for a time of sharing. We listened intently as several people told us something of

their story. It was so powerful to hear from an ex-heroin addict as he described laying on his bed with nothing left in the world except his mantra, repeating MARANATHA because his life depended on it. We also heard from a refugee from Uganda who told us how meditation had given her so much peace and that she had finally been able to sleep again after years of sleeplessness due to the trauma of losing family members and being displaced. We heard too from the Sixth Formers at Ampleforth about the importance of community life for them to flourish.

The accommodation at Ampleforth, the nature, the weather, the hospitality of the monks, the food, everything was fabulous. The Joy of Encounter was aptly named. A warm and friendly family atmosphere was quickly established, and any initial apprehension was soon banished. The depth of trust and sharing was remarkable and can only be put down to the presence of God in the silence we shared.

In Focus

Johanna Wisoli, Indonesia



Learning Christian meditation is the most beautiful blessing in my spiritual journey. The call to start this journey came through my late mother. When I reflected on this journey, I realised that God had called me many times, but I hadn't been sensitive enough to respond to His calls. Even after meeting Fr Laurence Freeman personally during his third visit to Indonesia, I wasn't yet interested in starting to meditate.

One day in 2013, as I was looking to join a retreat, my mother offered me a seven-day silent retreat at Chiang Mai with the Asian leader community. I decided to take her up on her offer, not thinking about the fact that the retreat programs would be packed with intensive meditation sessions, but seeing it more as an opportunity first to have quiet time and second to travel to Thailand and to visit Chiang Mai. Coincidentally, one participant cancelled so I was able to get the last place.

I landed by myself in Chiang Mai, a city that I had not visited before. Feeling a bit dismayed, I had to travel another few hours from the airport to reach the Seven Fountain Retreat House. Entering the retreat house gave me a feeling of calm and serenity. It was a beautiful place with a big labyrinth in the middle of the garden. I didn't know any of the other participants – everything was totally new to me. As the retreat started, I was overwhelmed by the silence - no talking, no sound - and by the many hours of meditation sessions. I had never experienced this kind of retreat before. In spite of these new experiences, my heart was at peace, and I started to experience the joy and bliss resulting from these long hours of silence and solitude. I was amazed at the simplicity of this kind of prayer. Inside my heart, my soul exclaimed, "God... this is what I had longed for for so long".

After the retreat, I returned home with an indescribable feeling of deep joy and calm in my heart and my mind. I had the thought that something new was about to happen in my life. I started meditating twice a day as often as I could and joined the weekly group that had existed long before my trip to Chiang Mai. My daily activities and my ministry as lector in my parish started to change and gain new meaning and depth.

When I was offered the national secretary position by our national coordinator, initially I was confused about what to do, but my national coordinator said, "Just do it," and so I took the opportunity to serve God, without any background or experience and without knowing what the challenges and my responsibilities would be. I started everything from zero. It turned out that the job was not as simple as I had previously thought; it came with enormous challenges and very demanding responsibilities. I had to split my time between my duties as the manager of my own store and my ministry in the Church, as well as my service to the national community. It wasn't easy at the beginning, especially when my mother passed away and I had to take care of the house and the business, and it still isn't. Whenever I felt sad and overwhelmed by juggling heavy workloads, I tried to stay calm and be conscious of the present moment. I was able to realise how my daily meditation helped me get through those difficult times.

My ministries in my Church and my service to the Community have made it possible for me to stay within my faith environment, and meditation provides me with the strength and courage to overcome challenging situations.



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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 30 November.

Resources

Online Courses

Meditation - A Healing Response to Trauma

The *Meditation - A Healing Response to Trauma* online course blends teaching videos from an international symposium on meditation and trauma with contemplative practices. It will allow you to design your own meditative healing journey, learn about groups doing trauma-informed meditation, understand how meditation helps heal the human brain and practise a body-centred approach to meditation.

It will include the following:

- *First-hand accounts of healing from

trauma survivors

- *A neurologist and a neuropsychiatrist speaking about how meditation is healing for humans

- *What has worked in groups doing trauma-informed meditation

- *How the ancient practice of meditation is an embodied tradition that eases trauma in the body; and

- *A body-mind approach to meditation.

Enrol for this online course here:

<http://tiny.cc/medtraumc>

**Save The Date
Events for WCCM and
Bonnevau in 2023**



Check out our *Mark your Calendar* list of events for 2023 here:
<http://tiny.cc/stdte23>

Books (available at mediomedia.com)

Meditation: A Gift for Life Guidelines for Meditation in Schools

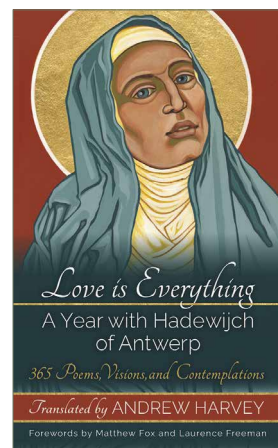
This booklet has been produced by WCCM Meditatio to offer international guidelines for the standardization of programs for meditation in schools. "A Gift for Life" is available in a printed version and as an e-book at mediomedia.com.

It is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. For more information, contact Kate Middleton at meditatio@wccm.org

Love is Everything - A Year with Hadewijch of Antwerp

By Andrew Harvey (translator)

This compilation of the mystical writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp presents an honest picture of love from every angle, stripped of sentimentality, not disguising the high price love demands if it is to be taken or given seriously. In a world torn by division, indifference and chaos, to read *Love is Everything* is to be awakened to the full potential and dignity of being human, and to be changed.



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

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Tel: +64 6 85 68378

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





A day of discernment for the WCCM Victoria Committee

by Adele Mapperson
State Co-ordinator for Victoria

In February this year Ruth Fowler led the WCCM Victorian Committee in a Discernment Day. At the time Victoria was still in the midst of going in and out of lockdowns and after two efforts to meet face to face, it became clear that we would need to meet on Zoom.

In her introductory remarks for the day Ruth spoke of the importance of seeing our work on the WCCM Committee very consciously as part of our Spiritual Journey, as a service in which we sought to grow closer to Christ. She asked us to consider:

- What impact the pandemic was having on our journey to union with God?
- What impact the pandemic was having on the Committee's operations and its sense of unity and purpose?
- What impact the pandemic was having on meditators as a whole and what actions could the Committee take to address these?
- What does "Unified Consciousness" mean in the context of our personal journeys in God?

As a committee called to act as 'one' she asked us to start by paying attention to our personal responses to these questions, to listen carefully to our own deepest inner voice and intuitions, to consider how each one of us might be instruments of cohesion and unity in our work on the committee; and to pay attention to our own cultural assumptions which we bring to the table.



We then spent time in silence to discern the way in which our hearts were responding to the work of being called to serve the meditation community in this challenging time.

Following this Ruth asked us as a committee serving our State and as part of the wider Australian WCCM Community and the international community of WCCM meditators to reflect in our groups on:

- what we were being called to do, to listen to the Spirit in the depths of heart and to sift with an intelligent mind, our sense of the directions and

priorities of the committee for the next two years?

- what was the virtue we felt the WCCM Vic Committee would most benefit from nurturing?

Fr Laurence had also raised some questions for national communities to consider:

- how do we understand WCCM as part of the rebirth of Contemplative Christianity?
- how might the contemplative

Continued page 14.

A Day of Discernment

● *continued from page 13*

dimension inform and transform the life of the community?

- what kind of contemplative formation is being called for today?

In our group reflections some themes became very clear. Despite all our best efforts to remain connected as a Committee through monthly meetings and weekly meditation together for some time, it became clear that we were struggling with a deep sense of disconnectedness.

We highlighted:

- a need to name and own the work we do as a committee and how it relates to the wider community, to know who we are and what we stand for.
- a need to practice interconnectedness, so that rooted in love and compassion, we can listen to each other more effectively.
- a strong need for the committee to 'get to know each other' so that we could discern the gifts each one brings. It became clear that some new members of the committee had not actually been able to meet other committee members except on the limited interaction of Zoom, and for them (and us all) this led to a sense of disconnectedness, even if at the time it was recognised as such.
- A need to encourage younger meditators, working to strengthen the relationship between the 'young and the not so young'.
- Concerns about the importance, but the difficulties for an ecumenical group, the need for a more progressive outlook in a rapidly changing world; the basic need to work towards oneness and respect.
- A need to look towards what draws people together, particularly needing to look at speakers and topics.
- The establishment of a Christian Meditation centre of the city, and the steps to forward this when COVID dies down.

So, what were our priorities for the future?

- Overwhelmingly the first priority

that emerged was a need for concrete action helping us 'get to know each other', to build trust in which we could share and value the gifts of each other.

- A strong sense of needing to listen to the young meditators in our community helping us grow together.
- A need to be open to emerging forms of Christianity in our community e.g. Benedictus.
- The establishment of a Christian Meditation Centre in the city.

'We need to practice interconnectedness, so that rooted in love and compassion, we can listen to each other more effectively.'

What have we done?

What did we learn from the day?

Where was our growth?

In a very real sense, we have done just what so many people in the wider community have done.

We determined to meet together as a group, meeting for lunch before the Lenten Retreat and in the Fitzroy Gardens. We have taken the time at the beginning of Committee meetings for a 'getting to know you' time centred around different themes.

We have recognised and named our struggle to find ways as 'little old grey haired ladies' and even grey haired men, to connect with younger meditators, but have found that the younger meditators are finding ways to connect with the 'older' community. They have come to the Lenten retreat where Kerien lead yoga sessions, (which we loved), where Leesl spoke about her involvement with Campfire in the Heart (one of the Committee has recently returned from a retreat there), Kerien has opened conversation about a dream to establish, interfaith meditation in the wider community. We have learned that all

we have to do is to be there and open to each other to begin the journey.

We have named our struggle with cultural overlay and called it out.

We have appreciated the joy of meeting with the community in retreat and community days after such a long absence from face to face gatherings.

We are having a planning day for next year at the end of August at the home of a member of the committee.

One of the committee spoke about our need to approach this day in a spirit of discernment, offering us and the community opportunity to listen deeply to where the Spirit is calling us. One important listening will be that of looking at what we have learned as a community during the time of lockdown, and the role of online gatherings, as well as face to face meetings.

At the beginning of the day Ruth asked us to appreciate the importance of seeing our work on the WCCM Committee as part of our Spiritual Journey, as a service in which we should grow closer to God.

Some have articulated this in naming their sense of call to the work which has spoken in their great commitment of time, talent, and faithfulness to the community

Some have spoken of their joy in being part of a committee where there are no egos vying for attention, but instead a willingness to listen and attend to the group wisdom. I am reminded of John Main's words that the purpose of meditation is that we listen and become attentive.

Some have spoken of their sense of 'coming home' in this community.

The WCCM theme for this year is *Unified Consciousness* which speaks of coming to wholeness and unity within the household of God, of the merging of division within ourselves into the fullness of God, and there is something about this which speaks of our learning and growth on this day. On this day, as much as we could, we brought ourselves as we are, with our fears, cultural overload, our brokenness and sense of disconnection, our uncertainties, our hopes and unspoken dreams, our efforts to listen deeply and attend to the Spirit within us, to the voices of those around us, and found that there is no divide between who we are and the work, it is all part of the whole spiritual journey.



As the National Coordinator of WCCM Australia I was sent a Safeguarding Code of Conduct (SCC) from our International Office in London asking me to sign the SCC and return it to London. I felt some details were not appropriate for Australia and should not be included and that some details should be changed or information added or expanded on.

After 12 months working with lawyers from the community and Carroll and O'Dea law firm as well as conversations with our Public Liability Insurer (Catholic Church Insurance), I felt happy with their advice and suggestions and I agreed to sign our amended and updated version of the SCC and send it to our London Office.

Also, we were asked to prepare a Safeguarding Code of Conduct for our Australian Community and we have decided to use the version I signed.

The National Executive adopted the amended Code on behalf of WCCM Australia at its meeting on 8th March 2022.

We always remember that our main job as a Community is to practice and to teach Christian Meditation. That is always at the top of our agenda. Poor, abusive or criminal conduct is very unlikely to occur within our Community. But, as we've all come to find over recent years, it remains a possibility. A public expectation these days is that a large (especially national) community which may include vulnerable people will have a code of behaviour (yes, often stating the obvious) but, importantly, an accompanying accessible means of dealing with any complaints of unacceptable conduct.

Our SCC is a very important document and I need your help. Please read the Safeguarding Code of Conduct and be aware of a few things:

1. The SCC will be listed on our Australian website – wccmaustralia.org.au – under the heading “Governance and Safeguarding”.
2. We will have a Safeguarding Committee made up of a lawyer, GP, Social Worker, the National Coordinator from our community and a person from outside WCCM Australia to maintain transparency. If this Committee receives a complaint it will be discussed, details passed on to the appropriate person or Government body and followed up by the Committee.
3. If you want to report an incident please go to this email address in the SCC – safeguardingwccmaustralia@gmail.com – on the Australian website. This email comes to the National Coordinator and will be addressed by our Safeguarding Committee. If you don't want to email your concern please phone me – 0418 655 291 – and I will be happy to speak with you.

If you have any questions please contact me at – janwylie@tpg.com.au

Thank you for reading the Safeguarding Code of Conduct, below.

With my love

Jan Wylie
WCCM Australia
National Coordinator

Safeguarding Code of Conduct

OVERVIEW

WCCM has a zero-tolerance approach to harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation of any kind – physical, verbal, emotional or sexual. The WCCM director, members of governance bodies, oblates, consultants, teachers, employees, contractors and volunteers are called upon to be exemplary models of moral behaviour and spiritual faith.

This Code of Conduct was drafted by WCCM and amended for Australian circumstances by WCCM Australia. It aims to:

- Ensure a safe working environment for all those engaged in the work of WCCM.
- Ensure the safety and well-being of all people, especially children, adults at risk/vulnerable adults and communities we come into contact with.

This Code of Conduct applies to all of WCCM: its director, members of governing bodies, oblates, consultants, teachers, employees, contractors and volunteers. Compliance with this Code of Conduct will be included in all employment/volunteering contracts and a copy of the Code of Conduct must be read and signed by anyone entering such a contract.

WCCM National Communities will be expected to have their own Code of Conduct which reflects the national legislation with regard to safeguarding and specific context in which they are working.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE WCCM SAFEGUARDING FRAMEWORK

- We take a zero-tolerance approach to harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation of any kind and this Code of Conduct aims to place the emphasis on the safety and well-being of those connected with our work.
- We take individual and organisational responsibility for safeguarding and, in the case of employed staff, we will provide appropriate staff with training and guidance to fulfil their obligations.
- We insist on professional, responsible conduct from all connected with us. We take a robust approach to dealing with any breaches.
- We will endeavour to maintain contextually appropriate best practice throughout our worldwide community by the sharing of up-to-date information and learning, through our regular community meetings and communications, and by membership of appropriate external advisory bodies.

BREACHES OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

- Compliance with WCCM's Code of Conduct is expected under all circumstances.
- WCCM's director, members of governing bodies, oblates, consultants, teachers, employees, contractors and volunteers have an individual responsibility to promote

a safe working environment and to ensure the safety and well-being of the people, including children, adults at risk/vulnerable adults and communities we come into contact with.

- WCCM's director, members of governing bodies, oblates, consultants, teachers, employees, contractors and volunteers have a responsibility to model appropriate behaviour and ensure that others whom they deal with within and through WCCM understand and comply with this Code of Conduct.
- All concerns about possible breaches of this Code must be reported to this email address (which will be monitored by the WCCM Australia National Coordinator for the time being) – safeguardingwccmaustralia@gmail.com
- All concerns and allegations will be taken seriously and it is the policy of WCCM to report all allegations of abuse to government authorities, including the police, regardless of whether the abuse occurred recently or in the past or whether the person accused is living or deceased. If a victim is unwilling to report the matter, the allegation will still be reported but (subject to statutory obligations to report, which must take precedence) their details will not be provided to the authorities, thereby retaining their anonymity.
- Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, termination of contracts and, where required, referral to other agencies such as the police.

PERSONAL PLEDGE

CONTRIBUTING TO A SAFE VOLUNTARY WORKING ENVIRONMENT

- I recognise that my conduct can potentially damage the reputation of WCCM and will uphold WCCM's values throughout, setting a good example.
- I will treat all others I deal with within WCCM with dignity and respect, even when our opinions may differ.
- I will not engage in or condone any form of harassment, intimidation, abuse or exploitation.
- I will not engage in or condone any behaviour that is illegal or could bring the organisation into disrepute in any way.
- Wherever possible, I will challenge inappropriate conduct directly. In addition, I will report all concerns to the email address on the website as soon as practicably possible after they arise.
- I understand that making intentionally false or misleading allegations against someone is a serious matter and could result in disciplinary action or legal action depending on the severity.

DEALING WITH OTHERS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

- I will not engage in any forms of abusive, degrading or exploitative behaviour.
- I will ensure that I am aware of and follow this WCCM Safeguarding Code of Conduct and associated procedures at all times.
- I will ensure that I am aware of any additional safeguarding measures required in a particular community and will follow any instructions or guidance provided by staff/ volunteers.
- I will take care in taking photos and videos of persons in the Community or attending Community events. I will not do so without their permission obtained at the time. In the case of children, that permission must be from the child's parent or person apparently in charge of the child.
- I will share any photos/videos taken on personal devices in connection with WCCM events with WCCM Australia through the email specified on the website. I will not post them on any form of social media unless consent has been provided at the time of taking photos/videos.
- I will be appropriate and responsible in my use of alcohol within the Community.
- I will avoid unnecessary risk to the safety, health and welfare of myself and others in the Community.
- I will observe local laws.
- I will be sensitive to local customs and seek to learn from and respect the experience and knowledge of the local communities that I meet.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS AT RISK/VULNERABLE ADULTS

- I will always behave appropriately in other people's presence and refrain from language that may cause discomfort or which could be deemed sexually provocative.
- I will listen to what the children/ adults at risk/vulnerable adults are saying and respond appropriately.
- I will avoid spending time alone with individual children and I will endeavour to be accompanied by another community member at all times when I am with children.
- I will take care in initiating any physical contact with a child as this could be misinterpreted and cause fear or discomfort
- I will never hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children or adults at risk/vulnerable adults
- I will not develop relationships with children or adults at risk/vulnerable adults that could in any way be considered exploitative or abusive and will never engage in any form of sexual conduct with them, including a relationship, verbal banter or flirtation.
- I will not act in ways that shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade anyone and in particular any child or adult at risk/vulnerable adult.
- I will not discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.

Continued over page

- I will endeavour to obtain written consent from a parent/guardian/carer before speaking to children on teleconferencing or social media platforms setting out the clear purpose of the meeting and notifying them of the organisers of the event.
- I will not take or post pictures or links to pictures of children on any form of social media or publication without written consent of parent/guardian/person apparently in charge of the child at the time and of the appropriate State or Territory Coordinator.

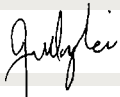
PERSONAL INFORMATION

- I will not seek to obtain or access personal information on members of the Community and children/adults at risk/vulnerable adults WCCM works with unless this is strictly necessary within my role and I have authorisation from the appropriate State or Territory Coordinator.
- I will not disclose or transfer personal information relating to children, young people, adults at risk/vulnerable adults or members of the WCCM Community unless authorised to do so by the appropriate State or Territory Coordinator.
- I will follow any WCCM Australia data protection policies and procedures when handling personal information.
- I will not use the organisation’s computer, laptop or other equipment to view, download, create or distribute inappropriate material (such as pornography) or any material which is criminal in nature.

Version 1 – Adopted by the National Executive of the National Council of WCCM Australia on 8th March 2022.

I have read and understood the Code of Conduct and agree to abide by it.

Signature



Print name

Jan Wylie
National Coordinator
WCCM Australia

Date

9th March 2022

Signature of Safeguarding Officer

N/A

Date

N/A





Deep in the Desert Retreat

by Deanna Klobas

National Co-ordinator for Young Christian Mediators

The Deep in the Desert Retreat was the first Young Christian Mediators (YCM) led retreat at Campfire in the Heart situated just outside Alice Springs, Northern Territory. It was held over 6 days from 26 June until 1 July 2022. Fourteen people from the WCCM Community attended, travelling from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania.

At Campfire in the Heart it takes hardly any time to feel present and connected to the rhythm and flow of the place! The desert location offers vast blue skies during the day, incredible colours at dawn and dusk and then an endless starry night over an enormous sky. The backdrop landscape in the distance is the MacDonnell Ranges and the sparse desert red earth that can be accessed and wandered in from the back gate of the retreat where there's a path that leads to a viewing platform. At Campfire in the Heart there are wattle bushes that sway in the breeze and tall gum trees where birds nest and where red tailed cockatoos pass by in flocks making wild shrieking sounds along the way.

The group walked the labyrinth at sunset on the first day to open the retreat and at sunrise on the last day closing the retreat. The labyrinth has been formed in a clearing in the red earth and contains circular paths made with stones that lead to the centre. Walking the labyrinth was

a wonderful opportunity to experience the changing colours of the vast sky, the sounds of the birds and wilderness close by and the gentle slow crunch of my own feet and those of others as we walked on the red desert earth in silent unity. A fire was lit in the centre of the labyrinth where the smoke created a mysterious atmosphere. Everyone in the group carried a stone they had found with them into the centre of the labyrinth on the first day and had the opportunity to leave the stone in the labyrinth or take it with them on the last day.

The Campfire was a very memorable circular gathering space surrounded by large gum trees. Everyone in the group was drawn to the space to watch campfire's crackling flames. The campfire created and nurtured a community space where we gathered at different times of the day including for meals, meditation, teachings and socialising in the evening around the amber glow.

The group was very blessed to have Celia Kemp lead sessions during the retreat. Celia's wisdom inspired us to delve into a deep connection with the spirit of the desert and with scripture readings. It was very moving to have time and space in the landscape, be that the busy township of Alice Springs, or wandering in the surrounding MacDonnell Ranges just out the back gate. We had time for self-reflection and then the opportunity to consider these experiences as a group.

Celia spoke about the origins and meaning of Making Peace After the

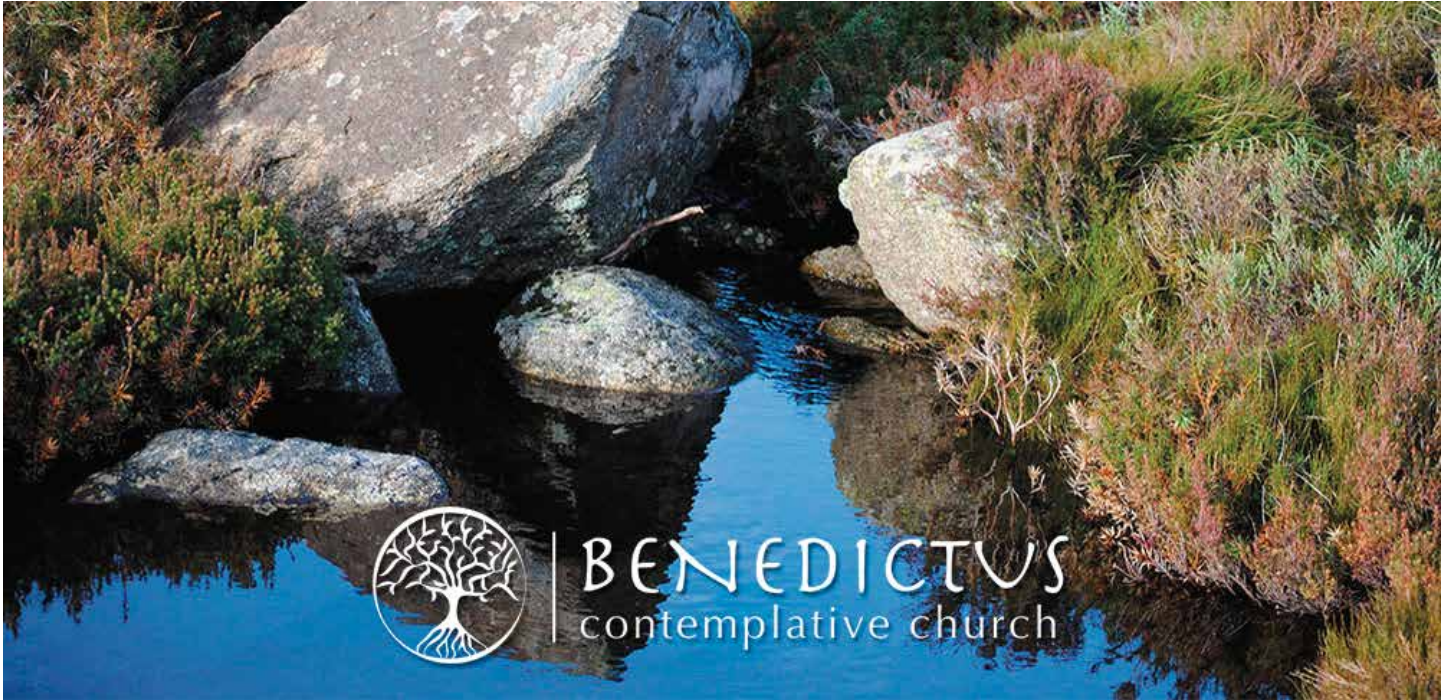
Colonial Era Conflicts and gave us the opportunity to make a desert pea to wear on a pin to commemorate the first nations people's suffering during in the conquest and settlement of land.

On an outing we ventured to the nearby Simpsons Gap in the West MacDonnell Ranges. The landscape on trip was sparse desert so it was surprising to find the Gap contained a waterhole and was home to wildlife including tall gum trees and birds and the rock wallaby. We ate our lunch on the bank of the waterhole during the limited time of the day when the sun shines into the Gap illuminating it's many waterholes – and we got a sense of the sacredness of this place. On the way back we were able to locate and spend some time with an enormous ghost gum with a circumference of 20 paces around, it was absolutely majestic and such special way to end the afternoon.

Unfortunately, some of the group had COVID and needed to isolate, however they reported they were able to enjoy the retreat having time to rest while being able to take in the surrounds in contemplation. Everyone on the retreat helped out whether it was adapting to a more COVID safe situation or preparing food for those who were isolating.

Being part of the YCM retreat at Campfire in the Heart was on the whole, a wonderful way to nurture community around a campfire, connect with the desert landscape and find and continue on a path deeper, into Christian meditation.

Online with the Benedictus



Benedictus is an ecumenical Christian community established in Canberra ten years ago, with a practice of silent contemplative prayer at its heart. It is led by Sarah Bachelard, a priest, theologian, retreat leader, author and guiding teacher with the World Community for Christian Meditation. In 2019 Sarah delivered the 36th WCCM John Main Seminar titled *A Contemplative Christianity for Our Time*.

In early 2022, Susanna Pain returned to Canberra and to Benedictus, offering her gifts as Senior Associate – Community, Spiritual Care and the Arts. Susanna brings many years experience as a priest, spiritual director, retreat leader and facilitator of artistic and community engagement.

Benedictus has its physical ‘on the ground’ location in Canberra, where the local community is flourishing for all in that place. But as you will read below, it is also a spiritual waterhole for many across Australia and around the world, through its growing online community. Benedictus offers a richness of ‘online’ and ‘on-the ground’ meditation, worship and other community gatherings and initiatives to which everyone is welcome, from Canberra and anywhere else in the Zoomiverse!

<https://benedictus.com.au>

Below is an article by Heather Olley that details the recent birth and blossoming of the Benedictus online community.

by Heather Olley

In the beginning... Easter 2020, there was meditation at Benedictus, there was Corona and lockdowns (who ever heard of such things!), and there was Zoom.

... and so Benedictus first meditated online in Holy Week 2020.

And then, the second day . . .

Sarah Bachelard and Neil Millar continued the online daily meditation into a second week. And I remember

saying to Sarah on that second Monday, Easter Monday – (somewhat nervously unmuting myself on Zoom for the first time ever) – ‘thank you for continuing the meditation, ‘cos I’ve never been able to make the evening meditation ‘stick’ and it was so easy doing it in community and online last week.’

I was obviously not alone. Since then, our Benedictus online family has grown, across Canberra to our surrounding regions – Yass & Burra, the South Coast, the South West Slopes, Armidale,

Gippsland, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Brisbane, across the continent, across the Tasman Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific and the Atlantic.

And, like learning to drive a car, over time we noticed the Zoom thing less and less – barring the occasional power cuts and tech fails of course! And we came to know and value the journey we were on together more and more.

We did spend much of 2020 ‘just meditating’ in our daily Zoom gatherings. And all in the midst of the occasional unmuted ‘turn the potatoes

‘There was a growing sense of community, trust, care and friendship, even though many of us had never met or even spoken to each other.’

Community – all are welcome

off please love', as well as treasuring those sights of people Zooming in from their beach walks, on rail and road journeys, on our back decks, carparks outside the theatre, from COVID testing queues, and even from so far afield as Milan in Italy, enroute to a long overdue family reunion.

And often, with our beloved Benedictus pets (cats, dogs, noisy budgies) sharing our screens and our laps and that 20 minutes of silence and stillness.

And the third day...

New shoots... it seemed once we had come to know each other as the Body of Christ in silence and stillness, there was a growing sense of community, trust, care and friendship, even though many of us had never met or even spoken to each other.

There were new leaders in our daily zoom meditation gatherings towards the end of 2020 – diversity, richness, welcoming, and loving in that still-point in our days... yet always the same silence and stillness.

'Let's experiment with Zoom breakout rooms after the Saturday service', suggested Sarah Bachelard.

Which has grown into the Friday and Saturday 'After-party' chats, where we share our lives, as well as questions and thinking on our service, times of reflection and times of contemplation.

There is a Zoom home group, now almost 2 years old, connecting 8 of us around the world, once a fortnight... where we share our doubts and questions and certainties about our spiritual journeys and Christian faith, and other faiths, about meditation and prayer, about how we 'be' as Christians out in the world. And sharing and supporting each other through major life events – births, deaths, baptisms, serious illnesses and health events, sharing our scars and wounds and healing.

A Melbourne chapter sprang into life after the Melbourne lockdowns eased –



Sarah Bachelard

new growth and gathering and sharing of lives, of friends known first in the silence and stillness of online meditation and Saturday services.

Zoom Sandwiches at Friday lunch-times – amazing unplanned theological and life-sharing moments wherever the Spirit leads, over a humble cuppa and a sandwich, with whoever has an hour free

'Sharing and supporting each other through major life events – births, deaths, baptisms, serious illnesses and health events, sharing our scars and wounds and healing.'

at the end of the week, and is looking for a chat or some friendly faces and voices.

Sunday Zoom meditation gatherings – 'yes, why weren't we doing that', someone asked? And so we did.

The Music and Poetry Zoom Group – where we explore the gift of words and music, creations of, and reflections of our God and our world and ourselves. And of course, in the process, coming to share deeply of ourselves.

The online community has also been a part of book launches, a John Coleman music concert, a Sunday Quiet Evening,

a 6 week Retreat in Daily Life, a Lenten study on James Alison's *Jesus the Forgiving Victim*, and Lenten reflections from both 'on the ground' and 'online' members about their journey to this waterhole at Benedictus.

And then... there's all the other gatherings over Zoom that I just can't yet fit into my waking hours... Fellowship through Books, and the other longer standing groups that have used Zoom to keep us connected through the hard days of these last few years.

And the next day?...

Who knows what the next day will look like?

Will it seem as seismic as these last days and years? How will we cope? How will the world respond?

Well, as JRR Tolkien reminded us, through the wise words of Gandalf...

... all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.

And John Main's answer to that... say your mantra.

Which I know we will continue to do, as this scattered and gathered community.

With just a little help from Mr Zoom. But mostly as we just keep following the Spirit dancing through our community and our lives at Benedictus, leading us on into the eternal present.

Anyone is welcome to join us – for any or all of the meditation sessions, the Saturday service or any of the other offerings.

All it takes is a click of the link!

<https://benedictus.com.au>



Unblocking the heart

Roland Ashby, Contributing Editor of *Living Water and long-time meditator, reflects on his own recent experience of confronting his mortality, and how this relates to what Spanish mystic St John of the Cross termed the “dark night of the soul”. Through this “dark night” God is encountered as passionate, intimate lover who seeks to liberate us to live in true freedom, in the fullness of love, which John Main described as a liberty of spirit that is the goal of mantra meditation.**

The last three months have been the most challenging of my life. They began with a bout of vertigo at 3am in the morning, calling an ambulance and being taken to hospital. I thought I was having a stroke (my brother had one at my age) but after all the tests it was decided it was probably an inner ear infection.

After going home the dizziness persisted; and when, a couple of weeks later, the dizziness was accompanied by chest pain, clammy hands and numbness down my left leg, my wife Ros drove me back to hospital. An angiogram revealed an 80% blockage in my Right Coronary Artery. The cardiologist inserted a stent to clear the blockage, and was happy with the result.

After sharing a room for the night with a very sick man, who was struggling to breathe, I returned home, but after a few days, didn't feel much better. It turned out I had contracted COVID, most likely while in hospital.

A week later I was still getting dizziness and chest pain, returned to hospital for several days, and had another angiogram, which showed all was OK with the stent and the heart. Nobody seems to know what was causing the chest pain and dizziness this time, but it may related to COVID.

Why am I telling this story? Because for me, it has been something of a dark night of the soul, a phrase used by 16th century Spanish mystic and Carmelite St John of the Cross, to describe his own dark night, to which I will turn in a moment.

I was confronted by my own vulnerability and mortality, was anxious about what sort of future, if any, I might have, and was plagued by negative thoughts about the past – my mistakes and failures, and hurts, both given and received. A tsunami of regrets, doubts and fears did their best to sweep away my

hope and faith. I had been stripped back to what Afro-American mystic Howard Thurman, and mentor to Martin Luther King, called our naked being, “our literal substance before God”.

St John of the Cross's dark night came when he was thrown into solitary confinement by his Carmelite order because he wanted to reform the order, along the same lines as his friend and fellow Carmelite and Spaniard, St Teresa of Avila.

For nine months, he was confined to a small, dark cell with little light and food. He was also flogged repeatedly in an attempt to persuade him to give up his ideas of reform.

However, contrary to all rational expectations that the darkness, sensory deprivation, isolation, pain, betrayal and abandonment he endured would crush him, it was actually the making of him. He fell in love with God with such a passionate intensity that he was able to produce the most exquisite love poetry.

In his poem *The Ascent of Mt Carmel*, evocative of the Old Testament's passionate and erotic *Song of Songs*, he describes how in darkness and stillness, “fired by love's urgent longings”, he is united with his lover, in whom he is transformed. He speaks, in psychiatrist Gerald May's words, of “soaring passion, sensual yearning and delight”, without using “a single religious word”.¹

And in the ecstatic stage of union with his lover, he abandons and forgets himself: “All things ceased; I went out from myself/Leaving my cares/Forgotten among the lilies.”

It is a love so intoxicating that in his poem *The Spiritual Canticle*, he compares it to being in a wine cellar where “I drank of my beloved”, and:

*There he gave me his breast;
There he taught me a sweet and
living knowledge;*

*And I gave myself to him,
Keeping nothing back;
There I promised to be his bride.*

Franciscan priest Richard Rohr says, “People who know God well – mystics, hermits, those who risk everything to find God – always meet a lover, not a dictator. God is never found as an abusive father or a tyrannical mother; God is always a lover greater than we dared hope for.”²

Here is a falling in love so complete that John of the Cross can say: “Now I occupy my soul/And all my energy in his service” and “my every act is love”.

In his poem *Living Flame of Love*, he writes that the warmth and light from such a love is so intense that he can describe it as a *Living flame of love/ That tenderly wounds my soul/In its deepest centre*.

Such profound depth of love as this can only be known via a Way of Unknowing, John of the Cross says. This is the way of experiencing a love “which surpasses knowledge”, in the words of Ephesians 3:19. It transcends the intellect, thought and imagination, and takes us into the cave of the heart. He writes:

*“To come to the knowledge you have not
You must go by a way in which you
know not.”*

It is a love beyond knowledge and understanding, in which we find true freedom, Gerald May says. “The dark night is a profoundly good thing,” he writes, because “we are liberated from attachments and compulsions, and empowered to live and love more freely”.³

He writes: “For [John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila], the dark night – indeed all of life – is nothing other than the story of a love affair: a romance between God and the human soul that liberates us to love one another.”⁴

May continues: “The meaning revealed in the dark night is ... there is something wonderful at the heart of our existence, and it is about nothing other than love: love for God, love for one another, love for creation, love for life itself.”⁵

Contrary to popular understanding,

to allow love to flow

the dark night is not, he says, about a life-denying asceticism that “saves us from sin”, but about being *freed for the fullness of love*.⁶

So, how does this make sense of my own experience of the dark night?

While in hospital, after the initial shock of what was happening to me, and coming to terms with the new and sterile surroundings, and routine of constant blood pressure monitoring and ECGs, I eventually found myself returning to morning and evening prayer, including Scripture reading, and also an attempt at silent meditation using the mantra *Maranatha*. This was despite the fact that constant interruptions, beeping machines and artificial light makes this all-night impossible.

However, I found that the words of morning and evening prayer, and Scripture, came alive for me, and even the attempt to silently recite the mantra had a calming effect. My mood shifted from one of alarm and anxiety, to one of peaceful acceptance. The heaviness lifted.

But more than this, I began to see other people differently. I began to see the nurses as loving human beings, doing their best to provide care, rather than just employees doing their job with varying degrees of efficiency; and I noticed too that my attitude to the men I was sharing rooms with softened and became more compassionate, as I became aware of their own suffering, and our shared humanity, despite initially feeling, I must confess – if I’m being totally honest – in a slightly superior way, I had nothing in common with them.

I came to feel a closeness to them, and companionship with them, that I would never previously have dreamed possible.

I began to see that I needed to learn to be grateful too for the dark night experiences, because, through experiencing my frailty and woundedness, and also coming face to face with my shadow side, I was being broken open to receive God’s love, and see God in others, and indeed *every* circumstance of life.

The doctor found a blockage in my heart and inserted a stent to remove the blockage.

But this wasn’t all that was happening to my heart.

This brings me back to John Main. “Saying the mantra”, he says, “is like unlocking the door of our heart. The mantra is like the key unlocking the door to allow the pure light of love to flood in.”⁷



The stent unblocks the heart to allow the blood to flow. The mantra unlocks the heart, and *unblocks* it, to allow *the love* to flow.

In the dark night, John of the Cross says, God works to unblock our hearts of all that prevents the love from flowing, including the ego’s fears, anxieties, prejudices and judgementalism, and desire for power and control; and the self-centred pursuit of pleasure, wealth and possessions; all our addictions and compulsions, and seeking God, seeking love, in the wrong places.

Through mantra meditation, John Main offers us an utterly simple and practical way to clear the blockages.

In this pilgrimage to the heart, a way of unknowing, transcending all thoughts and images, in darkness, silence and stillness, the mantra acts like a homing device, leading us to the door of the heart, *unlocking* it, and *unblocking* it.

And most importantly, it is a way to liberty of spirit. “Now what Jesus came to proclaim was precisely this liberty”, Main

says. “The liberty to be ourselves and the liberty to find ourselves in him, through him, and with him. Meditation is simply the way to that liberty. It is the way to your own heart. It is the way to the depth of your own being where you can simply be ... [and] simply rejoice in the gift of your own being.”⁸

And in an echo of John of the Cross, he adds: “Freedom is not just freedom *from* things. Christian liberty is not just freedom from desire, from sin. We are *free for* intimate union with God, which is another way of saying we are *free for* infinite expansion of Spirit in God.

“Meditation is entering into that experience of *being free for God*, transcending desire, sin, leaving it behind; transcending ego, leaving it behind, so that the whole of our being is utterly available to God.”⁹

And when we do that, he says, we are “swept out of ourselves, beyond ourselves” into a “great cosmic river of love”, the love that flows constantly between Jesus and his Father, the love that is the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Thus we are led into what Br Roger of Taizé calls a “springtime of the heart”, when, having complete freedom in God, we are now also “utterly available” to care for others and to live a life of loving service.

**This is an edited version of an article which first appeared on Living Water (www.thelivingwater.com.au). See the full article at <https://www.thelivingwater.com.au/blog/unblocking-the-heart>*

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