

# *NZ Community For Christian Meditation*

July 2009

*Dear Friends*

What has been especially pleasing since our last newsletter is the publication of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops pastoral letter on Prayer. In this letter the bishops discuss the importance of prayer in the home, in schools and in worship especially the Eucharist. They mention a number of devotional practices that are predominantly Roman Catholic, but also others that have a wider dimension such as Taize prayer, praying the Scriptures and Retreats in Daily life.

What is of special relevance to us is their endorsement of the practice of meditation as taught by John Main. The value of this endorsement cannot be overestimated.

Most of us, I understand, are attached to a church community and for many it has been through the church that we have come across Christian meditation. This is important for it gives us a security and the knowledge that we are within a tradition. One of the dangers any spiritual movement has to face is whether it is creating a sect or cult following. Meditation is no exception. Our churches are more than just institutions. There are many people who meditate but not so many who are part of a believing community. This is where our work is so helpful, since it is carried out in the context of a believing community.

I myself have made the big mistake of imagining that my enthusiasm for meditation would be easily picked up by the community. What could be safer than encouraging

people to pray contemplatively? Surely all prayer is directed towards that goal.

Well, just the opposite happened. Some people felt threatened that there seemed to be an implication that their own devotional practices were not good enough. Many became quite angry, feeling that their identity was threatened as well. Hence I believe that we are dealing with widespread ignorance within our respective faith communities. In my view a new holiness is required today, but one has to be careful where one says that - so I have found.

Prayer is like motherhood and apple pie; everyone is in favour of it. However, when you move into specifics people can become very territorial and the ego begins to take over. Clearly we come to meditation when we are ready and not before.

The Bishops wisely place meditation in the general context of the Prayer of the Church – Eucharist, liturgy of the hours - and private devotions. Their endorsement relates specifically to the “spiritual vacuum” that exists in our society. Further to this they encourage the setting up of meditation groups which can act as a “leaven” in the parish. Also they support the teaching of meditation in schools enabling children to enter their “inner room.” This is most heartening. The pastoral letter can be downloaded from the Bishop’s Conference website [www.catholic.org.nz](http://www.catholic.org.nz)

At the end of this month I am conducting a seminar with Diana Halloran, Catherine Readman and Rosemary Garsed, at the NZ Catholic Education Convention. Catherine, a principal, and Rosemary, a DRS, are from Hamilton. Ruth Fowler from Melbourne is also conducting a workshop for school teachers in September. Information for this latter event can be obtained from Sister Annette Green, [sr.annette@compassion.org.nz](mailto:sr.annette@compassion.org.nz)

Diana has written an obituary for Frank Fagan who died recently. The growth of the NZ community is in large part attributable to Frank's fidelity to the practice since he started the Massey group with Mark Clay 20 years ago. Frank's example shows that the work has a life of its own and if we are faithful to it, then step by step we will arrive at where we need to be.

In love and prayers,

*Peter Murphy*

### **In loving Memory of Frank Fagan**

We have lost a great friend and a pioneer for Christian Meditation here in New Zealand. Frank died peacefully on the 28 of May, 2009, this year being the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the prayer group here in Massey that he and Mark Clay started on their own. For about the first 3 years they just prayed faithfully together every Tuesday night. Gradually others joined them for a time, and I came in 1993.

My first impression of Frank was his gentleness, his complete commitment to meditation and his love for the teaching of John Main. He loved every aspect of this way of prayer. He was a great teacher for me

as he taught me to persevere when nothing seemed to be happening.

Frank welcomed everyone who came to the group. His strength, faithfulness, and desire to share with others his love of this way of prayer was the stability of the prayer group. I miss him very much as I'm sure many do. My lingering memories of Frank are of a man who was a complete gentleman, with a wonderful sense of humour, a great love of nature as he saw God's presence everywhere. There was a beautiful peace about him during the last few months of his life. Frank was a wonderful example for us all on our journey of Christian Meditation.

*Diana Halloran*

### **Auckland News**

#### **Retreat August 7-9**

Places are filling up for this retreat led by Dr Eric Ryan. Eric is a philosopher and has been a mentor for a number in our community for some years. His breadth of knowledge and his deep Christian faith made an indelible impression at the last retreat he conducted for us four years ago. The limit at the retreat house is 38. Call me at 09-4166-759 or 021-253-1887

### **Community Day**

The next Community Day is in November 21. The presenter will be Fr Kevin Waldie, a lecturer in New Testament Studies at Good Shepherd College. He will be speaking on Prayer in St Paul.

## **Friends**

Remember to keep supporting the work of Fr Laurence especially in developing countries. Payments can be made into the NZCCM account with Kiwibank, A/c No. 38-9003-0812910-02

[Diana Halloran](#)

[Wellington News](#)

[15th August](#)

Day of Recollection to be held in St Ronan's Church, Muritai Road, Eastbourne

**(NB CHANGE OF VENUE )**

10am -3pm Speaker will be Lester Reid

Please bring lunch and a donation

***31st July 31 - 2<sup>nd</sup> August***

A silent weekend retreat will be held at Home of Compassion, Island Bay. There are a few places left.

Contact Sister Annette on (04) 3837769 ext 851

or e-mail: [sr.annette@compassion.org.nz](mailto:sr.annette@compassion.org.nz)

***28th September - 30th September***

Christian Meditation Workshop for teachers wishing to introduce meditation in schools.

Please contact Sister Annette (details above).

***24th October***

Day of Recollection to be held at Home of Compassion, Island Bay 10am-3pm. Please bring your lunch and a donation.

***8<sup>th</sup> November***

Afternoon meditation period 1.30pm - 4pm Home of Compassion Island Bay.

[5th December](#)

Joint Muslim / Christian Meditation afternoon at Wellington Study Group 31 Hobson Crescent Thorndon 2pm for 2.30pm start

Afternoon tea provided

Any enquiries contact Caroline Williams at (04) 3885329

***Hugh McLaughlin***

***Christchurch News***

In the last week of May, I was proud to be the New Zealand presence at an international retreat of the World Community for Christian Meditation – six days of silence in the convent of Santa Maria della Provvidenza, Fara Sabina, on a high hilltop in the countryside an hour from Rome.

The castle-convent in late Spring/early Summer was an idyllic setting: cuckoos in the woods below, poppies and hay-making in the fields,

olives and oleanders in the old walled gardens.

Each day offered the same routine - a discipline that was always gentle: seven periods of meditation, four of mindful walking, the evening Mass, a teaching by Fr Laurence Freeman, and a short discussion with one of the retreat leaders.

We responded in silence to the Mass, but said 'Our Father . . . ' aloud in our own languages - a particularly moving symbol in the week before Pentecost.

Fr Laurence taught on the theme of faith - an interpretation of great breadth and depth, expressed with his characteristic clarity and vision. I hope this series of talks may one day become available to us all on CD.

Forty of us, from all over the world, felt ourselves grow over the six days into a loving community - which, John Main taught, is the natural fruit of meditation. I went to Fara Sabina hoping to find some light on how I should be spending my time - and I did.

In fact my strongest memory of the retreat is of light - the light of the European Spring all around me, and some light on my own path. I needed that time to stand back. I'm very grateful to those who suggested I take it. Attending the retreat was an extraordinary privilege.

***Jane Hole***

### **Nelson Cathedral Group**

In response to my request for news of other groups in New Zealand, I was grateful to hear from Mary Kroch who, with Katharine Day was responsible for starting this group. The following is an abridged version of their story which was originally published in the Anglican "Taonga" magazine.

Mary and Katharine came to Christian Meditation through their practice of Transcendental Meditation. Both look back on TM as being a significant step in their journey.

Mary discovered the work of John Main through a Hindu nun and subsequently both Mary and Katharine became very excited to find that there were other Christian meditation groups in New Zealand. With the assistance of Fr Allen Michel they were able to start a group which now meets every Tuesday in the Cathedral.

Katharine has commented that while the time spent to "be" with God is simple – it is not that easy. "When I began to meditate I assumed I was a natural at it, but it wasn't long before the internal chatter of my 'monkey mind' caught up with me".

The Nelson Cathedral group has a core of 5 or 6 members who have been there from the beginning. It has an inclusive aspect that is highly valued and appreciated. Everyone is welcome including local Quakers, Buddhists and visitors from around the world. Members also value the weekly group as an important part of what is essentially a solitary pilgrimage.

The wonder of it all is that this has all come about because of the work and perseverance of John Main, without whom the ancient Christian tradition may not have been revived when it was. One small step!

### **John Main**

"In the silence of meditation, when you go beyond thought and imagination, you begin to experience and later to understand that *being* is what life is about and that in meditation you are learning to *be*.

“To be is to live as the person you are, without trying to justify your existence or make excuses for your personality. Just to be, as you are.

“The wonder of it is that the more simple you become, the more you are able to enjoy to the full the gift of your being. But when you begin you have to begin in faith.

“You cannot come to meditation saying, “If I can get something out of this I will do it for a trial run for three or six months”. You cannot come to it with demands.

“As St John of the Cross described it, “The way to possession is the way of dispossession”.

“You have to let go of your thoughts, of your ideas, of your conscious and hidden ambitions and you have to *be*. The way to do it is to say your word. If all your attention is directed to saying your word and if you are neither lazy nor impatient, then gradually you are unhooked from all the thoughts and words and ideas and hopes and fears. You are free.”

*From “The Heart of Creation”*

### **Have a smile!**

The priest emerged from church to find a little boy earnestly looking at the Roll of Honour of the parishioners who had died during the war .

“Who are all these people?” asked the little chap.

“Why they are folk who died in the service” replied the priest.

The little boy's lip began to tremble and he finally blurted:

“Was it the 8.30 or the 10.30 service?”

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