

Greetings from the National Co-ordinator

Dear Friends

It is hard to believe that not just another year but another decade has come to an end – referred to irreverently as the noughties.

It has been an eventful year for me particularly with the death of Diana Halloran in September. Diana was a wonderful help in the building up of the Auckland Community and particularly in the work of teaching meditation to children, a work which became her real love. We also mourned Frank Fagan and Mark Clay, foundation members of the Massey group which they formed 20 years ago, and from which the NZ Community grew. I have just commissioned an icon in their memory for use at our gatherings. Any contributions will be gratefully received as the cost is just under \$3,000.

In October I was fortunate to join the Australian Meditation Community on their third national retreat held in Sydney. It came at a good time for me personally and it reaffirmed for me the value and the privilege of such events. It was a five day silent retreat at which there were 235 people present. The Australian community continue to be an inspiration for they have a band of very committed and dedicated meditators. This can be seen not only in the organisation of the retreat but in the various directions that the community has branched into, for example prison ministry and East Timor. I also had the privilege of sitting in on part of their national council meeting.

The theme of the retreat was *Practice makes Perfect – or Does It?* Perfectionism, as we know, is like a disease in modern society with its preoccupation with ratings and success. Meditation allows one to just be and that itself is very freeing. Last week in the Catholic calendar we celebrated the feast of St John of the Cross, famous for the phrase, “The Dark Night of the Soul,” which has now entered everyday language, not, however,

with its original meaning. John’s dark night describes aptly the absence of God in the life of the believer burning for love of him. This is often misunderstood. How can one burn with love for the beloved and at the same time be experiencing the hopelessness of his absence? The best modern example we have of this is Mother Teresa of Calcutta who for approximately 50 years experienced this darkness, yet for the world she was a symbol of God’s love if ever there was one.

This apparent darkness is common for those who meditate. There are different shades of darkness. The darkness for the beginner lies in coping with what we call the monkey mind, namely endless distractions and the question “Is this really prayer, for nothing is happening?” Here is where the meditation group is such an asset for one needs assistance to grope one’s way through the darkness.

Once one is over this hurdle does not mean that one is out of the darkness; it is more that one is journeying guided by a dark light. As John Main was fond of saying, we are on the path. One can step off the path and fall away from the practice for a few days, a week, a month or even years. No matter how long one is off the path it only takes one step to return to it. At times when I have been giving introductory talks on meditation I have been introduced as an expert. However, if you have been around awhile you recognise how little you actually know. Again, as Father John says, we are always beginning. There are no experts here.

The beauty of the practice is its simplicity. We are being called to greater simplicity, not just personally but collectively. As the Copenhagen conference has reminded us simplicity is not an option but a necessity. Our practice helps us in this process, and the stable at Bethlehem is an ongoing reminder of this message.

Blessings for Christmas and the New Year.
In love and prayer

Peter Murphy

Coming Events

Children's Meditation One-day Seminar led by Ruth Fowler from Australia. Auckland, Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom. Tuesday May 4. This will be of special interest to school teachers, but open to all wanting to enter this work. Cost \$40. Flyer attached.

Essential Teaching Workshop (formerly called Meditation School).

Led by Ruth Fowler. St Francis Retreat House, -Friday April 30 – Sunday May 2. This is particularly important for group leaders not only in aiding them to grow in confidence in sharing with others their experience of meditation but also in learning about the tradition to which we belong.

School Retreat

Home of Compassion, Wellington October 29- November 6. This will be led by Kath Houston from Australia and myself. Cost to be determined. The retreat is intensive and in silence and will offer personal assistance/guidance. The programme includes seven half-hour meditation periods. Limited to 20 people. The retreat is restricted to those who have already done an ETW i.e. meditation school.

National Retreat. Early February 2011, probably at Waikato University.

Auckland News

Jenny and Neil Keating have agreed to take over Diana's role as Auckland Regional Co-ordinator. Jenny and Neil are members of the Massey meditation group so I am having the opportunity of guiding them into the role. They can be contacted: Ph 09-833-1931 n.keating@clear.net.nz

I am moving in the New Year to Papakura parish in South Auckland. Address: 52 East Street, Papakura 2110, Ph 09-298-5134. Until now our community day venues have followed me around but the sense I have picked up is that people would prefer a more central venue. We have been offered the

crypt at St Benedict's Church in Newton. There is ample parking for our purposes. The big disadvantage is there are not the grounds where we can wander, however, the crypt itself is quite attractive.

The first community day will be on March 20 at Tyburn Monastery, 100 Chamberlain Road, Bombay, beginning at 10.00am. The presenter is Michael Dougherty who will speak on the spirituality of John Cassian. It was the discovery of Cassian that inspired John Main to begin teaching Christian meditation.

Coming events:

Other Community Days:

June 19, November 20 – Presenters to be decided

Venue: The Crypt, St Benedict's Church, 1 St Benedict Street, Auckland. (Note change of venue).

Time: 10.00am-4.00pm

Retreats:

Seminar-Retreat, St Francis Retreat House, Hillsborough, Auckland, led by Fr Michael Misfud Fri. August 27 – Sun. Aug. 29

Theme: Toward an Integrative Spirituality.

Michael is a hermit (not a recluse) living in Victoria, Australia. He is experienced in giving Christian Meditation retreats having given two this year in Victoria. He is a Camaldolese Oblate in the Benedictine tradition since 1992. He is very involved in the East-West meditation foundation, interfaith area.

FYI

Workshop Deep Field Relaxation with Clif Sanderson (who led our community day last April). Friday 19th Feb (evening) – Sunday 21st Feb).

Contact Galina 09 8292364 for more info or to book

Wellington Interfaith Initiative

As an Interfaith initiative Wellington WCCM over the last few years has met with some members of the Wellington

Muslim community and paid a visit to their mosque.

For Christmas 2009 we held a meditation service together on Saturday 5 December at the Wellington Study Group centre in Thorndon.

On a fine, warm, calm afternoon in a beautiful sheltered garden setting we could open all windows and doors. We were a small group, four from the Wellington Muslim community, and three of us from WCCM.

Our theme was the Holy Spirit.

We considered the Holy Spirit in Christian/Judaic thought.

We heard about the famous icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublov that shows the three persons of the Trinity seated at a table, gathered round the elements of the Eucharist. The persons of the Trinity reveal themselves as able to give and receive one another's love in perfect mutuality.

The nature of the Holy Spirit is that of the breath of God, *ruah* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. This breath is God's power or energy in action, and it is also God's love. The Old Testament name for God YHWH, was breathed in and out as it was said. In the New Testament it took the form of tongues of fire that hovered above the disciple's heads at Pentecost and strengthened them for their ministry.

For ourselves, when we wait on God in silence, or in prayer and meditation the Holy Spirit stirs our conscience, or clarifies a problem that may be troubling us and for which we seek a solution. The Holy Spirit sheds the light of discernment on our situation. If we feel unable to pray, it is the Holy Spirit that deep inside us suffers with us and seeks God.

Those who have had experience of the charismatic movement or a charismatic unity will have heard the ecstatic gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues or prophecy.

The Holy Spirit is at work in those who witness to God, serving others and building up the worshipping community.

Reihana Ali spoke of Muslim insights into the Holy Spirit and read a passage from the Koran that gave an account of the birth of Jesus to Mary - under a date palm!

We considered receiving the "fruits of the spirit" such as love and patience; and how in observing "the golden rule" the Holy Spirit guides and leads us.

By arrangement with Reihana Shelley led into quiet time with the Christian prayer "Our Father." Reihana followed with a beautiful Muslim prayer.

Our meditation was a time of wonderful communal silence.

We came out of meditation to hear some verses of James K. Baxter's poem, *Song of the Holy Spirit*

*Lord, Holy Spirit,
You blow like the wind in a thousand
paddocks,
Inside and outside the fences,
You blow where you wish to blow.*

*Lord, Holy Spirit,
You are the mother eagle with her young,
Holding them in peace under your feathers,*

*Lord, Holy Spirit,
You are the kind fire who does not cease to
burn,
Consuming us with flames of love and peace,
Driving us out like sparks to set the world on
fire.*

*Lord, Holy Spirit,
In the love of friends you are building a new
house.
Heaven is with us when you are with us.
You are singing your song in the hearts of the
poor.
Guide us, wound us, heal us. Bring us to the
Father.*

For me our afternoon was the spiritual highlight of the Christmas season, sociably concluded with strawberries, mince tarts and such over cups of tea.

Elsbeth Preddey

New Zealand Meditators are On Line!!

Why I Meditate

Many thanks to the 19 meditators from around New Zealand who answered the call to write about their meditation journey for the NZCCM website.

The 19 stories are now on the website and can be found at www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz.

Without exception the stories are both moving and magnificent. The document runs to 43 pages and more than 21,000 words.

The stories are linked to a PDF file so the whole 43 pages can be downloaded and either read on screen or printed and read at your leisure.

If reading these stories encourages you to write one of your own these please do so. It is my intention to call for more stories in April with the intention of publishing another file of personal testimonies mid-year.

Thank you again to the 19 people who have felt moved to share their journey.

Vincent Maire

John Main

I want now to address a particular question that we all encounter. It is the question of distractions. What should you do when you begin to meditate and distracting thoughts come into your mind? The advice that the tradition has to give us is to ignore the distractions and to say your word and to keep on saying your word.

Don't waste any energy in trying to furrow your brow and say 'I will not think of what I'm going to have for dinner, or 'who I'm going to see today', or 'where am I going tomorrow', or whatever the distraction may be.

Don't try to use any energy to dispel the distraction. Simply ignore it and the way to ignore it is to say your word

"Moment of Christ"

Smile Time

A man goes shopping and sees a Thermos flask. He asks the sales assistant what it's for.

"It keeps hot food hot and cold food cold" replies the assistant.

So the man buys one and takes it to work the next day.

Look at this he says to his workmate. "It's a Thermos flask. It keeps hot things hot and cold things cold"

"What have you got in it?" asks his friend.

"A bowl of soup and some ice cream!"

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