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From the National Coordinator - Jane Hole

Dear Friends

Last week I had a call from a woman who lives in a town not far from Christchurch. She'd been in Auckland recently and noticed, at the back of a church she visited, a leaflet about Christian Meditation. She took it away with her and found the contents unexpected and exciting. Noticing on the back of the leaflet, the address of the NZCCM website: christianmeditationnz.org.nz she looked it up and there, under the heading 'Meeting Times', saw that a group meets in Christchurch on a day when she regularly visits the city.

She thought she'd like to find out more about this attractive form of contemplative prayer and phoned the contact person for the group. We talked, and I explained to her what we do at our weekly gathering. On her next visit to Christchurch, she'll join us. I look forward to meeting her and know that the rest of the group will give her a welcome from the heart - for it's the prayer of the heart that we meet to share.

Fr John Main taught that 'Meditation creates community', a community of love. Speaking with this woman reminded me how effective for love our New Zealand meditation community can be if each of us faithfully plays our own small part in it. Here, as I see it, are the links in my story's chain of everyday acts of faith and love. Modest they may be, but they led to someone taking their first

steps on what John Main called 'a journey to our own heart'.

A woman on holiday, searching and open to learning, picked up a leaflet and read it.

Someone had taken the trouble to leave a few of them at the back of her neighbourhood church, and had checked that the web address for our community was on the leaflet.

Thanks to our Webmaster's skills, the meeting times, places and contact numbers were easy to find on the site and attractively and clearly displayed.

Our potential meditator, feeling that this discipline and community might be able to help her in her search, was able to see the range of opportunities for meeting with other meditators, and found the courage to phone the contact of a suitable group, who welcomed her.

And the chain may not finish there. The woman asked me how she could start a weekly group in her home town - this before she'd experienced meditation.

Hunger gives us courage. If her vision endures, experienced meditators from Christchurch would be happy to visit her town, speak to those interested, and help in the setting up of a group— if that is what they want. We would happily share our resources and keep regularly in touch.

* * * *

Your Council wishes you all a safe and happy Christmas and New Year

In the church grounds across the road from my home, lemon and orange poppies are in exuberant flower. I can see them shivering a little in one of Christchurch's easterly winds, but the sun shines.

And this is our city at present. We shiver at our stricken, lurching central city buildings; at the eerie spaces we leave as we regretfully lay them to rest; at the destruction of our beloved seaside and hill suburbs; at the tragic plight of those who live in them. The reality doesn't go away. This is our city - these are our people. But through the bitter wind, the sun is shining here now, in hearts as well as spring skies. Some Christchurch hearts are still too deeply afflicted to rise, and others are weighed down by the uncertainties of the seismic mysteries we perch upon and the slow struggles of our earnest but overburdened city recovery administration.

But those who can are now moving strongly towards the resurrection of the city.

Above all, we're seeing what we can do together, our people. As a city, we're a community; nothing can take that from us. We have local communities, and where they've been ripped apart we're making new ones.

With everyone doing their bit, we're busy as bees clearing away the broken bits and beginning to build tomorrow's Christchurch. Bus routes that stopped fearfully for eight months on the boundaries of the central city can now meet in a central bus station - temporary, but offering more services than our old bus exchange. So where we can, we're making a better city this time.

John Main told us that we must persevere. Being persistent in

meditation, being faithful in this, trains us for all the other parts of our lives in which we must just keep moving, keep coming together, keep doing our own small bit.

Three members of the NZCCM Trust Board recently attended the annual John Main Seminar in Ireland, where they shared exciting ideas, and had the chance for rich encounters with meditators from other parts of the international Community. It is exhilarating to attend such events overseas and bring back experiences and ideas to share with those at home.

What is at the heart of that 'community' that John Main assures us is a natural outcome of meditation?

In "*Word into Silence*" he says: 'Our Christian communities do not exist for themselves, but for others and ultimately for the Other...'

True community happens in the process of drawing each other into the light of true being. The essence of community then is a recognition of and deep reverence for the other.'

With love
Jane

Saint Theresa's Prayer – from the Editor

This is a little prayer which is attributed to St Theresa. I have found it to be very helpful and a fitting conclusion to my meditation. I know it has been widely circulated but I thought you might enjoy it afresh.

"May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on

practice of meditation. And we meditated.

Beulah Cox, Resource Person for the Queensland Christian Meditation Community, very generously travelled from Brisbane just to support the Christchurch community on this day, and shared with us her impressions of the recent John Main Seminar in Ireland and the attendant pilgrimage. Before afternoon tea, we watched a chapter from the excellent DVD 'Pilgrimage' recently issued by the World Community and spoken by Fr Laurence Freeman.

After an afternoon of delighting in our renewed sense of community, the organisers (largely our local postulant Benedictine Oblates of the WCCM) rewarded themselves and took Beulah for a cheerful meal at a nearby Indian restaurant.

Smile time

A client asked his lawyer if it was easy to make a will.

The lawyer said
"Certainly just tell me who you want as a Trustee and leave it all to me"

The client responded, "Well I'm very fond of you old chap, but I was rather hoping to leave a bit to my wife!"

(2) Would you like to update your story? please feel free to do so.

(3) Would you like your story removed?

Sharing our stories is a wonderful way for other seekers to appreciate what can be gained by centering one's life on the daily practice of the mantra. For all 19 it has been a life-changing experience and it is our duty to help other seekers find their path to God. So please start writing!

People who did not contribute to this original work, but would like to share their story are also encouraged to start writing. Ideally, we don't want anything over 1500 words, but if you need a broader canvas then don't hold back.

Our National Coordinator Jane Hole and Webmaster Vincent Maire will then take these stories and attempt to categorise them under common headings. So rather than have one 43-page document we may end up with three or four documents, each with a common theme.

We would like to have all submissions by the end of January 2012.

Please email your story to Vincent at maire.family@clear.net.nz or call him in the evening on (09) 424-2293 or Jane on (03) 359 9036.

The Australian Christian Meditation Community 2012 National Retreat with Fr Laurence Freeman OSB

Tuesday 3rd July to Sunday 8th July 2012

Newman College, the University of Melbourne

THEME:-

"STAGES – THE WAY UP IS THE WAY DOWN"

From ancient philosophers to St John of the Cross (who used this expression) and throughout our tradition we find a common wisdom about the stages of contemplation.

Fr Laurence will describe them in ways that illuminate and encourage our personal journeys and help to avoid unnecessary delays on the path. Expanding on John Main's route map of the mantra he will also show how the inner practice is always reflected in the way we live.

Bookings open March 1st 2012 and the booking form can be downloaded at www.christianmeditationaustralia.org from February onwards.

Early bird payment AU\$675 March 1st to 16th and final payment AU\$750 by May 31st.

This will sell out very quickly to make a diary note to go online by March 1st 2012.

CHRISTCHURCH News – from Jane Hole

On the afternoon of Sunday 16th October 19 meditators travelled across our rather bumpy city to the Christchurch Community's first Community Day since the earthquakes, as we tried to restore the bonds of a community that has been severely challenged in the last year. We found a comfortable and welcoming new meeting place at the North Avon Baptist Church Lounge, where the Southern Region Coordinator, Ian Lothian, led the afternoon and gave an attractive introduction to the

the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us".

From John Main – "The Heart of Creation"

"We cannot approach meditation hoping that we are going to become experts, proficient within a week or two (or within a year or two).

"What we require is the regular practice of meditating every morning and evening and a constant commitment to the practice. You can read all the books in the world about playing the flute, but until you pick up a flute and start to play, you will not have really begun.

"Once you understand that meditation is an art, you begin to understand that the practice of it is much more important than all the speculation about it.

"We slowly come to understand that to learn to meditate we need discipline: the discipline of sitting down and sitting still and saying our word, our mantra, from the beginning of our meditation until the end.

"This is a difficult thing to understand when you begin. We want to follow our thoughts, to come to new insights. Being religious people we may want to praise God, to say some prayer. But when you meditate you must transcend all thoughts and all words, and be silent, still and humble in the depths of your own being. Just 'be'".

John Main

THREE NEW GROUPS

Three new meditation groups have

recently started in Warkworth (Friday 8.30am), Hastings (Thursday 3.30pm & 7pm) and in Shirley, Christchurch (Wednesday 10am). To find out where these and other groups are meeting visit the MEETING TIMES page at: www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz

MEDITATION BLOG

Ross Miller's weekly meditation blog is well worth reading and subscribing to.

Recently he has written on holiness, suffering and affliction, passing judgement and that challenge faced by all meditators - distractions. His writing style is such that you could easily take one of his blogs to your weekly group and read it prior to meditating.

Thought provoking and always to the point is a good way to describe Ross' blog. Perhaps we could get Ross into a studio to produce a series of talks on CD? That way his wisdom would be shared with meditators around the world.

You can link to Ross' blog via the MEDITATION BLOG page at our website. We always like to hear back from you so please take a moment to share your thoughts and ideas on the 'contact' page on the NZCCM website. Blessings
Vincent Maire -
Webmaster
webmaster@christianmeditationnz.org.nz

Three cheers for the Irish!! – by Neil & Jenny Keating

How do you pin down Celtic Christianity?
For those of us worshipping as Catholic or Anglican, or Baptist or Presbyterian - all are represented in the New

Zealand community -- it's a conundrum.

You may read the church history books, read about the Englishman St Patrick...was there anybody else?... who 'got saved' while a prisoner of the Norsemen who then inhabited Ireland, and

who then (in a roundabout way) raced back to Ireland to evangelise the Celts.

In so doing he brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to a people who would then live the reality of the kingdom of God during the dying of the light in mainland Europe. (See Thomas Cahill's book 'How the Irish saved civilisation' for more).

Good stuff, but that was then. What about now? What about the fact we are living through the 'winter' of the church in the West and in New Zealand?

Here's one way to look at it: in an era when some, or much, of the mystery has been boiled out of the gospel message (that's how it can feel to an evangelical Protestant), the poetic -- and slightly 'off-the-wall' -- Celtic expression of Christianity is a blessed relief.

So the 30 Auckland meditators who gathered last Saturday (November 19), at Cityside Baptist, to hear Gabrielle Daly-Fong speak on John O'Donoghue went away challenged. Just how big, how all-encompassing, is the kingdom of God?

Does it have room for truth seekers whose understanding is not shaped by a Catholic or Anglican catechism, by a Baptist statement of faith or the Presbyterian Westminster confession of faith?

Is the truth about God's kingdom something sealed in a box (or a safe) that admits no expression outside the 'givens' of your/my present understanding? What will you say about your Christian faith to your new white-skinned Kiwi neighbour who turns out to be a convert to Islam? There are such people out there.

The 'box' containing our understanding of God's kingdom -- as uniquely revealed in Jesus the Messiah -- needs to be capable of expansion. The Celtic expression of the Christian faith may offer you some clues to that expansion. Thank you Gabrielle.

Offering Meditation at a Women's Prison – by Jane Lys

Before I started visiting the South Auckland Women's Prison, my only experience of prisons and their inmates came from crime films and TV programmes. I was therefore not prepared for what I found.

The South Auckland Women's Correction Facility consists of several collections of ground level huts of about ten cells (mostly double bunked) around a central guard house where there are always two or three officers who supervise the women's movements to and from work or courses.

All the buildings are set in a large grassed area with concrete paths, picnic tables, and trees and shrubs. There is no outer prison wall, just three layers of different wire fences, one of which is electric so the outside world is very close.

In the low security area where we work, the women are encouraged to work or take courses. The work may be

in the laundry, kitchen, library, ground maintenance, painting or window cleaning. The courses they can apply for cover literacy, numeracy, cooking, warehousing, stitching, which includes quilting, art and crafts which includes making things for the Christmas fair, and computer courses.

Those are all for Low Security but in High Security they can spend time in the Machine Workshop where they learn to take machines and engines to pieces, service them, put them together again and end up with their first Engineering ticket.

Because I am part of the chaplaincy team, the women I come into contact with are already "spiritually" attuned and eager to share their faith and air their problems and also to support other women with theirs.

With some groups we just talk with them, with others we have prayer groups with Holy Communion if they want it.

I offer the meditation programme to some individuals who are not ready to be part of a group but need some extra way of praying which they can keep private. This is especially important for those early in their sentence. In one section I have started a small weekly group and we use a timed CD of a 20-minute meditation with Margaret Rizza's music which they love.

When we talk to the women we ask them what they want to pray for and of course, for most, it is for their families outside. It is hard for them to have children being cared for by someone else, knowing all the important landmarks in their children's lives that they are missing, and worrying that the children are not always being well treated or cared for. They do also become anxious around the time of

their release or parole, not so much about the date, but it seems they worry that the situation they are going back to may be the very situation that got them into prison.

There is a lot of comradeship among the women which they will be leaving behind. This is why we are there, to support them and talk to them and pray with them. We get to know them, they appreciate what we are doing, and we become friends. Ideally they should be able to join a meditation group when they leave the prison but this is just an idea at this time.

Overall I have to say that the chaplaincy team is welcomed everywhere we go, moving from one section to another.

In the groups what really seems to be the "glue" of our work is the hugs! They are short of hugs inside, so we are happy to respond to this - hugs when they arrive and hugs when they leave.

Jane Lys

WHY I MEDITATE –(Revisited) from The Webmaster

Three years ago 19 meditators from around New Zealand shared their journeys on how they came to meditation and why they stay with the mantra. The stories ranged from less than 100 words to many thousands of words and were compiled into a 43-page document that has its own page on the NZCCM website.

The time has come to re-visit these stories and we are asking the 19 people concerned to review what they wrote and decide the following:

(1) Do you want it left unchanged?