

a Pearl  
of great price

*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it. (Matt 13:45)*

# a Pearl

of great price

sharing the gift of meditation  
by starting a group

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# Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	7
The call of Jesus	11
Everyone is a contemplative	13
Why meditation groups matter today	16
John Main	19
A discipline of faith made easier	22
Sharing the gift	25
First steps: first obstacles	28
Getting the word out	35
Where?	37
When?	39
How many?	41
What to do at the group?	43
Know the essential teaching	49
Other forms of prayer	53
Other faiths	54
Am I the one to do it?	56

<i>How to Meditate</i>	58
<i>Available Resources</i>	59
<i>Primary Resources for beginners in meditation and for new groups</i>	65
<i>Sample Announcements for meditation groups</i>	70

#### APPENDICES

1. An Outline for a Six-Week Course for Christian Meditation	74
2. WCCM Centres and Contacts Worldwide	80
3. Relationship with Other Contemplative Communities	82
4. Contemplation and Unity: An Ecumenical Statement	86



# Introduction

**T**here is nothing simpler than meditation. There are no difficult theories to master or techniques to excel in. We need only simple fidelity, and fidelity to the simplicity. But as anyone who has tried it knows, simple is not easy. We need all the support and inspiration we can get to persevere in what is a simple but demanding discipline. But what a wonderful demand it makes and what great rewards!

This is why the meditation group is so valuable – to help us meet the challenge and then share the fruits of the practice. The weekly meditation group is a spiritual phenomenon of our time, and a source of great hope as we face the many crises we are struggling with, financial, social, religious, political and environmental. The fact that small groups of people in more than a hundred countries meet weekly simply to meditate together and support their personal daily practice may not grab the media headlines. But it is a meaningful sign concerning the kind of society we might be moving towards. For many, the meditation group is a point of hope in an often desolate landscape today.

Meditation groups meet in all sorts of places – homes, churches, prisons, schools and universities, hospitals, and places of work – in order to share the simple

silence and stillness that connects us all to the common source of our life. A meditation group helps to bring its members – and those whose lives they are involved in – closer to the peace we need to flourish as human beings. After meditating together the members of the group return to life charged with the energy of faith that flows from this experience of being in the presence of the One who promised to be with those who are open to him: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name I am with them.’ (Matt 18:20)

In one sense, of course, the meditation group is nothing new. People have been coming together to pray and worship since the beginning of history. But in another sense it is radically new because of the deep interiority that unites the group. Meditation has become accepted in the mainstream of public consciousness and more people than ever before in history are curious and eager to learn about it.

As John Main said, meditation creates community. The meditation group is a contemporary expression of this mystical insight that resonates at the heart of Christian life. For the Christian meditator, it is possible to say that it is a community of love. For many people today, however, the meditation group also answers one of the great spiritual appetites that our age has produced, the need to share deeply and authentically with others. It is not so surprising then that The World Community for Christian Meditation has become, in the last two



decades since it was named and formed, a global spiritual family that springs out of this unifying experience of meditating together. Since then it has generated a high degree of wisdom among its members about how to share the gift of meditation with others.

This book draws from that collective experience and practical wisdom. Personally I learn so much from meditation groups and their members around the world. The questions people ask and the insights they have come to have enriched me on my travels around our 'monastery without walls'. I have learned that, although a person has to be courageous in starting a group (and they may be nervous about doing so), they never feel alone if they know they are in a community. We share meditation through a group and within a community of groups. This community has developed rich resources to make the starting of a new group easier and more successful.

Who starts and leads these small but faithful weekly meditation groups? Ordinary people who need no extraordinary talent, only faith to begin and the support of those who have done it before them.

So this little book offers encouragement and practical suggestions about how to start a group and then, of course, how best to sustain and nurture it. I hope you will see why a small, faithful meditation group has such meaning for our time. It is a work of great importance. By changing the people who meditate together it also

## INTRODUCTION

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helps to change the world. Our world and our children need the silent power of contemplation woven into all social institutions. We need to moderate our frenetic and wasteful lifestyles. We thirst for the healing and transforming power that only the Spirit can provide.

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# The call of Jesus

*We are called to teach as he teaches and so grow not only in relationship with him but in likeness to him. To become alteri Christi: other Christs.*

**J**esus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger.' (Jn 8:6) This moment in St John's Gospel occurs after a crowd that had been about to stone a woman to death dispersed, and the woman is left alone with Jesus. Like all great spiritual teachers in all traditions, Jesus lived what he taught. He taught by the example of his own behaviour. Here we see his silence at work.

Time and again we see him teaching by silence and direct transmission, as when on another occasion he transmitted his teaching to a rich young man who found it difficult to renounce his possessions, by a direct and loving gaze: 'He looked at him, and loved him.' (Mk 10:21) Confronting contradiction, injustice and

violence, as in his last ordeal, he preserved pure and truthful silence.

Compassionate presence, loving attention, and truthful silence – these are still essential elements of the way we encounter and get to know Jesus as our teacher and companion. He challenges us and he empowers us to share in his work of transmitting the good news. We are called to teach as he teaches and so grow not only in relationship with him but in likeness to him. To become *alteri Christi*: other Christs.

The qualities of presence and silence that link a student to a teacher are the timeless truths of our spiritual journey. Of course, our individual personality, like the culture that shapes us, makes the journey that each of us follows a unique story. But the essential human quest, the challenges and the fruits of meditation, are the same for all at all times.

In this little book we will explore these mysteries of faith in the light of a wonderful and simple phenomenon, the Christian Meditation Group. We will see how starting a group, in which people can learn to meditate and be helped to persevere, is a way of enriching and deepening the journey we are on.



# Everyone is a contemplative

*Jesus called everyone to 'be perfect' in love and compassion like his Father, to leave self behind, to shed materialistic stress and anxiety, to find the 'rest' of contemplation in accepting his yoke.*

**T**o understand the meaning of meditation and the meditation group we need to understand what contemplation means. In ancient times the 'contemplative life' meant a life of privilege. Only those who were educated and sat on top of the social pile could afford the time and leisure for contemplation. In early Christianity the contemplative life became more democratic because anyone in the church could follow it and it was seen to be an element in every life. But later it was seen in a more restricted way. It came to mean giving up the ordinary vocations of marriage and work in the world for a celibate and cloistered, monastic life. Contemplation still seemed a gift that God gave to a spiritual elite. It

became marginalized and even professionalized. Monasteries and hermitages were the preserve of contemplation.

It is not the place here to explore in detail why this happened. Many think it began in the twelfth century with the divorce between theology and prayer, when theology became a university subject and deep prayer the speciality of monks. At the Reformation, this situation worsened as Catholics grew suspicious of contemplation because it seemed too Protestant in its emphasis on personal experience and unmediated relationship to God. Protestants were wary of it because it seemed too Catholic and too related to the elitism of monasteries.

It is odd how over the centuries the universal teaching of Jesus ('to all he said...' Lk 9:23) became fragmented with essential elements of it restricted to a few. Jesus called everyone to 'be perfect' (Matt 5:48) in love and compassion like his Father, to leave self behind, to shed materialistic stress and anxiety, to find the 'rest' of contemplation in accepting his yoke. But the universal relevance of his essential teaching was forgotten or even denied and repressed. The deeper realms of prayer seemed out of reach, even irrelevant, to the majority of people.

The early Christians saw it more clearly. They heard the authentic voice of the gospel when it told them to 'pray without ceasing' (Thess 5:17). Contemplation requires specific disciplines to be integrated into life, but its influence is felt throughout ordinary life and everyday

existence. The early churches had many difficulties to face but they understood that contemplation (the ability to live in the present moment and to draw on the deeper levels of reality) is part of the human condition.

This does not compromise the active life of daily work and domestic business. Martha and Mary came to symbolize these two dimensions of action and contemplation. But they are sisters living in the same house, representing two complementary dimensions of the person, not just distinct personality types. Without Mary's stillness at the centre, sitting at the feet of the teacher and listening, we become like Martha, irritable, complaining, discontented, stressed, and distracted. In the end we become not even very productive in the work we do. In fact, Mary and Martha are both *working*, one interiorly, the other exteriorly.

Contemplation is not an escape from the problems of personal life or work, from family or social responsibility. Meditation is the work of contemplation and, as a daily practice, it becomes part of our life-work. It helps us to do the other, active, part more productively and peacefully. Mary and Martha are like the two chambers of one heart. They don't even just complement one another; they need each other to realize fullness of life.



# Why meditation groups matter today

*Meditation creates community because it reveals how we are all connected and how interdependently we develop. The meditation group illustrates this truth.*

In any active project we usually need a team to support us with the varied talents of its individual members; so, in the work of contemplation, we need community to help us get started and to persevere. Meditation, as John Main knew, creates community because it reveals how we are all connected and how interdependently we develop. The meditation group illustrates this truth. There is nothing new about Christians coming together to pray. It is forever renewing. It was said of the small Jerusalem church that formed after the death and resurrection of Jesus that ‘the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; they joined in continuous prayer’ (Acts 1:14).



We can see this in meditation groups today. In the last few decades there has been a spiritual transformation of the religious landscape, a silent revolution, a revolution in silence. It has been led not by a cloistered few but by ordinary men and women living in the world, making ends meet, and working and raising families. So this has not been an academic discovery.

The practice of meditation in the lives of so many people has awakened an awareness that the contemplative dimension of prayer is open to each of us and it is necessary for us all, religious and non-religious alike. Access is not restricted. It is a privilege of grace given by the Spirit to all. But like all gifts of the Spirit, we must do our part.

Contemplation is a gift and like all gifts it has to be accepted. If we are to live our particular vocation in daily life with depth and meaning, we must actively receive the gift of our potential for contemplation, tending it with humble devotion and daily fidelity.

It is no news that Christianity is in a turbulent transition from a medieval to a modern mentality. If we listened only to the media and the sociologists we might even conclude that it is in terminal decline. Certainly its structures and attitudes are going through a death process, but within the Christian view of death there is a certain hope of resurrection. The Christian Meditation Group is one of those positive and hopeful signs of renewed life, an authoritatively silent sign that the Spirit

prevails over chaos and breakdown and brings about new harmony and order.

Meditation is a universal practice that leads beyond words, images and thoughts into that faith-filled and presence-filled emptiness, the poverty of spirit, that we call the silence of God. What is particularly Christian about it is the awareness that by faith it takes us directly into the prayer of Jesus himself. This means it leads us into a transformative discovery of his indwelling presence: 'Christ in you'.

When we share in the human consciousness of Jesus, who is simultaneously open to each of us and to God, we begin to be more truly open to one another. We can create and experience the evolving union of persons that we call community. As the fruits of the Spirit appear – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control – so also does the grace of recognizing Jesus in our deeper selves and in one another.



# John Main

*As he read his monastic tradition in the light of meditation, he realized that here was indeed a hidden treasure, a pearl of great price that the church was meant to recover and teach.*

One of the most influential spiritual teachers of prayer of our time was the Irish Benedictine monk John Main. He was born in England in 1926 and died in Canada fifty-six years later. For Fr Bede Griffiths, writing soon after John Main's death, he was the 'most important spiritual guide in the church today'.

As a young Catholic diplomat in the Far East, John Main was introduced to meditation by a wise and compassionate Indian monk. Never leaving his Christian faith, John Main soon recognized the value of this prayer of the heart in deepening and enriching all the other forms of prayer that he was already practising. But it was not until some years later that he fully realized how integrally this silent prayer of the heart was rooted in the Christian tradition.

He saw with fresh eyes the contemplative emphasis of Jesus' teachings on prayer. As he read his monastic tradition in the light of meditation, especially the fifth century master John Cassian's vivid descriptions of the early Christian monks, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, he realized that here was indeed a hidden treasure, a 'pearl of great price' (Matt 13:46) that the church was meant to recover and teach. He understood how the early monks practised, and taught by example, the truth that the essence of prayer is not just our personal intentions but the attention of the heart, of the whole person.

They taught that the way to this attention was through a simple discipline, the prayer of one word, what Cassian called the 'grand poverty of the single verse'. They saw how effectively this discipline of the mantra deals with the distractions that constantly fill our mind, most obviously at the time of prayer, but in fact at all other times as well.

In the mantra ('formula' as Cassian called it) John Main, like John Cassian before him, discovered the way to that stillness (*hesychia* as the Eastern Christians call it) or *oratio pura*, pure prayer, that is the meaning of Jesus' 'worship in spirit and truth' (Jn 4:24). He saw how the discipline of the mantra purifies the heart of its contradictory desires and unifies us physically, psychologically and spiritually. The place of this unity is the heart, where we find the deepest and most natural orientation towards God as our personal source and

goal. He understood how the mantra brings us to poverty of spirit, the non-possessiveness that Jesus placed as the first Beatitude and the primary condition of human happiness.

Through his resumed practice of meditation, John Main soon learned that the morning and evening discipline of meditation balances the whole day, every day of one's life, in an ever-deepening peace and joy. More and more, he saw the connection between his experience of inner peace and joy with lived Christian faith. Prayer for him now appeared as more than mental prayer, more than speaking to or thinking about God. He understood that prayer is *being with God*.



# A discipline of faith made easier

*We respond to the call of grace not by a mere technique but with a discipline of faith. St Irenaeus said 'the beginning is faith, the end is love, and the union of the two is God'.*

John Main also saw that the quality of our relationships is the true test and measure of progress in meditation. Progress is accomplished by grace not technique. But we must do our part to receive the gift. We need discipline, perseverance, and fidelity. It takes time. It is the meaning of time. We respond to the call of grace not by a mere technique but with a discipline of faith. In this way we soon find the mystery of love at work in our meditation. St Irenaeus said 'the beginning is faith, the end is love, and the union of the two is God'.

For John Main, as for the centuries-old Christian tradition from which he spoke, a discipline freely chosen

is the path to freedom and expansion. The alternative to a liberating discipline is to stay in bondage to the ego. Spiritual discipline is necessary if we are to free ourselves from the tyranny of selfishness, addiction, fear, compulsiveness, delusion and self-fixation.

John Main was always clear that meditation is a way of faith, that it is simple, and that it requires a daily practice. The minimal commitment, he said, is to meditate morning and evening. Participating in a group meditation once a week helps this immensely and is another, external, discipline John Main recommended. The interior discipline is the faithful, continuous saying of the mantra during the meditation. Most of us begin the discipline with enthusiasm but quickly get discouraged by distractions or lack of the kind of experience we are expecting. The group helps us avoid too many interruptions to the discipline. Although it is a demanding discipline it is not fanatical but humane and gentle, one which we all learn at our own pace. Usually we begin, then stop, and then begin again, often many times. It takes time, maybe years for some people, to incorporate the twice-daily practice into daily life.

That is exactly why a meditation group is so valuable. Like the Spirit, it 'helps us in our weakness' (Rom 8:26). Not many of us are good at self-discipline on our own. It takes time, friendship, and continual encouragement to build a good habit. Through the support and example of others, we come to the insight, born of

our own experience, that meditation is simple not easy, life-giving not life-denying, embodied not abstract, most of all that it is a way of love. For all these reasons John Main encourages whoever wants to learn to meditate to take advantage of the gifts of community found by sharing the journey of prayer.

Hence the formation today of more than two thousand groups meeting weekly in homes, parishes, offices, hospitals, hospices, prisons, colleges, schools and universities, *favellas* and shelters for the homeless.





# Sharing the gift

*At a certain point in our practice of meditation, our Martha stops complaining about Mary. We see that being comes before doing. The next step is to share this gift with others.*

**A**t a certain point in our practice of meditation it dawns on us that we have indeed found a pearl of great price. Your Martha stops complaining about Mary. However busy we are, we see that meditation is a good use of time. We see that *being* comes before *doing* and bestows on all doing the spirit of love.

Still, you may feel uncertain and cautious about taking the next step, which is to share this gift with others. After all, we may say, 'I'm not a guru. I don't know much about meditation anyway. And on top of that I'm definitely not very good at it. So, how can I possibly teach anyone else?' These thoughts are a good sign that we probably *are* ready to share the gift. It will be the next step in the journey because it will help to deepen our practice. But how can we take this step?

The first thing is to feel comfortable in bearing witness to what our practice is giving us, however imperfect it may seem. Why do I meditate and want to continue meditating? Teaching others is basically just explaining that.

It doesn't mean becoming a bore about meditation by telling everyone we meet that they should meditate too. But sometimes we meet someone with whom we share spiritual meaning more deeply, and then talking about what meditation means to us becomes our way of sharing it. Some people are nervous about doing this but it can be liberating for us, as well as helpful to the person we are with, to mention it. Or maybe someone notices we have changed recently and asks us why we seem more patient, or peaceful under pressure, or generally just easier to live with. Tell them why. Or we are staying with friends and need to slip away for half an hour to meditate before the dinner. Why not just say 'I'm off to meditate. Back soon.' All this is a matter of discretion, of course. But meditation cultivates discretion and good judgment.

Starting a group is the next and more generous step. Again we may feel hesitant. 'I'm only a beginner myself,' we say. John Main says we are all beginners, always. 'But I'm not a teacher,' we say. OK. Jesus is the teacher though. We have only to worry about being a good disciple, not becoming a guru. Seeing ourselves as a student, a disciple of Christ who teaches us by

meditating in us, with us and for us, is the best qualification you need to go ahead. Jesus encouraged all his disciples to teach 'in my name' (Mk 9:39), which means in his presence and with his spirit. To put this into practice we need only to be humble enough to let go of our self-conscious fear. Anyway, we don't start a group entirely on our own resources. We have a community and a tradition to support and help us.



# First steps: first obstacles

*We start a meditation group where and as we are. This is why it is a spiritual decision and deepens our spiritual journey.*

**S**o we start a meditation group where and as we are. This is why it is a spiritual decision and deepens our spiritual journey. If you belong to a parish or worshipping community, start there. Speak to the priest or pastor or parish council or fellow parishioners about meditation as a way of prayer you have found. Explain what this gift has come to mean to you. You may be lucky and get a positive response. But be prepared for misunderstanding, uneasiness, or even suspicion. Remember that when many people hear about meditation for the first time they may feel it is something new and strange (at best), or (at worst) something quite alien and threatening. Some will say 'it's Buddhist!' Others, that it is dangerous. Stay calm and don't be put off by these disappointing

responses. Try to respond to their particular resistance or objection. It helps to be prepared for some of the most common misperceptions about meditation. Here are a few of them.

### **Meditation is not Christian**

That is, it is 'imported' from Buddhism or Hinduism. Explain as best you can that meditation is a universal spiritual discipline, existing in most other religions, especially those older than Christianity. But the way of silent prayer is also deeply rooted in the Christian tradition historically, theologically, and scripturally. It belongs to what is called the *apophatic* approach to God in which we let go of words, thoughts, and images, and simply worship in silent attention. The approach in which most Christians are trained from childhood is the *kataphatic*, talking to God or about God. But these two approaches are complementary.

It will help you if you are familiar with the tradition that John Main passed on especially in his first two books, *Word Into Silence* and *Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks*. Sharing from these short and very helpful books might help to build relationships of trust and so help others to see that meditation is indeed Christian, a way of prayer and faith deeply part of our tradition. Two other effective resources that help others situate meditation firmly on Christian ground are the pocket-sized *Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice*,

and the DVD *Pilgrimage*. This DVD, published in eleven languages, presents the teaching very simply and tells the story of the World Community through the testimonies of individual meditators from around the world.

### **The mantra is not Christian**

Another expression of the fear that meditation is not Christian is discomfort with the mantra, both as a term and as the 'work' of 'laying aside thoughts' that the tradition teaches us. It is important to have a basic understanding of the tradition of the mantra in Christianity. This does not mean you have to be an historian or a scholar. John Cassian's great *Ninth and Tenth Conferences on Prayer* explain it very well. You can find these on the School of Meditation page on the WCCM website. The mantra is not about 'blinking the mind' or practising self-negation as some at first think. It is about entering into *poverty of spirit* in the *inner room* of the heart. The faithful recitation of what in Latin Cassian calls 'the single verse' or 'formula' helps to keep attention on the Lord instead of ourselves. The fourteenth century spiritual masterpiece, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, calls the mantra the 'one little word' that helps us to turn from distraction toward the silent mystery of God.

John Main chose to call the sacred word a 'mantra' because this was a term that has become familiar to many people and because it suggests the link between the Christian tradition of meditation and the universal

wisdom. 'Mantra' is, of course, now an English word too according to the Oxford English Dictionary, though sadly used most often today to describe the oft-repeated promises of politicians! In Sanskrit (the root tongue of most European languages) mantra means a short scripture verse or sacred word used repetitively to deepen stillness of mind and attention. The Our Father, the rosary, the words of the mass, blessings, and familiar, repeated prayers of all kinds are Christian 'mantras' in this sense. And of course there is the personal authority of Jesus who tells us not to 'babble on like the pagan, who think that the more they say the more likely it is that God will hear and answer them' (Matt 6:7). He advises us instead to 'go into your inner room, close the door' (Matt 6:6) and pray in union with the Spirit. As Cassian says, we pray most deeply not with our lips but in silence to 'the searcher not of words, but of hearts'.

### **Meditation is dangerous**

This most often comes from certain kinds of Christians, sometimes fundamentalists or just those with a narrow kind of training. They often take a more literal approach to scripture because it seems to offer a more absolute certainty. Sometimes people with these attitudes have a high degree of fear or even of repression. So they can react angrily when they feel that their perspective is being threatened by another. They often say 'when you

open yourselves up or blank your mind the devil will come in'. It's more likely, I usually respond, that the devil will come out. Negative feelings and the forces of the shadow will get released as repression is lifted. This is quite natural although it is important to be prepared for the inner turbulence it can create at times.

The literature of Christian contemplation offers many descriptions of this process, as well as advice on dealing with it. Meditation practised moderately and in faith is not dangerous. It is more dangerous to be controlled by unconscious fears than to meditate. Meditation is not about blanking your mind but about being poor in spirit, open to the indwelling presence. Christians who believe in the Resurrection, and the presence of 'Christ in you, the hope of a glory to come' (Col 1:27), should surely be the most comfortable with meditation as an inner journey.

### **Meditation is selfish**

That's what Martha probably thought too when she criticized her sister for doing nothing. But Jesus said that Mary had chosen the 'better part'. The gospel account of his life shows him balancing periods of active ministry with times of withdrawal and quiet. Navel-gazing is selfish. Meditation, however, is the work of selflessness, taking the attention off ourselves and the ego's agenda. At first the practice is hard and unfamiliar. With practice it becomes familiar and delightful.



Gradually it becomes a good habit, a way of life, and the work of the meditation periods penetrates all areas of our life, inner and outer. Increasingly we see that prayer is not an alternative to action but its very ground. We discover the relationship between *being* and *doing* and that our life is as good and deep as our prayer. 'The way you pray is the way you live' as the early Christians believed.

If meditation did not show its fruits in greater love and compassion, that would be the great and valid objection. But in the Christian tradition the only true measure of meditation is: 'Am I growing in love?'

### **Meditation is just a relaxation technique**

We hear more in the popular media about meditation as a way to reduce stress, boost the immune system and cope with pain, anxiety and depression. Medical and psychological research has proven that meditation is good for us both physically and emotionally. We teach meditation though as prayer, as a spiritual practice, not as a therapeutic technique in this sense. Nevertheless these *benefits* are worth mentioning. They show that grace works on nature. Our emphasis, however, is more on the *spiritual fruits*, which are less easily measured than cholesterol but are more relevant to the quality and meaning of human existence.

Whatever objections people may raise when we think about starting a group, listen to them. Try to see

where they are coming from. Be prepared with a response. Don't be defensive or argumentative. Remember that most clergy were not introduced to a practice of contemplative prayer in their training. Humanly enough, they may feel disconcerted by a layperson talking about contemplation. And remember that you are *not* saying – and the tradition does not teach – that meditation is the only way to pray. Try to share from your own experience that meditation is not a substitute, but a support, for all other forms of personal and communal prayer. It feeds Christian life in all its dimensions, bringing people back to the living truth of the gospel with fresh eyes and feelings.

If you get a negative response to your suggestion about starting a group, respond to the rejection contemplatively! It will strengthen you. Consider whether you should wait and try again or reflect on other avenues, other places or communities you might explore.

But this rejection would be the worst scenario. You will probably find a positive and grateful response. What's the next step?



# Getting the word out

*Publicity doesn't mean marketing. It means not hiding your light under a bushel. As John Main says, it is caught rather than taught.*

**P**ublicity doesn't mean marketing. It means not hiding your light under a bushel. It doesn't mean you have to sell meditation as a product. As John Main says, it is caught rather than taught.

The obvious way to begin is to offer an introduction to Christian Meditation, featuring a brief talk followed by meditation together. You may do the introduction yourself, especially if you have had the opportunity to attend a WCCM School of Meditation session. Or you could invite a leader from an existing group nearby, your regional coordinator, or a volunteer in your area who would be happy to team up with you. Many regions have individuals designated to help with new group formation. The introduction may be repeated at various intervals along the way, and can be organized to suit any circumstance: church, home, school, or business.

Making use of examples available through the School of Meditation as well as from the Community's other fliers and brochures, prepare a simple one-page description of the essential facts about the introductory session you are planning: *what, why, when (and how long), where, and who.*

Describe the key points simply and briefly. The combination of the words, 'Christian' and 'meditation' and 'group', speak for themselves. This 'one-pager' can serve as a simple flier to pass around locally or email. It will also help you keep your facts together for other kinds of communications: phone calls, emails, faxes, brief notice in the appropriate in-house publications, like a parish bulletin or newsletter. You can also place posters in key locations like local shops, or get a notice in the local newspaper. Wherever you have the introductory session, let your friends know. They might come along to support you. Encourage them to join you in passing the word along. Finally, if your diocese has a spirituality commission, make contact with it. Whether or not your introduction or group will be held in a church setting, members of the spirituality group may very well give you moral support, as well as offer helpful suggestions for publicity.



# Where?

*All that's required to transform an ordinary place into a sacred one is, in most cases, a single candle, a little music, and the group leader arriving early to prepare the room.*

It is important to find a place where you can meet regularly each week. It should be as quiet as possible and be a suitable size. Moving from place to place each week can be disruptive. Having a choir practising or a TV playing next door can be excellent tests of discipline now and then, but if it's every week, it's less fun. Use your negotiating skills to ensure stability of place. It would be ideal if you can get a room or space allocated permanently just for meditation, but that is rarely possible and not necessary. What you can do is create a space each week that is special. All that's required to transform an ordinary place into a sacred one is, in most cases, a single candle, a little music, and the group leader arriving early to prepare the room.

I meditated once in a crypt of a church in the heart of the business district of London. A steady core group

of people, working in offices nearby, met every week during their lunch break. The leader of the group arrived before the others to put out the chairs in a circle around a candle. He also brought a CD player. People arrived quietly as the music played. They started punctually, listened to a talk by John Main, meditated, shared a few words, and went back to work. The candle was blown out, chairs were put away, and in a moment there was no sign – except the energy of peace – that there had just been a group of meditators sitting together in such stillness and silence.

Groups like this now meet in homes, apartment buildings, schools, churches, rectories, monasteries and convents, community centres, Christian Meditation Centres, chapels, universities, prisons, government office buildings, a department store, senior citizens' homes, and factories.



# When?

*In different cultures the timing is different. Respect local customs. Different times of the day or week will attract different types of people.*

Most groups meet in the late afternoon or evening when people are on their way home from work or after their evening meal. In different cultures the timing is different. Respect local customs. For working people, evening is often the best time apart from lunchtime groups near their workplace. But for retired people, homemakers, mothers with young children, or the sick, a morning or afternoon time can be better. Different times of the day or week will attract different types of people. In some communities, there are meditation groups meeting several times a week or every day, at different times, to respond to people's different situations. Several churches even have a meditation group every night.

Choose a time best suited to your schedule, as your regular presence is essential in the early days. Later, you

## WHEN?

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can delegate and share the leadership. It is important for the group leader to be faithful, especially in the first months or during the summer when numbers often drop off. If you cannot be there, arrange for someone else to take your place. It is best if the group meets every week. This not only ensures continuity but can help others in the group realize their own potential for leadership.

Be sure to stay with the announced times for beginning and ending. A group meeting can be completed in about an hour. The time together builds confidence and stability.





# How many?

*In meditation we make the discovery that the repetition is not mechanical but faithful. The kind of growth that concerns us in meditation groups is spiritual not numerical.*

**D**on't measure the group's success by the number of participants. The size of the group is really not important. Even two or three faithful meditators make a good meditation group. As C S Lewis once said to a clergy conference he was addressing: 'The Lord said feed my sheep, don't count them'. Nonetheless, the tendency to judge success by numbers is deeply engrained in us. Just catch yourself when you start doing it.

Normally a group experiences a reduction in numbers after an initial influx of enthusiasm. Expect this and focus on building up those remaining. This is the vital point where a community of faith begins to form. Some of those who drifted away may have been enriched by their brief encounter with the group. Some may be meditating on their own. Others may come back when,

in a year or two, they see that the group is still meeting and its example of steady fidelity inspires them to start again.

In meditation we make the discovery that the repetition is not *mechanical* but *faithful*. Faithfulness makes for creativity, as the practice of starting and leading a group is creative work. So we shouldn't judge this kind of work by materialistic standards. The kind of growth that concerns us in meditation groups is spiritual not numerical.

With growth in depth there probably will follow, in time, an expansion in numbers, if not in your particular group then in the spin-off of new groups forming at different times and places. If we wanted a quantitative goal to measure up to, then having a small meditation group in every parish would be worth pursuing. From time to time you can throw the net out on the waters again and publicize another introductory series of talks. Or redesign the familiar notice you have on a poster or in a bulletin. But even if the group stays small it can find strength from belonging to the wider national and global community.



# What to do at the group?

*Keep it simple.*

*Keep words to a minimum.*

*Always keep the silence central and  
the rest will fall into place.*

**T**he three essential elements of a Christian Meditation group are:

TEACHING  
MEDITATION  
DISCUSSION

Keep it simple. Keep words to a minimum. Let it be what it is – a meditation group, not a discussion group or a therapy group or another kind of prayer group.

The essential part of the group is the period of meditation. Always keep the silence central and the rest will fall into place. Here are a few practical hints for how to ensure a contemplative environment and the most meaningful experience for all.

### **The Preparation**

As people arrive, let them feel welcomed but also make it gently clear that they are entering a sacred place and time. Ten minutes before the start time put on some quiet music, light a candle, and gently ask people to stop talking. People generally need to be encouraged in this, because they feel they might seem unsociable by not chatting with others. At the start time, turn off the music and welcome people.

### **Newcomers**

Make an especial welcome for newcomers and orient the group's teaching on that occasion for them. An introductory talk will be of benefit to them and also reinforce the other members. After the group meeting, have a private word with the new members and offer your personal support if they would like to consult you or ask questions later.

### **The Teaching**

An ideal way to give the teaching is to play one of the recorded talks of John Main. These extraordinary teachings were originally given to meditation groups very like the one you are now sitting in. The talk is not a sermon or a lecture but a unique kind of spiritual preparation for meditation in a time of silence. Listening to the talk informs not just the mind but also the heart. It works by placing you in the best frame of mind and clear

attention for the work of meditation. Like many others, I have been listening to these talks for many years and find that they never become stale however many times you listen to them. There are about two hundred of these talks on CDs, so you have plenty of time to do the round.

There are some talks that are specifically introductory and some are for more experienced meditators. *The Essential Teaching*, a set of John Main's introductory talks is composed of three introductory talks which are published in the book *Word into Silence*. The section 'Twelve Talks for Meditators' has proved very popular with new groups. *In the Beginning* is a series of introductory talks. *Being on the Way* is for meditators with some experience. *Door to Silence* and *Word Made Flesh* are sets of both introductory and ongoing talks.

There are many other resources that you can select from according to your needs and what you think the group would benefit from. So a rich variety for the teaching section of the group meeting is possible and there are new titles regularly in CD and DVD format. For further advice, you can consult your regional or national coordinator or browse the website's online bookstore at [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org).

For more established groups, you might adapt some of the longer retreat or seminar sets that have been published, playing a different part of a talk for a number of weeks. The leader of the group should choose the talk

beforehand and spend a moment or two introducing its theme to the group. The group leader or other member could also give a talk themselves from time to time if they feel confident. Teachings can also be read aloud either from the text of a book by John Main or other teacher in the tradition.

A three-year cycle of 'Weekly Teaching' posted on [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org) can also be emailed directly to you or the members of the group. You could also copy each week's instalment for the members so that they can take it home and read it at leisure during the week. These teachings build up to a rich introduction to the contemplative tradition to which Christian Meditation belongs.

### **The Meditation**

After the teaching there should be a moment of silence while the lights are turned down. The meditation period itself can be introduced with a couple of minutes of suitable music, something quiet such as Margaret Rizza's music or another calm piece.

The meditation period is normally 25 or 30 minutes. If the group is new to meditation you could begin with 20 minutes and gradually build up the time from there. The leader or other member of the group is responsible for timing the meditation, and can signal the beginning and end of meditation with a soft ring of a chime or prayer bowl. There are other ways to signal the end of meditation without making everyone jump out of their

skin at the end when the alarm or buzzer goes off. You could use a quiet alarm or the CD set *TimePeace*, which has a short piece of music at the beginning and end of a timed period of silence. On the WCCM website there is a WCCM App which has a timer, prayer, and music.

Preparing and framing the meditation period as a time of stillness and quiet is an important part of the work of the group's leader.

### **After Meditation**

There may be a brief reading following the period of silence, preferably repeating a key point in the previous teaching or echoing it with a brief scripture passage. The final part of the group meeting is then the sharing or discussion session. It doesn't matter if on some weeks people don't feel like talking. Then the meeting should be concluded quietly and people can take their leave. Often though, after a few moments of sitting in silence, people like to share a reflection or raise a question.

The group leader can often steer the discussion gently by referring to a key point or scripture reference made in the talk or sharing some other reflection. This is not a time for idle talk, debate or theological argument; nor should it be a time for analysis of people's personal problems and other life issues. There are other times and venues better suited for this.

If there are questions, group leaders don't have to feel they have all the answers all the time. Others in the

group may have a contribution to offer, and all questions need not be answered immediately. Group leaders can get back to members either privately or at the next session after further reflection, discussing it with someone else in the community or, for example, after consulting Paul Harris' useful book, *Frequently Asked Questions*. If a question seems unanswerable, perhaps it is; so don't try to answer it. Allow space for the mystery, too.

A time for sharing thoughts and feelings related to the practice of meditation – not analysing what happened during the meditation – helps to grow a sense of solidarity among the different gifts, ages and personalities that make a group a community.





# Know the essential teaching

*Meditation is as natural to the spirit as breathing is to the body. Deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, it is an ancient spiritual discipline, a simple way into union with the Spirit of Christ.*

**T**he regular teaching component of the weekly meeting is essential. But the group-experience teaches what is truly learned from silence. It is important to begin each session with a teaching. It is also important for the group leader to feel comfortable in giving the essential teaching in his or her own words and style. There are of course many ways to convey the same truth, as long as the essential simplicity of meditation is emphasized. Here are some essential elements that should be shared and reinforced at the weekly group.

Meditation is as natural to the spirit as breathing is to the body. Deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, it is an ancient spiritual discipline, a simple way into union

with the Spirit of Christ. The tradition does not say that meditation is the only or even the best way to pray. It simply conveys the wisdom, at once practical and holy, of daily silent prayer. It transmits the essential teaching of contemplative prayer, first articulated in the early church through the teachings of the Desert Fathers and passed on with a special clarity and depth in our time by John Main. This tradition advises the following simple practice:

Choose a quiet place.

Sit down comfortably, with your back straight.

Close your eyes lightly.

Sit as still as possible.

Breathe naturally, staying both relaxed and alert.

Slowly and interiorly, begin to say your mantra.

The mantra we recommend is *maranatha*, an ancient Christian prayer from the language of Jesus, Aramaic, meaning 'Come Lord'.

Repeat the word in four equal syllables, ma-ra-na-tha.

Listen to the word as you say it.

Give it your full attention.

Don't think about its meaning.

Stay repeating it, gently and faithfully, for the whole time of the meditation.

Return to it as soon as you realize you have stopped saying it.

Stay with the same word during the meditation, and from day to day.

Meditate twice a day, ideally in the early morning and early evening.

Meditate between 20 and 30 minutes.

Don't evaluate your performance.

The root of all distractions is self-consciousness. In meditation we are 'leaving self behind'. Distractions will come, but don't try to repress or fight them. Simply let them go. When you find that a thought has hooked your attention, simply return in faith to saying the mantra. This is the 'work of the word'. If you are led to a level of peace and clarity and think 'I have no thoughts', that thought is a thought. So keep saying the mantra and allow it to become more fine and subtle as you go deeper.

Once we have begun this as a daily practice, there are a few guidelines concerning attitude to the experience that help us go deeper. These should be shared with the new members of the group and repeated from time to time.

First, don't assess your progress. The feeling of failure – or success – may be the biggest distraction of all. Do not expect or look for 'experiences' in meditation. You don't have to feel that anything *should* be

happening. This may seem strange at first, because the experience of silence is so unfamiliar and so alien to our culture. We are not used to being simple. The silence, stillness, and simplicity, however, do have a purpose. In one of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus compares the Kingdom to a seed that someone plants in the ground. The person then goes off to live an ordinary life while the seed grows silently in the earth, 'how, he does not know' (Mk 4:27).

The same thing happens to us as the word sinks ever more deeply in our hearts. As in the parable, in time there will be signs of growth. You will not always find them in your meditation itself, but in your life. You will begin to harvest the fruits of the Spirit; you will find that you are growing in love. And if you ever stop the practice of meditation, whether for a day or a month or a year, simply return to it again with confidence in the infinite generosity of the Spirit that dwells in and among us.



# Other forms of prayer

*Meditation does not replace other forms of prayer. These spiritual practices are all irreplaceable elements of a life lived in the way of the gospel. But the forms will vary.*

**M**editation – often-called ‘pure prayer’ – does not replace other forms of prayer. What these spiritual practices are in the lives of the different members of the group will depend on their temperament and vocation and the kind of Christian tradition they are formed in. The reading of Scripture, communal prayer and worship, and the prayer that expresses itself in acts of compassion and works of charity, are all irreplaceable elements of a life lived in the way of the gospel. But the forms will vary. The practice of meditation is a living foundation for these – not a substitute for them. John Main once said that the best preparation for and the best fruit of meditation are ‘small acts of kindness’.



## Other faiths

*The contemplative experience is essential if inter-religious dialogue is to mature. The Christian Meditation group is instinctively ecumenical in this broader sense. Each of its meetings is open to any genuine seeker and it should respond hospitably and warmly to all.*

**T**he attitude of Christians to other faiths has, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, already undergone a historical shift in our time. Most Christians no longer arrogantly reject other faiths but are able to revere what is true, good and holy in them. Dialogue with these faiths helps us to seek new ways of expressing Christian experience in theology. The contemplative experience is essential if inter-religious dialogue is to mature.

The Christian Meditation group is instinctively ecumenical in this broader sense. Each of its meetings is open to any genuine seeker and it should respond hospitably and warmly to all. Although it is not an interfaith group as such it can welcome people of other faiths, or those seeking for faith if they are content to

meditate with Christians. Having Christ as our teacher inspires us to imitate his truth and openness.

If the group agrees, perhaps after it has matured for some time, it can make contact with other religious groups locally and have an interfaith meditation evening together from time to time.



# Am I the one to do it?

*Starting a Christian Meditation group is a step of a faith. Always remember that you are not expected to be an expert or a perfect meditator, just a committed one. The teacher is within.*

**S**tarting a new Christian Meditation group is a step of faith. It is an enriching responsibility. Whatever we give we receive back manifold. Always remember that you are not expected to be an expert or a perfect meditator, just a committed one. The teacher is within. A group becomes a channel of his presence not only to its own members but to all those whose lives they interact with during the week.

Like everything else in the life of the gospel, the meditation group does not exist for itself alone. Seeing this makes us less nervous about sharing the gift, and we will not be so concerned about numbers or success. You will know that this little community of contemplative



faith – in communion with many others around the world  
– is nurturing the spiritual journey of each of its members.  
In a world that is becoming too noisy to listen, it is a  
window of silence to the divine mystery in our midst.



# How to Meditate

JOHN MAIN

**T**o meditate, you must learn to be still. Meditation is perfect stillness of body and spirit. The stillness of body, we achieve by sitting still. So when you begin to meditate, take a couple of moments to assume a comfortable posture. The only essential rule is to have your spine as upright as possible. And so the first thing to learn is to sit completely still. Your eyes should be lightly closed.

Then the stillness of spirit. The way to that stillness is to say silently, in the depth of your spirit, a word or a short phrase, to repeat that word over and over again. The word I recommend you to use is the Aramaic word *maranatha*. Say it in four equally-stressed syllables: ma-ra-na-tha. Say it silently; don't move your lips but recite it interiorly. Recite your word from beginning to end. Let go of your thoughts, of your ideas, of your imagination. Don't think. Don't use any words other than your one word. Just sound, say, the word in the depth of your spirit, and listen to it. Concentrate upon it with all your attention: ma-ra-na-tha. That's all you have to do.

*The Hunger for Depth and Meaning, p42*



## Available Resources

### **The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM)**

John Main saw that meditation creates community. Over the past 25 years this insight has taken shape in the growth of a worldwide contemplative community extending to over a hundred countries. There are Christian Meditation Centres in many of these countries. These Centres serve as focal points for the teaching and life of the community locally and nationally.

An annual John Main Seminar is held in which a leading thinker or teacher enriches the Community's contemplative vision of the modern world and its challenges. A Guiding Board in the spirit of the Constitution of the World Community is drawn from different countries and gives direction and assistance to the growth of the Community. A quarterly Newsletter gives spiritual teaching and local and international news of the Community. Groups have a wide range of resources to draw from.

The resources of the community are designed to help a wide variety of people in diverse situations to teach and practise meditation. Knowing which of these resources is the best for you at the moment may take a little time to discern. One of the coordinators of the Community locally can help you select the best ones for your purpose.

## **The School of Meditation**

The aim of the School of Meditation is to advance the Community's Mission, which is: 'To communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of John Main in the Christian tradition in the spirit of serving the unity of all.'

The various aspects of the School of Meditation support and nurture meditators in a way that strengthens and deepens their daily practice and expands the spiritual friendship arising from the shared contemplative path within the wider community. It leads to a greater knowledge of the rich Christian mystical tradition in which meditation is grounded.

The programme of events, seminars, retreats, and workshops held throughout the World Community guides the journey of the Christian Meditator from the first steps in the practice to the sharing of the gift with others.

Each step in the School Programme provides an opportunity to share experience with other meditators, reflect on insights gained, and learn how other meditators meet the challenges of the daily discipline. They help to arrive at a deeper insight into what the experience means to them personally.

There are six stages in the School of Meditation:

Stage One - Learning to Meditate in a Group

Stage Two - Supporting the Daily Practice

Stage Three - Personal Experience and the Tradition

- Stage Four - Seminars, Retreats, Workshops
- Stage Five - The School Retreat
- Stage Six - Sharing the Gift

For more detailed information see the brochure on the School of Meditation or the School website. The School of Meditation has a section on the Community's webpage ([www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)).

### **The Website**

The WCCM website: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)  
and many National websites

A growing number of people every day are led to meditation through the internet. Many come to meditation groups near their homes through this connection where there is a list of groups. They find a further sense of community in the news and discussion on the WCCM webpage.

Before you start a group, contact your National Coordinators who can be found on the WCCM website or under their national website listed on pages 80-81 of this book. If you have any special events to publicize, let them know. You will find news of upcoming retreats and workshops in the International Calendar on the webpage. There are also reports and photos of recent events, and often talks or teachings on meditation are posted.

There is also a weekly posting of 'Weekly Teachings'

for groups, 'Weekly Readings' for personal use, and other regular resources such as a monthly podcast.

The WCCM Facebook page and other social network links are also on the webpage. On YouTube, the Community channel is called *Meditatio* and has many videos of talks and events. The link to this site is: [www.youtube.com/user/meditatiowccm](http://www.youtube.com/user/meditatiowccm)

### **Online Bookstore**

The online bookstore of the World Community has a wide range of books, CDs, and DVDs by John Main and many others. These can be ordered and some can be downloaded from the website directly.

### **Medio Media**

Medio Media is the publishing arm of The World Community for Christian Meditation. It offers a wide range of titles to support the practice of Christian Meditation. The catalogue can be found on the Medio Media website [www.mediomedia.com](http://www.mediomedia.com) and is also linked to the Community website.

### **International Centre of the World Community**

The International Centre of the World Community is based in London. The Centre serves as a central point of communication and communion for meditators and

other Christian Meditation Centres worldwide. It coordinates many aspects of the life of the Community such as the quarterly Newsletter, the annual John Main Seminar, visits, retreats and other special events. The International Team at the Centre and in other countries is happy to help you personally with any queries you may have and will happily put you in touch with the local community nearest to you.

International Centre  
The World Community for Christian Meditation  
32 Hamilton Road  
London W5 2EH  
United Kingdom  
Email: [welcome@wccm.org](mailto:welcome@wccm.org)

## **Meditatio**

Meditatio is the outreach of the World Community that shares the fruits of meditation with the wider public. Launched in 2010, Meditatio hosts seminars and events on topics such as Education, Mental Health, Business and Finance, Inter-religious dialogue, Social Justice, the Environment, and Addiction and Recovery. It engages in dialogue with the secular approach to the problems of our time. These seminars generate insights that are shared through publications, resources, training programmes, and use of contemporary media. If you

would like to know more about Meditatio please email [meditatio@wccm.org](mailto:meditatio@wccm.org).

### **Meditatio House London**

Meditatio House in London is home to a small residential community of meditators who live in the spirit of the Rule of St Benedict. It welcomes guests as well as offering the opportunity for longer term experiences of living in a meditation-based contemplative community. The International Centre is also based there. To learn more about the House, write to Meditatio House or visit its webpage.

Meditatio House  
32 Hamilton Road  
London W5 2EH  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 20 8579 4466  
Email: [welcome@wccm.org](mailto:welcome@wccm.org)  
Webpage: [www.wccmmeditatio.org](http://www.wccmmeditatio.org)





# Primary Resources

for beginners in meditation and  
for new groups

## For Those New to Meditation

Individuals need to feel personal support. The group leader should offer to meet personally with a new meditator to discuss the practice and respond to questions. If the beginner cannot attend a group regularly, some other way of staying in touch should be suggested – the local monthly meeting or some other form of personal support.

### BOOKS

*Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice.* Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, Singapore, 2010. ISBN 9789810817107

*The Inner Pilgrimage,* Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, Singapore, 2009. ISBN 9781933182544

*Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks,* John Main. Medio Media, Singapore, 2007. ISBN 9781933182865

*Light Within,* Laurence Freeman. Canterbury Press, UK, 2008. ISBN 9781853118678

*Moment of Christ,* John Main. Canterbury Press, UK, 2010. ISBN 9781848250208

*Silence and Stillness in Every Season: Daily Readings with John Main*, ed Paul Harris. Medio Media, Singapore, 2010. ISBN 9789810855437

CDs

*In the Beginning*, John Main. Collected Talks Vol VIII. Medio Media, Singapore, 2013. ISBN 9789810748586

*Christian Meditation: The Essential Teaching*, John Main. Medio Media, US, 1991. ISBN 1933182148

*The Essentials of Christian Meditation*, Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, Singapore, 2006. ISBN 9781933182466

*Letting Go*, Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, US, 2005. ISBN 1933182369

DVDs

*Pilgrimage: The Way of Christian Meditation*, Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, Singapore, 2011. ISBN 9789810888305

YouTube clips [www.youtube.com/user/meditatiowccm](http://www.youtube.com/user/meditatiowccm)

WEBSITE

WCCM: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

*Weekly Teachings and Weekly Readings* (subscription available from the website)

## Materials for New Groups

Like individuals, new groups need personal support. The group leader should feel connected regularly to the

local or regional or national coordinator. They should be encouraged to take part in the Essential Teaching Weekend and to use the Weekly Teachings in their weekly groups, copying it for their members if possible as lectio during the week. A new group leader should be familiar with *A Pearl of Great Price* and be helped to understand the format of our groups and the need for consistency. They should also be helped how to select and prioritize the resources listed below, e.g. a new group in its early days should concentrate on the elements of the basic teaching before moving into use of the Meditatio CDs.

#### BOOKS

*The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*, John Main ed Peter Ng. Medio Media, Singapore, 2007. ISBN 9781933182636

*Word into Silence*, John Main. Canterbury Press, UK, 2006. ISBN 9781853117541

*Silence and Stillness in Every Season: Daily Readings with John Main*, ed Paul Harris. Medio Media, Singapore, 2010. ISBN 9789810855437

*The Selfless Self*, Laurence Freeman. Canterbury Press, UK, 2009. ISBN 9781853119835

*John Main: Essential Writings*, ed Laurence Freeman. Orbis Books, New York, 2002. ISBN 9781570754159

#### CDs

*TimePeace: For Your Time of Meditation*. Medio Media Singapore, 2007, ISBN 9781933182568

*In the Beginning*, John Main. Collected Talks Vol VIII. Medio Media, Singapore, 2013. ISBN 9789810748586

*Communitas Series Vol 1-5*, John Main. US, 1991. ISBN 9781933182742, 9781933182759, 9781933182766, 9781933182773, 9781933182780

*John Main: Collected Talks Vol I-VIII*, Medio Media, Singapore, 2013

Vol I *Word into Silence*, ISBN 9789810748517

Vol II *The Christian Mysteries*, ISBN 9789810748524

Vol III *Moment of Christ*, ISBN 9789810748533

Vol IV *The Way of Unknowing*, ISBN 9789810748548

Vol V *The Heart of Creation*, ISBN 9789810748555

Vol VI *Word Made Flesh*, ISBN 9789810748562

Vol VII *Door to Silence*, ISBN 9789810748579

Vol VIII *In the Beginning*, ISBN 9789810748586

*Lord Teach us to Pray*, Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, Singapore, 2009. ISBN 9789810832926

*Preparing to Meditate (Vol 1-3)*, Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, US, 2006

Vol 1 *Practical Wisdom*, ISBN 1933182342

Vol 2 *The Gift of Being*, ISBN 1933182326

Vol 3 *The Eye of Love*, ISBN 1933182342

#### DVDs

*Pilgrimage: The Way of Christian Meditation*, Laurence Freeman. Medio Media, Singapore, 2011. ISBN 9789810888305

*The Journey of Meditation*, Laurence Freeman, Medio Media, Singapore, 2008. (available on DVD and audio CD)

DVD -ISBN 9781933182490

CD -ISBN 9781933182482

WEB

WCCM: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org) and National sites

School of Meditation Website: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

Weekly Teachings: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

### **Music for Meditation Groups**

An ideal style of music for leading into and out of meditation is that of Margaret Rizza, an English meditator. Her acclaimed CDs include *River of Peace* and *Fountain of Life* and are available from the website.



# Sample Announcements

## For Meditation Groups

### CHRISTIAN MEDITATION GROUP

A Christian Meditation Group meets

- at [address]
- every [day/evening of the week]
- at [time]

This form of silent, imageless prayer using a mantra or prayer word is rooted in the gospel and the letters of St Paul, and originated with the early Desert Fathers of the 4th century. A Benedictine monk, Fr John Main OSB (1926-1982), has rediscovered this ancient prayer tradition for contemporary men and women. Today there are over 2000 Christian Meditation groups around the world.

#### **Newcomers are welcomed to the group**

The one-hour meeting includes quiet music, a short recorded talk on meditation by John Main, Laurence Freeman, or other teachers in the Community, 25 minutes of silent meditation, followed by a question-and-answer period.

**For further information contact**  
[name and contact details]

## CHRISTIAN MEDITATION GROUP

A new Meditation Group has been formed in  
[city, town or parish]  
to introduce newcomers to  
Christian Meditation.

Meditation is not something new. Rather it is central to the Christian experience and deeply rooted in Christian tradition. Meditation, also known as contemplative prayer, is the prayer of silence and listening. This is the aim given by the Psalmist:

**Be still and know that I am God.**

Psalm 46:10

To learn more about Christian Meditation, you are invited to participate in a weekly group meeting held

- at [time] each [day]
- at [address]

**For further information contact**

[name and contact details]

## MEDITATING IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

**A Christian Meditation Group at  
[address] welcomes newcomers each  
[day & time] to a Meditation Group Meeting**

This ancient form of Christian prayer, rooted in the gospel and St Paul, was taught by St John Cassian and the 4<sup>th</sup> century Desert Fathers, and is found in the 14<sup>th</sup> century spiritual classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Meditation, also known as contemplative prayer, seeks God in the silence and stillness beyond word and thought.

A Benedictine monk, John Main OSB (1926-1982), has rediscovered this ancient prayer tradition for contemporary men and women. There are now [number] Christian Meditation Groups meeting weekly in [country].

The one-hour meeting includes quiet music, a short recorded talk on meditation by John Main, Laurence Freeman, or other teachers in the Community, 25 minutes of silent meditation, followed by a period for questions.

**For further information**

contact [name and contact details]  
or come along any [day and time]



# MEDITATION

a group meditating in  
The Christian Tradition

Newcomers are invited to join a Christian Meditation group which meets

- each [day], [time]
- at [address].

Meditation is an ancient form of contemplative prayer that seeks God in the silence and stillness beyond word or thought. Benedictine monk, Father John Main OSB (1926-1982,) says:

*In meditation our way forward to this growing awareness of the Spirit praying within us lies simply in our deepening fidelity to the saying of the mantra. It is the faithful repetition of the word that integrates our whole being. It does so because it brings us to the silence, the concentration, the necessary level of consciousness that enables us to open our mind and heart to the work of God in the depth of our being.*

**For further information contact**  
[name and contact details]

## APPENDIX 1

# An Outline for a Six-Week Introductory Course for Christian Meditation

The following outline is meant to help a group leader to introduce meditation to newcomers to your group over a six-week period. It will help you to help others to get going and to persevere long enough to break through into their own understanding. It may be used continuously or periodically during the year or as a refresher for more experienced meditators.

Further materials specifically for the six-week course, including audio resources and examples of talks, can be explored through the website of the School of Meditation: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

### **Welcoming Beginners**

Be especially welcoming to newcomers who may be finding the silence of the group a little strange. Whenever possible, meet personally with them and explain the basics of how to meditate and tell them they can raise any questions with you personally as well as in the group. It may help to suggest that they 'check in' with

you monthly at first. Help them understand that the importance of the weekly meeting is to strengthen their daily practice and help them come to deeper understanding of the way of meditation. Remind them that it will take time for a regular practice to get established in their daily life and not to give up. If they do, they should just start again. Explain the general structure of the group meeting and the centrality of the meditation period together. Help them to sign up for (and contribute to the cost of) the International Newsletter. Share a little of your own journey when this seems helpful.

### **Each Week**

- Emphasize the simplicity of meditation.
- Review the basic 'how to meditate'.
- Explain the theme of the week and give a short summary of the recording you will listen to.
- Recommend specific reading.
- Have the basic introductory resources available for sale or loan. All are available from Medio Media at [www.mediomedia.com](http://www.mediomedia.com).
- Offer handouts such as the basic local, national, and World Community fliers.
- Have printouts available of the Weekly Teachings from the web page ([www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)).
- Encourage questions afterwards which you and other members can respond to.

## WEEK ONE

The theme is: *What is Meditation?*

Explain how meditation is a universal practice also found in our Christian tradition. It is a discipline not just a technique. There are no difficult theories or techniques to master. Emphasize the stillness of the body and the importance of the twice-daily practice. Prepare them for the encounter with the monkey-mind. Remind them that meditation is the prayer of the heart so all thoughts, including holy ones, are to be left aside.

- Play one of John Main's talks from his *In the Beginning* series.
- Recommend Laurence Freeman's book, *Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice*.
- Suggested New Testament Reading: Matthew 6: 5-6

## WEEK TWO

The theme is: *John Main*

Briefly, in your own words, tell the story of his life. He found meditation first in the East then rediscovered the Christian monastic tradition of it and later went on to teach it to lay people. This led to the worldwide community of which the group you are meditating with now is a part. Meditation creates community. Tradition is a personal discovery. Each of us has to rediscover it 'in our own experience'.

- Play one of the *In the Beginning* talks.
- Recommend John Main's book, *Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks*.
- Suggested New Testament Reading: Matthew 6: 7-15

### WEEK THREE

The theme is: *The Roots of our Tradition*

Pick up on John Main's rediscovering of the mantra in John Cassian's *Tenth Conference* and the meaning of poverty of spirit – simply letting go. Explain how Cassian, like *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the Orthodox tradition of the Jesus Prayer in the *Philokalia*, emphasizes the continuous saying of the word. Distractions are to be let go of, not fought or repressed. This gradually leads into the present moment. All this is a way of discipline, but the fruit is liberty of spirit.

- Use another talk from *In the Beginning*.
- Recommend John Main's book, *Word into Silence*.
- Suggested New Testament Reading: Matthew 6: 25-34

### WEEK FOUR

The theme is: *The Wheel of Prayer*

Now that they have been meditating for a while they have been introduced to the prayer of the heart, a new experience for most people. So now ask 'what is

prayer?’ in the light of this experience. All forms of prayer are valid and meditation does not replace them, although it may simplify them along with everything else in life. In the Christian tradition all prayer leads back to the prayer of the Spirit in the heart. My prayer, by itself, gives way to his prayer.

- Choose a talk from John Main’s *Being on the Way*, or one of the *Collected Talks* series, or the *Communitas* series, but remember to repeat how to meditate as this introduction may not be found in those talks.
- Recommend a re-reading of Laurence Freeman’s book, *Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice*.
- Suggested New Testament Reading: Romans 8: 26-27

## WEEK FIVE

The theme is: *Leaving Self Behind*

What we are really doing as we meditate is a selfless activity. All spiritual traditions describe this as the basic way to find who and why we are. Meditation is a universal and personal quest for truth. Leaving self behind is not a violent or repressive process. It is learning simply to be and to let go of desire and fear.

- Play a talk from the *In the Beginning* CD set.
- Recommend Laurence Freeman’s book, *The Selfless Self*.
- Suggested New Testament Reading: Matthew 7:13

## WEEK SIX

The theme is: *Meditation as a Way of Life*

The early Christians said that the way you pray is the way you live. The fruits of the daily practice appear in life situations and relationships as we live from a deeper inner centre. Our religious tradition appears in a new life as well, along with a greater respect for other traditions. Wisdom and compassion are the greatest gifts.

- Recommend John Main's book, *Moment of Christ*, or Laurence Freeman's *Aspects of Love*.
- Suggested New Testament Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Consider having a special event after this sixth meeting to mark the conclusion of the introductory course and remind everyone that we are all, always, beginners.



## APPENDIX 2

# WCCM Centres and Contacts Worldwide

For more information about the Community, its work and publications, to join a meditation group, or to learn to meditate, please contact your national coordinator on their webpage below, or the International Centre for the Coordinator's details.

### INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

The World Community for Christian Meditation  
32 Hamilton Road  
London W5 2EH, United Kingdom  
Tel +44 20 8579 4466  
welcome@wccm.org www.wccm.org

**MEDITATIO** [www.wccmmeditatio.org](http://www.wccmmeditatio.org)

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*For countries not listed below, contact the International Centre.*

**Argentina** [www.meditacioncristianagrupos.blogspot.com](http://www.meditacioncristianagrupos.blogspot.com)

**Australia** [www.christianmeditationaustralia.org](http://www.christianmeditationaustralia.org)

**Belgium** [www.christmed.be](http://www.christmed.be)

**Brazil** [www.wccm.org.br](http://www.wccm.org.br)

**Canada English** [www.meditatio.ca](http://www.meditatio.ca)

**Canada French** [www.meditationchretienne.ca](http://www.meditationchretienne.ca)

**Chile** [www.meditacioncristiana.cl](http://www.meditacioncristiana.cl)



**China** [www.wccm.hk](http://www.wccm.hk)  
**Colombia** [meditacioncristianacol.blogspot.com](http://meditacioncristianacol.blogspot.com)  
**Czech Republic** [www.krestanskameditace.cz](http://www.krestanskameditace.cz)  
**Denmark** [www.kristenmeditation.org](http://www.kristenmeditation.org)  
**France** [www.meditationchretienne.org](http://www.meditationchretienne.org)  
**Germany** [www.wccm.de](http://www.wccm.de)  
**Hong Kong** [www.wccm.hk](http://www.wccm.hk)  
**India** [www.wccm-india.org/](http://www.wccm-india.org/)  
**Indonesia** [www.meditasikristiani.com](http://www.meditasikristiani.com)  
**Ireland** [www.christianmeditation.ie](http://www.christianmeditation.ie)  
**Italy** [www.meditazionecristiana.org](http://www.meditazionecristiana.org)  
**Latvia** [www.jesus.lv](http://www.jesus.lv)  
**Malaysia** [www.wccmmalaysia.org](http://www.wccmmalaysia.org)  
**Mexico** [www.meditacioncristiana.net](http://www.meditacioncristiana.net)  
**Netherlands** [www.wccm.nl](http://www.wccm.nl)  
**New Zealand** [www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz](http://www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz)  
**Norway** [www.wccm.no](http://www.wccm.no)  
**Poland** [www.wccm.pl](http://www.wccm.pl)  
**Portugal** [www.meditacaocrista.com](http://www.meditacaocrista.com)  
**Singapore** [www.wccmsingapore.org](http://www.wccmsingapore.org)  
**South Africa** [www.wccm.co.za](http://www.wccm.co.za)  
**Spain** [www.wccm.es](http://www.wccm.es)  
**Spain Catalonia** [www.meditaciocristiana.cat](http://www.meditaciocristiana.cat)  
**Ukraine** [www.wccm.org.ua](http://www.wccm.org.ua)  
**United Kingdom** [www.christianmeditation.org.uk](http://www.christianmeditation.org.uk)  
**United States** [www.wccm-usa.org](http://www.wccm-usa.org)  
**Venezuela** [www.meditadores.blogspot.com](http://www.meditadores.blogspot.com)



## APPENDIX 3

# Relationship with Other Contemplative Communities

The tradition of Christian contemplative prayer is a rich and broad one with expressions in many different spiritual schools and Christian denominations. To meditate in the tradition that the World Community teaches is to be rooted in a part of this great vineyard. Friendship and cooperation with other communities representing different aspects of this same tradition is a natural fruit of meditation and also a sign of the peace that it engenders.

Among these there is a close friendship with the Contemplative Outreach network expressed in this statement by Laurence Freeman and Thomas Keating.

### **A Joint Statement from the World Community and Contemplative Outreach**

The contemplative communities of Contemplative Outreach and The World Community for Christian Meditation began independently of each other but in interdependence on the gospel tradition about twenty-five years ago.

Both communities grew from the Christian contemplative and apophatic heritage. We therefore share a special respect for the early monastic tradition, represented for example by John Cassian, the hesychasts of the Orthodox tradition and the medieval mystics such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. We believe these traditions are living streams and have a significant and urgent value for Christian life today, for the renewal of all the churches, and for enhancing the sense of the sacred in the modern world.

It seems to us that the Spirit is awakening the contemplative life among the people of God beyond the usual lay or clerical categories. It also nurtures an experience of communion beyond denominational boundaries. The same Spirit is reminding us of the forgotten treasures of our Christian heritage. Seeing contemplation as a dimension of prayer and of personal lifestyle, and finding a contemplative path taught in our own tradition, often come as a welcome discovery to many Christians. We believe this discovery and its widening influence needs to be encouraged by all Christian leaders.

Contemplative prayer grows with faith and perseverance and, in order to sustain them, community is born. For both our communities, small local groups characterize this growth, both in depth and numbers. We encourage friendship and the sharing of faith between these groups which are committed to be open, hospitable and ecumenical. We believe that greater

growth will follow if the groups of each community meet together from time to time to share the silence of Christ and his Word.

The differences of approach to practice, particularly on the issues of the mantra or sacred symbol, are subtle expressions of the richness of the Christian tradition, not divisions. Wisdom and experience however suggest a person persevere in the same practice once undertaken. Living the wisdom of the contemplative path is a matter of faith active in love, not of spiritual techniques. Contemplation is primarily practice not theory and hence requires fidelity to a method or discipline. While recognizing common sources and the ultimate goal for Christian contemplation we also accept that different interpretations and recommendations concerning practice can be equally valid. When differences are respected and similarities shared we are open to true unity and liberty of spirit.

Out of the deepening experience of contemplation the fruits of the Spirit are born in ever-new ways. Charity, compassion and tolerance, peace-making and courage for social justice characterize Christian contemplation as lived by individuals and communities. A better appreciation and understanding of inter-religious dialogue is also a fruit of the practice of our two communities.

Both our communities are, in the scheme of history, still very young. We are still discovering our full vocation

in the Body of Christ. By our spiritual communion and by learning from each other we pray that we will be faithful to the contemplative journey and to the sharing of its spiritual riches with the world.

LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB  
The World Community  
for Christian Meditation

THOMAS KEATING OCSO  
Contemplative Outreach



#### APPENDIX 4

## Contemplation and Unity: an Ecumenical Statement

We believe that welcome progress has been made recently in overcoming the ancient divisions between Christian churches. The power of the Gospel has often been veiled by the failure of Christians to love one another and to celebrate diversity as a sign of the richness of unity that there is in Christ. We believe, however, that a new era is opening. In these times there is less call for words and ceremonies and more need for the authentic spiritual knowledge that arises through the silence of contemplation.

The spiritual hunger and the widespread suspicion of religion in our society firmly points Christians to this depth dimension of their common faith. The contemplative dimension of the Gospel is not a specialty of particular churches or groups. It belongs to all and summons us all, through the signs of the times, to recover it. Nor is this contemplative dimension of faith to be identified only with the vocation of some to solitude and quiet. It applies equally to the life of good works, prophetic protest against injustice and the patient labour of peace-making. Indeed, the integrity and vigour of the

Christian life and its witness to the world depend upon the marriage of contemplation and action in the full experience of the mystery of God that passes understanding but is intimately known in daily acts of kindness.

If we cannot understand the silence of Christ we will not be able to understand his words, as an early Christian teacher asserted. Because we are convinced of the urgent need to recover the contemplative dimension in our prayer, worship and ministries, we have committed ourselves to search for ways in which this can be better appreciated by all Christians and by the whole of society. The Christian Meditation Centre is an ecumenical sign of this resolve to cooperate at that deeper level where unity in Christ is already achieved.

We invite our brothers and sisters in all churches to reflect on and join in this contemplative endeavour and so enrich its vision with their own special insights and traditions.

We believe, too, that in this age of violence and terror, friendship between the world religions is an indispensable foundation of the work for global peace and justice. If this friendship is to be sincere and transformative it also must be rooted in that experience of silence, stillness and simplicity that is the common ground of contemplation.

If we really can achieve a fuller harmony between contemplation and action in this way we will surely

better fulfil the greater desire of Christ that we 'may all be one'.

THE RT HON AND RT REVD RICHARD CHARTRES  
Bishop of London

DOM LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB  
Director, The World Community for Christian Meditation

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY O'CONNOR  
Archbishop of Westminster

REV DR LESLIE GRIFFITHS  
Superintendent, Minister of Wesley's Chapel

