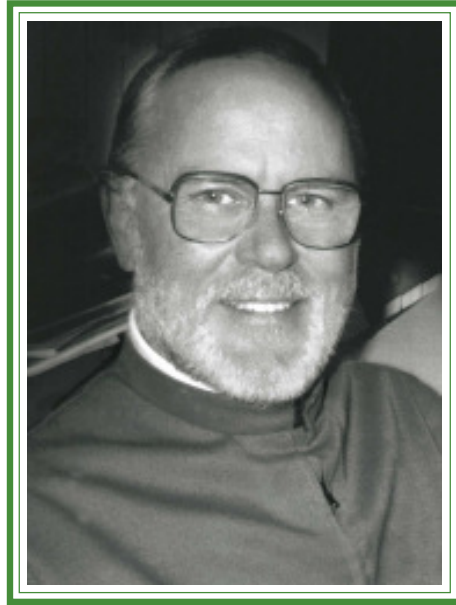


The background of the entire page is a photograph of a vast ocean under a clear blue sky. A thin layer of white clouds sits on the horizon line, separating the deep blue water from the sky. The water in the foreground shows gentle, rhythmic waves.

Oceans of God

The Story of the
New Zealand Community
for Christian Meditation



*Prayer is our way into the inner richness of the Christian mystery
which is the centre of all reality. Jesus is the Centre where all lines meet.
And, to paraphrase St. John, the prayer I speak of is not our love for God
but God's love for us.*

Main, John. *Sacrament: The Christian Mysteries*
Medio Media, London 2011, p14

Oceans of God

The Story of the New Zealand
Community for Christian Meditation

researched & compiled
by Margaret Paton

Disclaimer:

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New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation
christianmeditationnz.org.nz

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Thanks:

NZCCM is greatly indebted to Margaret Paton for her tireless work on this history. Margaret requested, coaxed and patiently extracted contributions and documents from a wide range of NZCCM members. Then she waded through the many documents she received to create a coherent account of the fascinating history of the emergence of the practice of Christian Meditation here in New Zealand. From its tiny and uncertain beginnings we have grown into a strong and well established Community.

I was fascinated to read about the number of times Fr. Laurence Freeman has come to New Zealand and we are very grateful for his enthusiasm and perseverance in sowing the seeds of Christian Meditation on our shores.

To all those, from the early days until now, in New Zealand and Australia, who have helped share the gift of meditation, we honour your input with appreciative thanks.

Linda Polaschek

National Co-ordinator NZCCM

December 2021

*By Stillness in the Spirit,
we Move in the Oceans of God*

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Acknowledgements:

Researching and compiling the story of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation is certainly not the easiest job I've ever done – in fact I'd go so far as to say it's probably the hardest!

In February 2020 when I began the task, there wasn't a lot of documentation to work with, that is until April 2020, when Fr. Peter Murphy produced his Recollections. This was a gem for which I sincerely thank Margaret Fairweather – Margaret, who says that she's "good at nagging!" has proved that she is. Fr. Murphy did his homework! Thank you Fr. Peter.

Random papers and a few old newsletters also helped, plus some files sent to me by Vincent Maire and Linda Polaschek. However the greatest gift of all came from Jane Hole in Christchurch. Jane sent me a USB of 94 files – various minutes and reports she had stored on her computer over the years. With these, I was ready to tackle the work.

It was all great stuff, but how to organise it into some logical sequence then became a trauma. I tried three or four structures to hang the information on, but nothing really worked well – that is until my patron saint Our Lady of Perpetual Help was brought on board. From then on I had a clear understanding of method and structure so was able to proceed. Thank God for the power of prayer and our saints on high! Our Lady never lets me down.

Then came Lockdown 2021 with its magical ability to remove writer's block from quite a few people in NZCCM. I was suddenly deluged with notes, articles, memoirs and suggestions, for which I sincerely thank all those who contributed. Another re-write but I was finally able to bring the project to a close.

Consequently, what we now have is not so much a history of what has been – it's more of a story about "a people with a mission" and the way they worked to achieve their goals. It's a story of faithfulness, dedication, planning and commitment, and I sincerely hope that in recording their achievements, I have honoured that dedication and commitment with the respect it deserves.

The others in our "Team of Five" – Fr. Peter Murphy, Jane Hole, Vincent Maire and Linda Polaschek, have been a great team to work with: almost instant answers to my numerous emails, queries and questions, as well as lashings of encouragement and support – for this I am very, very grateful. Thank you all.

I do hope this book will be pleasing to everyone. My sincere apologies for any errors and mistakes – as they say: to err is human, but to make real mess, you need a computer! I have three of those.

Sincerely in Christ
Margaret Paton
December 2021



1. The Pioneers

NEW ZEALAND

Silence at the End of the World

New Zealand meditators, scattered between North Cape and the Bluff, undoubtedly represent the same cross-section of Christians as in other countries. Most are members of worshipping communities, most are active in their church in various capacities, and in outreach in the community. Two groups, one each from Auckland and Wellington, are described below to illustrate meditation in urban New Zealand.

In Auckland a group meets in the Parish of St Paul, Mossey. Formed in 1988 following a retreat at the Cistercian monastery in Takapau it meets weekly with up to seven (currently five) members. In its early stages the group was assisted by Avis Ridley who led a group at Orewa. It has accumulated a library of John Main and Laurence Freeman tapes. The group writes 'As our group has prospered and entered into the silence of faith we find that, unknowingly, we are automatically encouraging and supporting each other in our daily pilgrimage. That through our meditation group God's mysterious presence within us is becoming not just a reality but the reality which gives meaning shape and purpose to everything we do and to everything we are. This community of love that dwells in the depths of our hearts also reflects outwards into the community of the faithful. As we penetrate more deeply into the communion of love within us we find that God's mystery in our community naturally emerges to us and enriches our faith and dedication'.

Several groups meet in the Wellington area, including at St Andrews on the Terrace, The Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre, St Theresa's Church in Plimmerton, and a WCCM beginning group in Kelburn. Paul Harris' visit in 1996 stimulated new meditation activity. Meditation in the

Archdiocese of Wellington was encouraged by Avis Ridley in 1992 and a group began meeting in the Assumptionist Monastery in Porirua. This group now has a central core of 10, with occasional visitors. Over the years the group has made a weekend retreat with the Cistercians at Southern Star Abbey in Hawkes Bay; prayed with the community at the Buddhist Monastery in Lower Hutt; attended seminars by the Dalai Lama and Paul Harris; participated in a Thomas Merton weekend at Furuta Retreat House; taken part in a day of recollection at the Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre.

The role of the NZ Centre of the WCCM has to be one of encouraging, resourcing and facilitating these individual faith journeys. A key is communication. The meditation community in New Zealand, outside the major cities, is widely scattered. There is little knowledge of the WCCM, even within the Anglican and Catholic churches. Over the next year or two the aim is to establish knowledge of the WCCM as a major Christian meditation resource. Information will be provided regionally and nationally to the major Church denominations. The Internet will be a key to the future networking and resourcing of meditators. Links to WCCM need to be established through the websites of major NZ Churches. In November 1999 Fr Laurence visited New Zealand for the first time in eight years. He gave talks and led retreats in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. We feel, as he remarked, that there has been a quiet steady deepening among the meditators and that the time is ripe now for a more generous sharing of this teaching with others.

Richard Clarke
National Co-ordinator

Silence is the Best Teacher

As part of a vision for the longer-term future I see meditation becoming part of the norm for the daily life of the believing Christian. Without an interior life any participation in the Eucharist and other forms of church worship is simply hollow. Meditation brings both a discipline and a routine to one's life. The discipline is simply building it into one's daily programme. It also helps make holy the day, beginning and ending with prayer. I still remember the words of a former spiritual director of mine - 'Silence is the best teacher'. Silence is our natural state. It is only in today's world that it has become unnatural... I see meditation as fundamental to the life of the Church, particularly in prophetic voice. For the Church, the balance between the ideologies of conservative and liberal groups can only be achieved through the middle way, through the centre, through Christ. St Paul says 'It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me'. Christian meditation is focused on the person of Christ. The changes that it brings about are so subtle that one is often unaware of them. It is only with perseverance and time that one can see one has changed and can experience the fruit of it. In the meantime, before coming to that point, the journey is one of faith and of entering into the unknown not knowing where it may lead or what it will bring.

Avis Ridley
New Zealand

Photo: Avis Ridley and Bishop Leonard Crowley of Montreal.

Christian Meditation Newsletter, January 2000



Photograph: Avis Ridley and Bishop Leonard Crowley of Montreal

from the Christian Meditation Newsletter, page 51
25th Anniversary Tribute 1975 - 2000 Issue

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The group writes:

As our group has prospered and entered into the silence of faith we find that, unknowingly, we are automatically encouraging and supporting each other in our daily pilgrimage. That through our meditation group God's mysterious presence within us is becoming not just a reality, but the reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do and to everything we are. The community of love that dwells in the depths of our hearts also reflects outwards into the community of the faithful. As we penetrate more deeply into the communion of love within us, we find that God's mystery in our community naturally emerges to us and enriches our faith and dedication.

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**Peter Murphy
New Zealand**

Whilst rummaging through an assortment of papers Fr. Peter Murphy very kindly presented me with, I came across an envelope marked:

"To Father Peter from Mark and Frank.

*History of Massey Group for International Website
commemorating 25th Anniversary of Fr. John Main's death."*

The following articles are those testimonies written by
Frank and Mark.

Meditation Group - Massey Parish, Auckland

It was during an eight day retreat at the Cistercian Monastery in Hawkes Bay on the East Coast, that my friend Mark and I enjoyed the silence so much that we came to the conclusion it would be worth trying to continue this when we returned to our own parish - and so the idea of a meditation group was conceived.

On returning home we began to meet together on Wednesday (later changed to Tuesday) at 7.00pm. Soon we were encouraged by two young women who joined us out of interest. They remained with us for about a year and then departed, leaving us on our own for a number of years.

We then discovered there was a lady who lived outside Auckland, who was not only leading a meditation group, but was the New Zealand Convener under the WCCM. In order to develop meditation and make it more widely available, Mrs Ridley opened and furnished rooms at a diocesan level where people could stay overnight and take part in meditation. This Centre was blessed by Fr. Laurence on one of his visits to New Zealand. Mark and I attended the Centre every Wednesday night. We also visited with Mrs Ridley's group for days of recollection on occasions.

Eventually Mark and I were blessed with a new member who would prove to be a solid and dependable person and we are very pleased to have Diana as a core member with us. She is very loyal. Some years ago we had a monthly parish magazine in which we featured excerpts from *Moment of Christ* by Fr. John.

It was in February 1989 (16 years ago) that Mark and I decided to embrace this pathway. Many people have come and gone over the years and today we can have ten people with a core group of five come together on Tuesday nights.

We are also very blessed that our parish priest, Fr. Peter Murphy, who is also NZ Co-ordinator, is in our group.

Frank Fagan

The aim of our group has always been *To seek the face of God*. We could rephrase this element in various ways: *To pray, To meditate, To live the spiritual life*. We have chosen this one because it is scriptural and expresses His nature of contemplation.

A wondering contemplative aspect of our Meditation Group focusses on the reality of God, recognising always that contemplation is a gift of God, not an acquisition as a result of putting in sufficient time. This is the commitment to personal holiness. Our Meditation Group wants to see God, wants to know God, and recognises that prayer and meditation now take on greater importance.

Our dedication to meditation is a commitment to a new way of life in which the personal life of each member of our Group becomes contemplative. The style of life of each member changes with the growth in virtues that accompany the growth in the spirit - it is impossible to live a life of prayer and meditation without changing. This new style of life enhances all the rest of life. This commitment to holiness through meditation is a source of grace and strength to live our lives with dedication and purpose.

This is the direct result of *seeking the face of God*.

Mark Clay

Massey Parish Meditation Prayer Group



left to right:

Liz Fitzpatrick, Margaret Vulinovich, Frank Fagan, unknown, Mark Clay, unknown, Sarah Glucina

Photograph taken outside St. Paul's Church, Massey, Auckland, probably in the early 1990s.

Fr. Peter Murphy

Personal Recollections

Christian Meditation, as taught by Fr. John Main OSB, came to New Zealand initially through Avis Ridley whom I knew as a parishioner in Tokoroa. Avis had been a Benedictine Oblate for a number of years and was attached to the Benedictine monastery in New Norcia in Western Australia. I am not aware of how Avis came to know of Fr. John, but I suspect it was through the Benedictine family. She went to Montreal after Fr. John died – his death was on 30th December, 1982 – and presumably invited Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB, (Fr. John's successor), to this country, a visit he made in the mid-1980s. My first knowledge of it was reading of the visit in a copy of the *South Waikato Times* many years later. My colleague, Fr. Bill Tuerlings MHM, recalled visiting the Ridley home at the time having been invited for breakfast, and turning up in the middle of a morning meditation. He was unimpressed!

Fr. Laurence next came to New Zealand during Lent in 1988. I met him at St. Paul's Anglican Church in Symonds Street, Auckland, where he held a retreat day. This was before the monastery at Montreal had closed. I believe he also did an extensive tour of the country on that visit. Avis was the co-ordinator, aided by her husband Jack, who had given up his work as a Member of Parliament to aid Avis. Bill Hodge, who later succeeded Avis as co-ordinator, was a non-stipendiary priest at St. Paul's at the time. I lost contact with Christian meditation after that for some years. I did attempt to continue the practice, but like many when starting off, I gave up, finding it too difficult to persevere.

Shortly after this visit, two men from the Massey Catholic Parish of St. Paul's, Frank Fagan and Mark Clay, decided they would start a meditation group. They had been visiting the Cistercian Monastery at Kopua together every year for a number of years and had become good friends. Someone at the monastery, possibly Fr. Kieran Hynes, had put it to them that they should continue with this practice at home. Fr. Hynes at the time was very highly respected as a spiritual teacher. As they were about to start, they heard of Avis' attempts to set up a meditation centre in the Liston Centre adjoining St. Patrick's Cathedral in Auckland. It was there they purchased the talks of Fr. John, then available on cassette.

For the first year a number of people joined them but at the end of that year there was just the two of them and they continued on their own praying every Tuesday evening at 7.00 pm in St. Paul's Church. It was like this for about four years before Diana Halloran joined them. Diana had been drawn to meditation through reading in the Catholic paper of the visit to the country of Fr. Basil Pennington, speaking on Centering Prayer. She instinctively knew this was what she was searching for and asked her parish priest at the time where she could find help with this. He directed her to Frank and

Mark's weekly meeting. This has been advertised regularly in the parish newsletter but, as is so often the case with this practice, she had not made the connection until she began searching.

Fr. Laurence returned to the country on a brief visit to open the meditation centre in St. Patrick's Square. This was in 1990. At some stage after this Avis let go of the leadership. She had put much work and much of her own money into the development of the work. Her leadership style, however, did not include others with the result that she became burnt out and in the end literally dumped everything on to Bill Hodge.

Bill continued on in this leadership role for a period of time. He organised seminar days at the newly built Catholic Pompallier Centre in Ponsonby. It was during this period that Paul Harris visited New Zealand from Canada. Paul Harris had been a co-ordinator of the fledging community in its early days. I first heard of the workshop he was planning through Mary McLister who had begun attending the Massey group. The contacts were so few within the city that Paul himself rang Frank Fagan to see if he was coming. This was in September 1995. I just attended one day of the workshop. I was meditating regularly at the time but not in this practice. Michael Dougherty also attended this weekend workshop. Michael had been introduced to Christian meditation by Fr. Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine, who had gone to India in 1955 to find, in his words, "the other half of his soul". Michael too was meditating regularly but not in a Christian tradition. This workshop was key for Michael in reconnecting with the practice to which Fr. Bede had introduced him. Paul Harris continued on to Wellington where he stayed with Rev. Richard Clarke (Dick), in Kelburn. Dick was university chaplain at the time. He had not long left the DSIR where he had held a senior management position. Robyn, Dick's wife, had started meditating. Dick was so impressed with Paul that he too began to meditate. On the surface, this tour of Paul Harris was a non-event. He paid for it out of his own money and received little in the way of return. But it was like a pilot light, a small flame which kept burning quietly.

I joined the Massey group in early 1998. I had been meditating twice a day for nearly eight years on my own. I had a teacher, Margaret Hooton, with whom I met periodically. I was out of the ministry at this time and had been working in Whangarei but came back down to Auckland in the beginning of that year. At the time the core of the Massey group was Frank Fagan, Mark Clay and Diana Halloran, and there were others who came and went. I found it very difficult at first in large part as it was my first re-entry into a Church environment, and to me, a very old-fashioned conservative one at that. However, I was committed to the practice and persevered with the weekly meeting.

For me personally the group was a watershed. After a few months I noticed changes in myself. Although I felt alienated at one level from the other members, on another level I began to recognise that there was a deeper bond, brought about by praying in silence. This was an important lesson. My experience of the Church too began to change. Whereas often when I

went to Mass, I would come away angry and frustrated, I began to notice that this was subsiding. Whereas before it did not bother me too much if I missed Sunday Mass, I began to make sure I never missed.

It was part way through that year that that Frank mentioned to me that Bill Hodge wanted to pull out of the co-ordinator's role. It was one Sunday morning in St. Malachy's (the second parish church), and he just passed the remark, "You could do it." Something clicked within me when he said that. I had been expecting some sign as to my future direction and this appeared to be it. I just knew this practice was to be my work.

Not long afterwards I contacted Bill Hodge and went to see him and his wife. He was indeed ready to let go. He also mentioned that Fr. Laurence was interested in coming out to New Zealand as he had not been for some time, and that the organising of his visit would need to be done. He also explained the different aspects of the co-ordinator's role: the quarterly newsletter, the books and teaching the practice. At the time I was studying for a Master's in Planning (my work) and did not do anything. Then when I heard that he had actually resigned from the position I again contacted him. By this time Dick Clarke had also been in touch and had offered to take over the administrative side of the work. Dick had his own PC and with his management skills he was well set up to fill this role. I could look after Auckland.

Around this time I wrote to Fr. Laurence to introduce myself and to explain my background. His reply was rather guarded I felt, but he did ask if I could help organise his visit later in 1999. Early in 1999 I called Dick as I was coming down to the lower North Island and arranged to stay overnight with him and Robyn. It was there that we sorted out roles; he would be national co-ordinator and I would look after Auckland and we would work together to organise Fr. Laurence's visit later in the year.

Bill Hodge had given me addresses of people who led groups in the Auckland area. They were mainly elderly and did not connect with one another. I contacted Avis Ridley just to find out whether she was interested in Fr. Laurence's visit. Her reaction was quite negative. "You don't need him. You can run it yourselves." Another contact was very supportive of Avis and was also quite negative about Fr. Laurence's world trips. For some time we were unsure about whether to have Fr. Laurence come given the lack of interest. Even my friends in the Massey group were not supportive. It was too big an ask.

This situation continued for some months. I recall talking to Ross Miller who had been in touch with Dick. Ross had been to Montreal just before the Priory was closed. He was critical of the local leadership which was why the community had not grown in any way. Another person who contacted Dick was June Ryan who also had been part of the community from the earliest days in this country. She called me and was most insistent that we had to have Fr. Laurence come out here. For me that clinched it. We had

been prepared to let it go but the determination on her part turned us around. Fr. Laurence planned to be here for a week but where he would stay and what he would do was open.

At Massey we decided to have a recollection day to which we invited others but only June came. We played tapes of the Irish President Mary McAleese's talks at the John Main Seminar in 1997. June talked about having Fr. Laurence out here and that was enough to enthuse us about his coming. I informed Dick. We would try and arrange a retreat weekend here in Auckland and the rest of the time he could spend in the other centres. I was left to do the organising with June, however, just as we were preparing to organise, she wanted to pull out. Dick managed to talk her into continuing in order to get the retreat off the ground. The Friday night would be an open meeting and the Saturday and Sunday would be retreat.

Dick arranged talks in Wellington and Christchurch but there was no response from Dunedin, so I decided to fill in the extra time by taking Fr. Laurence to Whangarei to speak there and to stay with my friend, Eric Ryan. The only place available for the retreat was *Knock-na-Gree*, a camp in West Auckland owned by the Catholic Church. There was limited accommodation but we had managed to gather a good cross section of people both from different churches and from different parts of the country. There were three from Christchurch. Christchurch had a group based in the Blessed Sacrament Cathedral that had been meeting for some time. This was led by Max Broadbent and Alice Flett. Wellington was represented by Dick Clarke and his wife Robyn, and also Hugh McLaughlin who later became the National Oblate Co-ordinator.

We had a meeting with Fr. Laurence prior to retreat. Earlier I had worked out a programme with him at the Franciscan Friary where he was staying. What we had worked out was that there would be a mixture of silence and talking. He had been quite concerned about what was happening in the country but remarked that now we seemed to be on a better footing and ready to move forward. The opening session was more in the vein of a public meeting except that there were very few of the public there, only about 40. One significant person was the former Archdeacon Kenneth Prebble of St. Paul's Church in Symonds Street. Archdeacon Prebble was the father of politician Richard Prebble. He had since joined the Catholic Church with his wife. I made the mistake when introducing Fr. Laurence of referring to Christian Meditation as a movement for which he corrected me. We are a *community*, not a movement.

There were about 20 plus people who stayed for the retreat. It went very smoothly. Fr. Laurence's easy-going nature made us feel very much at home. Indeed this was a new beginning. There was one amusing incident I recall. The Church had had issues with the management of *Knock-na-Gree*. It was managed by a married couple, but they had alienated many people by their approach. On the Saturday evening Fr. Laurence was just waiting by the dining room and the wife approached him to give a message to someone on

the retreat. He replied that he didn't know the person, whereupon she gave him his pedigree. He accepted it all in good humour.

Following the retreat I journeyed with him to Whangarei. For me personally that was a very significant journey. I had been out of the active priestly ministry for twelve years and he was the first priest whom I had encountered who understood the journey. At the time I had no intention of returning to active ministry although I knew meditation was to be my work wherever it led me.

Fr. Laurence spoke at the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Whangarei to a crowd of approximately 60. He also took the opportunity of blessing a meditation chapel built by one of the Whangarei meditators, Dr. Damian Wojcik, at the rear of his house. This chapel has continued to be the "home" for a weekly meditation group since that date.

We put Fr. Laurence on the plane the next morning for Wellington where he spoke to a good crowd, and then on to Christchurch. For Jane Hole, who followed me as national co-ordinator, this was her first introduction to Christian meditation.

The visit provided a way forward. We were grateful to the international community for paying Fr. Laurence's travel costs. He suggested that he come back again in a couple of years to lead an Essential Teaching Weekend. This was a workshop that had not long been developed within the Community, to offer those who had been meditating for a period of time the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the tradition, and to give them confidence in being able to share the gift with others.

My fellow meditators in the Massey group were also buoyed up by the visit. Dick in Wellington, mentioned how he was giving introductions to Christian meditation, and this gave me the initiative to do the same myself, so in early 2000 I offered a twelve-week introduction to Christian meditation in the Massey Catholic parish. I took as my material the twelve talks of Fr. John Main *In the Beginning*, talks he had given on Monday nights in Montreal. The numbers were not great and only three lasted the distance, with none joining the Tuesday evening meeting. I was undeterred and next decided to take on the hallowed precincts of the University by running a course at the Catholic Chaplaincy Centre in Newman Hall. Again I used the twelve introductory talks of Fr. John Main. The talks were advertised on the chaplaincy website, (Internet at this time was still in its early days). Again the turnout was small with no fewer than one attending each evening, and again no group was formed from these meetings.

While the second course was underway I went through a major personal change. A mentor of mine from my early days in the priestly ministry, Fr. Tom Ryder, died. We had kept in touch over the years. He occasionally used to ask me if I would return to active ministry and I would always say no, that I had changed too much and that I couldn't see myself fitting back

into the ministry, even though I saw myself as a committed Catholic. However when Tom died I was completely broken and no sooner was his body in the ground than I knew I had to return. I decided to wait till I was sure for this was a highly emotional time. In the meantime the situation at my work began to deteriorate until one day it came to the stage I needed to leave and there was only one direction I needed to go and that was to make an appointment with the bishop. I had kept him informed of my involvement with Christian meditation and had also taken Fr. Laurence to see him the previous year.

That year (2000) was also the first of our Auckland retreats; I had managed to gain a hold of a set of Fr. Bede's presentations at the 1991 John Main Seminar held at New Harmony, Indiana. It was at this seminar that the World Community was first formed. My friend and meditation teacher, Margaret Hooton, offered to attend this event just to help me along. Her input was invaluable for I was very much a novice at this stage. We held this at the Mary McKillop Centre in Kohimarama, a beautiful site overlooking the Waitemata Harbour. There were 45 attendees, 20 of whom were residential. I organised it on much the same pattern as the *Knock-na-Gree* retreat with Fr. Laurence. There were periods of silence during breakfast and lunch and at night, and three meditation periods a day. This retreat became an annual event, and for the next three years we met at the McKillop Centre. In 2003, a retreat led by Andrea Cook on Thomas Merton, the numbers were such (65) that we had to move from there and since then our retreats have been held at the St. Francis Retreat Centre in Hillsborough. The numbers have never reached that peak since, in large part owing to the retreat becoming a lived-in experience over a weekend, and extra cost.

In 2002 Fr. Laurence returned again to New Zealand primarily to lead an Essential Teaching Weekend held at the Stella Maris Retreat Centre in Seatoun, Wellington, a site since bought by the film-maker Peter Jackson. I hosted Fr. Laurence initially at St. Michael's Presbytery in Remuera, Auckland, where I was resident, having returned to active priestly ministry in September of the previous year. He arrived late morning from London, had a sleep, went for a run, gave a talk that night in the church and promptly went to sleep during the meditation, a matter of concern for many attendees who couldn't resist having a peek. He has since desisted from giving talks on the evening after arrival from overseas. The next morning he gave an introduction to priests and ministers in the crypt of St. Michael's. This time, after a good night's sleep, he was in much better form.

Dick Clarke, richly blessed with management skills, created a database of meditators, names gathered from isolated groups and individuals around the country. He also sent out a quarterly newsletter accompanying the international newsletter that Fr. John had initiated from Montreal days. He also created an introductory brochure for general distribution, which we still use today (with minor modifications). He and Robyn had attended the John Main Seminar in 2000 held in Northern Ireland. This was a ground-breaking event at which the Dalai Lama was the keynote presenter, a step in

the Way of Peace pilgrimage that had begun in India a few years earlier. Interfaith dialogue through meditating together had become one of the forms of outreach within the nascent community.

Around this time Richard and Robyn left their home in Kelburn, Wellington and settled on a lifestyle block in Otaki. I visited them a few times in their new home. It was also in this period that Richard developed cancer and subsequently died in January 2004. In late 2003 Richard had passed all his material over to me with a view to my taking over his role. I visited Robyn about a month after Richard's death with Hugh McLaughlin and Stan Martin. Both Hugh and Stan had been at the *Knock-na-Gree* retreat in 1999. Stan had attended with his wife Dorothy who was living with cancer. Sadly Dorothy died in early 2002. By that time Stan had become a key part of our fledgling community. Both he and Hugh insisted that I take over the leadership of the community. I was reluctant at first having just returned to active priestly ministry and was still feeling my way. However, in their eyes that was no excuse. Stan, an accountant, would take over as treasurer and Hugh would look after Wellington. As it turned out, being in the ministry opened many doors. One such door had been meditating with prisoners at Auckland prison in Paremoremo, at the invitation of the then chaplain, Sr. Teresa Donworth RGS. That lasted eighteen months, not an easy situation as prisoners were moved frequently from prison to prison.

In mid-2002 I was appointed parish priest of St. Ignatius, St. Heliers, a small parish on the Auckland waterfront. It was there we began holding our community days. These consisted of inviting a speaker, having a shared lunch and two meditation periods. We held three a year and a fourth event was our annual Auckland retreat, at that time held at the Mary McKillop Centre in Kohimaramara. Being a small parish, I was also able to devote significant time to the developing of the practice in different parishes in the Catholic diocese. It was also at St. Ignatius School that I began meditating with children, quite tentatively at first but significantly encouraged by the response of the children. One of the teachers organised a CD with different time slots for the children according to age. I had been encouraged in this by Fr. Laurence at the first national Australian retreat early in 2003.

In 2004 I was appointed parish priest to St. Paul's Parish, Massey in west Auckland. It was at this time we held our second Essential Teaching Weekend. To lead this we had the services of Ruth Fowler from Melbourne. Ruth had been part of WCCM from its earliest days and was well experienced. In fact the Australian community was hugely helpful to us in these early stages. Fr. Laurence had visited Australia around the same time he first came to New Zealand but the uptake there was immediate, so by the time we were re-establishing ourselves, they were well advanced, and it was their structure that we followed. This workshop was held at Vaughan Park, an Anglican Church retreat centre at Long Bay on the North Shore. My organisational skills were put to a severe test for I naively put people in shared rooms without any consultation, presuming we were all meditators, they would naturally be accommodating. However after some toing and froing the situation was sorted out amicably.

In April 2004 I was invited to participate in the first School Retreat held in Australia. This was only the third such retreat within the World Community. Sr. Eileen O’Hea, who worked with Fr. Laurence in developing this, was destined to share the lead with him, but sadly she was diagnosed with cancer so was unable to come. Her place was taken by Pauline Peters from Brisbane, one of the leaders in the Australian community. This retreat took place at the Carmelite monastery in Varroville, south of Sydney. It was in total silence, lasted for eight days, and involved personal consultation with Fr. Laurence or Pauline each day. I personally found it a very powerful experience. Following the retreat I attended the Australian National Council meeting immediately afterwards.

It was a blessing being back in Massey and meditating again with the group I had joined six years previously. After a few months I approached the Director of Religious Studies at St. Paul’s Catholic Primary School about meditating with children. Pauline Oliver, who held that position, was quite open as was the Principal, Carmel Platt. Diana Halloran, from the local group, asked if she could help too. As it turned out, meditating with children became Diana’s passion. She had had little formal education herself but her experience and passion for meditation overcame all hesitancy in dealing with both teachers and children. Massey was a very different prospect from St. Ignatius. This was the “wild west.” The arrangement was that we would each meditate with a class once a week. It was hard going at first. I recall one teacher saying to me later that in those early days she thought we didn’t have a dog show in making it work. For me a watershed moment was at one school Mass. After communion we had a three-minute meditation. I introduced and concluded it with my singing bowl. On this particular occasion a palpable hush descended on the three hundred children, the only noise coming from the adults gathered there. At the end of the concluding bell the place just erupted. I knew then that meditation with children worked and that they loved it and could do it naturally. What sold it to many of the teachers also was seeing children whom they had believed would never sit still, actually sit perfectly still.

In April 2005 Fr. Laurence visited the country again. He gave a retreat day at St. Mary’s College in Ponsonby, Auckland. I remember it as a very special event although I do not have recorded details. I delegated Shirley Temm to organise. Shirley developed her organising skills as a mother of eleven children. She took great pride when I thanked her, praising her skills such that she could organise a Normandy landing. We were blessed too to have the Catholic Bishop of Auckland, Bishop Patrick Dunn, attend this day with us.

A special part of the occasion was initiating Diana Halloran as an Oblate of the World Community for Christian Meditation. The Oblates are a community within the community, but attached to the wider worldwide Benedictine congregation. They are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours morning and evening, to meditate twice a day and read each day from the Rule of Benedict, and to support the practice of Christian meditation. Diana

had been prepared for this by Stan Martin. Stan had become an Oblate at an international event and had been given the responsibility of co-ordinating the Oblates in this country.

Fr. Laurence continued visiting other centres in the country namely Wellington and Christchurch. I recall it was on this visit that he recommended it was time for us to form a national council, which we did that year.

In the middle of 2005 I attended the first International Co-ordinators meeting held in Florence, Italy. This was a sign of the growth of the community. It was an opportunity too to meet with people who had been part of the community from its early days and who had been so influential in its development such as Peter Ng from Singapore (recently widowed) and Susan Spence from the UK. After the meeting most of us attended the annual *Monte Oliveto* retreat held at the motherhouse for the Olivetan Benedictines, Fr. Laurence's community. Owing to the large numbers I was given a room in the monastery itself. The retreat lasted a week and was attended by people from all over the world. Silence was observed during the day but the evening meal was an occasion for conviviality, an opportunity to meet up with one another. The day finished with Compline in the monastery chapel, led by the monks.



First New Zealand National Council

Back Row left to right: Stan Martin, Ross Miller, Fr. Peter Murphy, Max Broadbent
Front Row left to right: Hugh McLaughlin, Diana Halloran, Jane Hole

The monastery was huge, able to accommodate around 200 monks. There was nowhere near that number in the community, more around 30-40. We were also welcomed by the Abbot and made to feel very much at home. A significant feature in the monastery cloister is a series of frescoes on the life of St. Benedict. Our daily *lectio divina* was a series of reflections on these frescoes given by a senior member of the World Community.

Our first Council meeting was on 28th-29th December 2005, at St. Paul's Catholic Presbytery, Massey in West Auckland. Members included myself (chair), Diana Halloran and Ross Miller (Auckland), Stan Martin (Treasurer), Hugh McLaughlin (Wellington), Jane Hole and Max Broadbent (Christchurch). Max was our initial secretary. Ross was assigned the "meditation school". He later took part in the second school retreat in Australia.

Our first task was to draw up a Constitution. Here we followed the Canadian model that was given to us by Clem Sauve from the International Guiding Board, the Body that oversees the development of the community along with Fr. Laurence. I was elected National Co-ordinator, a role I already held informally. Our programme followed the pattern I had picked up at the Australian Council meeting, with meditation three times a day plus the business of setting up the National Council and an evening dinner out. At this meeting too we began making plans for our first national retreat to be held in 2007.

A regular annual feature of the international community was the John Main Seminar (JMS). This was an opportunity for the community to receive input from significant people in the international scene. In 1997 the presenter had been Mary McAleese. A year later she was elected President of Ireland, a position she held for twelve years. In 2001 the presenter was Archbishop Rowan Williams. A year later he was elected Archbishop of Canterbury. This event had been held in Sydney which made it accessible for us in New Zealand and approximately fifteen of us availed ourselves of this opportunity.

In 2006 the JMS was held in Penang, Malaysia, and again a number of New Zealanders were able to attend. The presenter there was Margaret Rizza, known in the community for her musical compositions which were used widely in meditation groups. After the retreat and seminar was a visit to the *Pure Light* orphanage in Kuala Lumpur. This was where John Main first met Swami Satyananda in the course of his work for the Colonial Service. It was Swami Satyananda who first taught John Main to meditate. We were blessed to meditate with Mother Mangalam, the Swami's successor, after he was killed in a motorbike accident in 1961. The meditation was followed by dinner with the community at which the children put on a little concert, and then followed an inter-faith meeting. This turned into a rather tense event soured by the current Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East.

I was keen for Fr. Laurence to meet with the Catholic Bishops of New Zealand. The New Zealand Conference met twice a year. I discovered their meeting in April 2007 was to be in Auckland so the plan was to hold the retreat at that time and arrange for a meeting with the Bishops' Conference.

Mother
Mangalam
and
Fr. Laurence



Visiting
the
Pure Light
Orphanage
in
Kuala
Lumpur,
Malaysia



We also had to find a venue. Initially I was keen on Sacred Heart College which had single rooms for their senior students and cubicles for the younger boarders. I arranged for myself and a team of women to have a look over the facilities. By that time our community was expanding.

Part of the reason for arranging Fr. Laurence to meet the Catholic Bishops was to propose a pastoral letter encouraging the practice of meditative prayer. On my visit to Bishop Pat Dunn in 1999 with Fr. Laurence, Bishop Pat mentioned how at the NZ Bishops' *ad limina* visit to Pope John Paul the previous year, the Pope had encouraged in his report to them, the practice of contemplative prayer and this his colleague, Bishop Peter Cullinane, had welcomed especially. I knew there was receptivity there. The Bishops normally receive visitors at their October meeting but here they were prepared to make an exception. I wrote out a draft pastoral initially, sent it to Fr. Laurence who completely re-wrote it and this we put to the Bishops. The meeting went for about thirty minutes. Fr. Laurence and I were very cordially received. The outcome was that two years later they did issue their pastoral letter, *Prayer in the Busyness of Life*. We were concerned they might issue something bland; after all, as Fr. Laurence said privately, prayer is like motherhood and apple pie. However we were very pleased with what they produced for they specifically encouraged the development of meditation groups in parishes, and meditating with children for which the Catholic school system offered the ideal setting. Fr. Laurence was also able to offer the letter to other bishops he met on his travels, which were extensive.

In early 2004 I had a call from Jacqui Driscoll in Orewa wanting to meditate. One of the participants in the ETW that February was Bertha Casas. Bertha had been introduced to Christian meditation in Singapore and she was keen to connect with us. So after the ETW she gave a series of introductory talks in her parish from which sprouted three groups, including one led by Jacqui.

Jacqui had been a teacher and in her young days had worked in the Catholic Youth Movement with then Dr. Reginald Delargey. Jacqui had much experience in organising and she was the powerhouse behind the organising of this retreat. When she saw the facilities at Sacred Heart which were designed for teenage boys, she had a fit. This would not work for a mixed group of adults. So we went in search of another venue. It was Shirley Temm who alerted us to St. Cuthbert's in Auckland, a private Presbyterian Girls' school. This was available at the time being in school holidays and at reasonable cost.

We had a committee led by Jacqui, Diana Halloran, Shirley, Janet Price and myself, and we met regularly in preparation for the event, mainly at Jacqui's home in Orewa. Organising an event such as this was something



Prayer in the Busyness of Life

Pastoral Prayer Leaflet
issued by the
New Zealand Catholic Bishops
in 2001

new for all of us. Diana and I visited the school a few times. Although a church school, our contact there spoke of Presbyterian with a small 'p'. But they had a chapel and that was ideal for our purposes. It was there we had our meditations and conferences. We had five meditation periods a day including one during Eucharist, and a morning conference given by Fr. Laurence. The late morning slot was taken by Michael Dougherty leading participants in bodily exercises, a practice he has continued to do on all subsequent retreats. The weather was perfect autumn weather, cool in the mornings but beautiful days. I distinctly remember at the beginning of the retreat the wooden floor being distinctly cold but with our presence over the subsequent days becoming noticeably warmer.

The retreat ended on Saturday. Fr. Laurence gave an introductory talk on meditation that evening in St. Benedict's Church in Newton. Attendance was small. All our energies had been spent on the retreat at which there was just under 100 present, and the evening event was left to look after itself. On the Sunday we held an inter-faith event. This had been the inspiration of one of our members, Patrick Doherty, who had been received as a Benedictine Oblate on the retreat. However, this was a mixed success with one participant using it as an opportunity to advertise the merits of her religious faith. Our Muslim participant was Ahmed Zaoui, who gained notoriety by entering New Zealand as a suspected terrorist, but through the determination and persistence of the Dominican friars and a local lawyer, was eventually granted residency.

On the Monday morning Fr. Laurence met with the New Zealand Catholic Bishops and that afternoon left for Brisbane. There were some issues with his visa to Australia at the airport, but these were sorted out by the Air New Zealand staff one of whom was at the Saturday night meeting. Fr. Laurence later wrote up a description of his visit in the *London Tablet* giving particular reference to the kindness of the airport staff.

This visit, particularly the retreat, marked the growing maturity of our community. Now with our own Council we were able to stand alone, but very thankful of the assistance that our Australian friends had given us in becoming established.

Frank Fagan

A tribute

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

My first impression of Frank was his gentleness, his complete commitment to meditation and his love for the teaching of John Main. He loved every aspect of this way of prayer. He was a great teacher for me as he taught me to persevere when nothing seemed to be happening.

Frank welcomed everyone who came to the group. His strength, faithfulness and desire to share with others his love of this way of prayer was the stability of the prayer group.

My lingering memories of Frank are of a man who was a complete gentleman, with a wonderful sense of humour, a great love of nature as he saw God's presence everywhere. There was a beautiful peace about him during the last few months of his life. Frank was a wonderful example for us all on our journey of Christian meditation.

Diana Halloran

Mary McLister

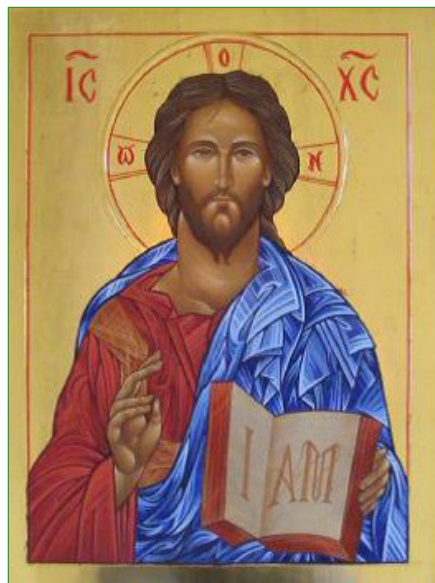
Personal Recollections

I was taught Christian Meditation by an Indian Jesuit at an education conference in Auckland. This was around 1983/1984. I was introduced to the NZCCM through linking up with the group in the Massey Parish in West Auckland which was led by Frank Fagan. It was very good to have the support of this group and also of the wider Auckland Community which was then led by Bill Hodge.

I enjoyed attending the inspirational community meetings and benefitted from access to the resources distributed at these events. Books and tapes on Christian Meditation were available for New Zealand from Bill's home address in Browns Bay.

The NZCCM Icons

by Fr. Peter Murphy



“I AM” “Pantokrator”
Jesus Christ Saviour Ruler of All
Lord of the Universe



“Eleousa”
“Mother of Tenderness”

NZCCM's Icons “Pantokrator” and “Eleousa” were both written by Michael Pervan John the Baptist Studio, Auckland.

The icon of *Our Lady of Tenderness* was commissioned by St. Paul's Parish in Massey, Auckland, and at the same time, the icon of *Christ Pantokrator*. This was commissioned in memory of the three meditators from St. Paul's who died within six months of one another in 2009.

It was they, especially Mark Clay and Frank Fagan, who kept the meditation flame alive during a time when little was happening. They began meditating at 7.00pm every Tuesday in the church in 1989. They had a group of five or six during the first year and then the others left. For about four years it was just the two of them meditating on their own, with the occasional visitor.

In 1993 Diana Halloran joined them. For her, discovering meditation was literally coming home. When I began meditating with children at St. Paul's School in Massey, Diana was my assistant. She became very passionate about the necessity of this. We did a seminar at the Catholic Education Convention in 2009 and Diana was determined to make it even though suffering from terminal cancer. She was dead within two months.

I joined the Meditation Group in the beginning of 1998 and returned in 2004. It is primarily thanks to those early dedicated meditators that we have a vibrant meditating community today.

Gone to God

Richard Clarke died in 2004

Frank Fagan died in 2009

Mark Clay died in 2009

Diana Halloran died in 2009

Avis Ridley died in 2014

Ross Miller

Personal Recollections

For me it began in the mid-1980s. I was a Presbyterian parish minister in Auckland – and spiritually, as were many of us I think, “running on dry”. Two things came together for me back then. One was my daily practice of exercycling, which was tolerable only if I could read at the same time. The other was my membership of the Religious Book Club run, I think, by the Student Christian Movement (SCM). They published new texts on aspects of religious faith, not only Christian, in a paperback format. You paid an annual subscription, as I recall, and they sent you one book a month of their choice. It was an admirable thing. I read these books while cycling.



And so it was that I received a book entitled *Letters From the Heart*, by someone called John Main*. It unveiled for me a real way forward, a daily discipline of silence and stillness, hands-off, asking for nothing, setting down on the side of the road all the lumber, fantasy and regrets and guilt, being present, paying attention, seeing the ego recede to its proper place...

With three months study leave owing, I phoned the monastery in Montreal mentioned in the book and arranged to stay there for a month. It was in some ways a difficult month, but in the process I settled into daily meditation (it was four times a day in that place, part of each Daily Office, and each time for at least 30 minutes), I acquired some Benedictine sensibility and understanding, I discovered that Fr. John Main had died and that Fr. Laurence Freeman was now Prior of the monastery... and that, mysteriously, the monastery was under notice of closure from the superior house in Vermont. I was there at a time of crisis for them, which I now see was a process of dying and rising, as in John 12:24.

I cannot remember now at which point I became aware of Avis Ridley. Avis was a feisty woman who lived at Whangaparaoa, and had stayed at the Montreal monastery before I did. I don't know what had happened there, but they remembered her vividly. Avis tried later to set up a meditation centre in Auckland, in rooms she hired across the road from St Patrick's Cathedral. It was dedicated one day by Fr. Laurence Freeman, during what I think was his first visit to New Zealand. But Avis was precipitate – there had been little consultation or planning, and the venture collapsed. Enthusiasm had prevailed over quiet wisdom and discernment.

But the seeds had already dispersed and were sprouting. On my return from study leave it was to find that some of my parishioners, intrigued that

their minister had sloped off to stay in a Roman Catholic monastery, had made it their business to find out about Christian Meditation. I arrived back to find a meditation group already functioning in the parish – all I had to do was join it.

Fr. Peter Murphy picked up the reins of leadership in the embryonic NZ meditation community, and steadily then it started to come together and grow.

In those earlier times however it was a matter of people here and there around the country reading about Christian Meditation as I did, or meeting and talking with a meditator, and recognising a contemplative pathway we had not been taught in parish life. There were those who began to see their way forward through problems or disappointment with the formal church, or from being stuck in doctrinal difficulties... Christian Meditation seemed like a light ahead, the more so when we found others practising it and could join their company.

It also seemed like a lowering of the historical barriers between Catholic and Protestant, liberal and conservative, saint and sinner – all, one would think, as Jesus himself lived and taught.

I remember too how at an early stage Fr. Peter, and others such as Hugh McLaughlin, got very keen on involving children in Christian Meditation. Jane Lys did valiantly in exploring meditation with women in prison. Meditation groups sprang up around the country, a website was established.

The annual John Main Seminars had started, held each year in a different part of the world, hosted by the local meditation community. An international Guiding Board had been set up, and I often think there must have been a lot of wisdom in those early decisions. I managed to get to two John Main Seminars. One was in San Francisco, the speaker being Fr. Thomas Keating, the proponent of Centering Prayer – and we were impressed at how, despite differing “schools” of contemplative life and prayer, we never encountered disunity or rivalry. The other JMS I attended was in Sydney, and the speaker was Archbishop Rowan Williams, about a year before he became Archbishop of Canterbury. His theme was the *Desert Spirituality*, and his talks have been published as *Silence and Honeycakes*. Travel was, back then (we now realise) relatively easy, and NZ meditators made it to the JMS each year.

At first we were deemed to be under the wing of the Australian meditation community, and indeed we derived help and wisdom from them. I recall the earlier Essential Teaching weekends – I attended one of them, and assisted at two others. Ruth Fowler would fly over, I presume at their expense, to lead these important teaching occasions, and some of our NZ leaders were equipped at these times. Eventually we were able to assume responsibility for these important occasions ourselves. We had already set up a NZCCM Council.

One day Jane Hole, in Christchurch, emailed me with the suggestion that some of the weekly talks I prepared for the Warkworth Christian Meditation Group might be collated and published, and made available to meditation group leaders around the land. I suppose Jane had arranged finance with the Council, and eventually *Sharp Darts of Longing Love* emerged. For me the importance was that the NZ meditation community needed some teaching in Kiwi idiom, with NZ references... home-grown, as it were. It was found useful, and was followed in time by two other collections, *Sight Unseen*, and *A Field At Anathoth*.

These writings seem to have acquired a wider readership than the group leaders. I think there was some nervousness abroad, at least initially, about countries producing their own teaching and commentary. Jane herself compiled a wonderful anthology of insights from contemplative writers past and present, with her own helpful comments, and this has been published as *Forty Days Of Silence*.

I am a little short on dates, places and times, but I think in general that is the way things got going in New Zealand.

* Since republished and expanded as *Monastery Without Walls*
– *The Spiritual Letters of John Main*
(ed. Laurence Freeman Canterbury Press 2006).

