



3.

The Events

- Over There!

2005 – Florence, Italy

National Co-ordinators' Meeting – Fr. Peter Murphy

In 2005 the first international meeting of National Co-ordinators was held in Florence, Italy - such a lovely place for a meeting. This was in recognition of the growth of the Community throughout the world. The main item discussed was the need for the works of Fr. John Main and Fr. Laurence Freeman to be translated into other languages. English has always been and remains the mother tongue, but obviously English does not reach everyone. For instance there was a strong Italian community and during the meeting Fr. Laurence gave an introductory talk with the aid of an interpreter in the crypt of the church next door to the convent where we were staying. Most of the participants then continued on to the *Monte Oliveto* retreat which has been an annual fixture of the community until 2020 when interrupted by *Covid*.

2007 – Montreal, Canada

John Main Seminar & Retreat – Fr. Peter Murphy

In 2007, Fr. Peter Murphy attended the John Main Seminar in Montreal, Canada. He also attended the International School meeting. Fr. Murphy reported to the National Council that the highlight of this event was meeting some of the people who knew Fr. John Main personally and had caught the spirit of his life and work; the simplicity of the practice and total fidelity to it. Dr. Balfour Mount was a key speaker. Dr. Mount had attended Fr. John Main while he was dying. 200 people attended the seminar, predominantly from North America. Fr. Peter was the only New Zealand representative.

2008 – Mainz, Germany

National Co-ordinators' Meeting – Fr. Peter Murphy

In his report to the National Council in February 2009, Fr. Peter Murphy spoke of the second International Co-ordinators' Meeting held in Mainz, Germany. The primary purpose of the meeting was to assist National Co-ordinators in their role, to give them an experience of the Community at international level, and to provide first hand information on the services provided by the International Community base in London.

The main decision there was the need to hold regional meetings as the community was now too large to bring all national co-ordinators together on a regular basis. It was decided that we in the Asia-Pacific region would meet in Malaysia in early 2011.

The National Co-ordinators' meeting was held following the John Main Seminar at which the keynote speaker was Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The theme of the John Main Seminar was *Unity: local and global . . .* A key theme of Cardinal Kasper's talk was the significance of the spiritual ecumenical movement. Divisions come from sin and in the context of the world, they are a scandal. The confusion of the tongues of Babel is reversed. Everyone hears the other in the same language. It is one joint choir of people praying together. This leads to a new understanding. What stood out for me on that occasion was his openness to intercommunion in certain circumstances among Christians. This was not a declaration; he was just thinking aloud!

2009 - Rome, Italy

WCCM School Retreat - Jane Hole

In May 2009, Jane Hole attended an international retreat of the World Community: six days of silence in the convent of *Santa Maria della Provvidenza*, Fara Sabina, in the countryside outside Rome. Forty people attended the retreat. Jane reported that each day offered the same routine - seven periods of meditation, four of mindful walking, the evening Mass, a teaching by Fr. Laurence Freeman, and a short discussion with one of the retreat leaders. During Mass only the *Our Father* was said aloud, in each retreatant's native language.

2011 - Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Asia-Pacific National Co-ordinators' Meeting Fr. Peter Murphy & Jane Hole

The first WCCM Asia Pacific Regional Co-ordinators' meeting was held near Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

Twenty nine people gathered, from eight countries: Australia, Fiji, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, New Zealand, led by Fr. Laurence Freeman director of the WCCM from the UK. At the first session, Fr. Laurence drew us together with the metaphor of bees which work in community but communicate from their own experience.

Relative to the size of our Community, the NZCCM has an unusually well-developed structure, allowing the rich life of local groups to be securely related to a resourceful national body. Our activities are branching out and show how our national resilience and ingenuity can deal with the problems of distance and isolation.

Many of the Asian delegates, gracious and generous, projected a gale of energy fuelled by their uncompromising commitment. Your milder kiwi envoys looked on, admiring and bemused, as they rolled out the military precision of their organisation, the opulence of their resources. The Australians, our natural mates, represented with engaging modesty the most highly developed national community within the WCCM. We and they gladly pledged our support for the needy, emergent Fijian community.

2013 - Hong Kong, China

National Co-ordinators' Meeting

- Vincent Maire & Fr. Peter Murphy

At the Annual General Meeting held in April 2013, it was agreed that NZCCM pay travel and accommodation costs for Vincent Maire to attend the Regional Co-ordinators meeting set to be held in Hong Kong in September 2013. The costs were expected to be approximately NZ\$2000.

Due to an injury, Vincent was unable to travel, however, Fr. Peter Murphy attended this Seminar. The theme was *Desert Wisdom and Oriental Spirituality*, led by Fr. Joseph Wong. The Seminar was followed by the second Regional Meeting for National Co-ordinators. It was at this meeting that Fr. Laurence asked if New Zealand would host the 2015 John Main Seminar.

2013 - Sydney, Australia

Australian National Conference & AGM

- Fr. Peter Murphy

In November 2013, Fr. Murphy attended the Australian National Conference in Sydney at which Fr. Laurence Freeman was speaking. He also attended a day for teachers run by the Sydney Archdiocese and said that in Sydney the Catholic Education system is taking on the practice of meditation in schools. It became clear to him that spiritual formation of teachers in the school system was a priority.

2015 - Honiara, Solomon Islands

Clergy Retreat - Fr. Peter Murphy

At the NZCCM Trust Board AGM in May 2015, Fr. Peter Murphy confirmed that his July trip to the Solomon Islands to lead the Clergy Retreat in Honiara is being paid for by WCCM and not NZCCM.

2016 - London, England

National Co-ordinators' Conference

Vincent Maire and Fr. Peter Murphy

At the NZCCM Trust Board AGM in May 2015, it was agreed that Vincent Maire attend the International Co-ordinators' Meeting in London, England, in June-July 2016. It was resolved that NZCCM pay travel costs and the WCCM pay accommodation costs. Vincent would also attend the Meditation Seminar on *Meditation for Children*, being held during the same period. Fr. Peter Murphy also attended.

Over the period 30th June to 3rd July WCCM held a Conference in England as part of observing its 25th anniversary. Vincent Maire and Fr.

Peter Murphy represented New Zealand at the two events, the first of which was a *Meditatio* Seminar held at Heythrop College in Kensington.

Hope for the Future: Meditation in Schools, was attended by over 200 participants from around the world. The opening speaker, Dr. Rowan Williams, told us that meditation recreates the world we live in and that what occurs in meditation is The Kingdom. Other speakers from different countries spoke about programmes to take meditation into schools.

The final two days of the event focussed on the next 25 years. Presentations from Gene Bebeau (USA) who is the Director of the School and Groups, Fr. Laurence on the *Meditatio* Outreach Programmes and Brijji Waterfield on *Meditatio* Seminars.

Attendees were grouped into regions and each group was asked to come up with what they thought was the most pressing issue in their region. For the Oceania group, a key issue for our part of the world was taking Christian Meditation to a number of small, strongly Christian and generally economically poor nations in the South Pacific.

Overall, 63 people from 43 countries attended the Conference of which most were National Co-ordinators.

My thanks to NZCCM for enabling me to attend this important and timely event. We are a part of a world-wide organisation that is doing incredibly important work. Our challenges are the same as for all the other countries in attendance. However, being English speaking is a huge benefit, and our 70 groups make us one of the bigger communities in WCCM.

NZCCM also sponsored Mary Vautalevu from the Fiji Community to attend the event.



left to right: Vincent Maire, Mary Vautalevu, Fr. Laurence Freeman and Fr. Peter Murphy

Dear Vincent

A very big Bula to you. To the New Zealand CCM I would like to say a very big thank you to you all for making it possible for me to attend the WCCM Seminar and Conference in Kensington and the Conference in Battle in Sussex.

It was a wonderful experience meeting up with meditators from all over the world and it has strengthened my meditation life, which would not have been possible if you had not been so kind in giving me the opportunity to be able to travel to England to attend the Conference. It has been a huge blessing to have met so many spiritual people and to have shared and learnt so much from each one of them. After the Conference I was able to spend time with my daughter and their family in the north of England, which I am very thankful to you all for. A big vinaka vakalevu to Vincent and Peter!

God bless, Mary Vautalevu

2018 - Bruges, Belgium

John Main Seminar - Fr Peter Murphy

In September 2018 Fr. Peter Murphy attended the John Main Seminar which was held that year in the city of Bruges, Belgium. The pre-seminar retreat was led by Fr. Laurence Freeman, his theme *Experience and Meaning*. The meaning of meditation reveals itself through the experience, in particular its fruits.

The two outstanding speakers, Fr. Murphy found, were Sean Hagan: *Leadership and Contemplation*, and Dr. Barry White: *A Contemplative Practice to Transform Healthcare*. Sean Hagan is a retired Counsel to the IMF, and Dr. Barry White a Haematologist and Professor at Trinity College, Dublin, Eire.

2019 - Bonnevaux, France

Youth Retreat 2019 - Edward O'Connor

In July-August, 2019 the WCCM hosted a Young Adults' Retreat at the Bonnevaux Centre for Peace in Bonnevaux, near Poitiers, France. The retreat was specifically aimed at people under 40 years of age, who already had or were interested in establishing a Christian Meditation (CM) practice. Edward O'Connor from Christchurch was sponsored by NZCCM to attend.

2019 - Vancouver, Canada

John Main Seminar - Raymond Eberhard

The John Main Seminar in August 2019 was held in Vancouver, Canada, at Quest University. Keynote speaker was Sarah Bachelard, who spoke on the theme: *Contemplative Christianity for our Time*, and challenged "How do we evangelise without being tribal or egoistic?"

Fr. Laurence Freeman spoke about the richness of our contemplative tradition and the knowledge and wisdom behind the simple repetition of the sacred word.

The John Main Seminar was followed by *An Essential Teaching Presenters' Workshop*. Both were attended by Fr. Peter Murphy and Raymond Eberhard.



left to right: **Damian Robertson, Linda Polaschek, Fr. Peter Murphy,
Rosie Dell & Yvonne Smith**

2019 - Penang, Malaysia

Silent Retreat & Three Day ETW Course

Rosie Dell, Damian Robertson, Yvonne Smith,

Linda Polaschek & Fr. Peter Murphy

In November 2019, Rosie Dell, Damian Robertson, Yvonne Smith, Linda Polaschek and Fr. Peter Murphy attended the Seven Day Silent Retreat and Three Day Essential Teaching Presenters' Workshop held in Penang, Malaysia, which was organised by WCCM.

The Essential Teaching Presenters' Workshop provided the resources necessary to present the revised format of an Essential Teaching Weekend (ETW).

2019 - Perth, Australia

Australian Catholic Youth Festival - Edward O'Connor.

In December 2019, Perth was host to the Australian Catholic Youth Festival (ACYF). The festival attracts around 6,000 young people from around Australia and includes a vast array of speakers, musicians, workshops, and promotions from Catholic organisations. Edward O'Connor from Christchurch was invited to assist the Australian Community for Christian Meditation.

At the start of every hour at the ACCM meditation booth, a brief introduction was given and then an 8-minute meditation session held.

2020 - Brisbane, Australia

Formation for Teaching Workshop

Rosie Dell & Raymond Eberhard

In January 2020, Rosie Dell and Raymond Eberhard from NZCCM attended the WCCM *Formation for Teaching Workshop* at the Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre in Brisbane. The purpose of the programme is to provide formation for individuals to become contemplative teachers within the WCCM tradition, who can then support the development of Christian meditation, by leading retreats and other events in their national communities and neighbouring countries.

Both Rosie and Raymond have already run short retreats for NZCCM, so this workshop further developed their skills and confidence in becoming experienced teachers and leaders within a contemplative framework.

John Main Seminar 2019 - My Impressions

A Contemplative Christianity for our Times

Raymond Eberhard

This was my first John Main Seminar. I attended with Fr. Peter Murphy. It was held at Quest University, Vancouver. Once checked in, I was making my way to the first event, when a man rushed up to me. "Hello! I'm Gustavo from Mexico! It's my first international travel! Later he wept in a deeply moving ceremony as Fr. Laurence inducted him as an Oblate.

Keynote speaker Sarah Bachelard's presentations were all deep and insightful. She challenged, "how do we evangelise without being tribal or egoistic? It's not recruitment, it's reconnecting people to themselves."

Fr. Laurence advised, "prepare yourself for your meditation times. Those are the most important times of the day. Think what that might mean..."

I was pleased to meet Graeme Watson. We recently listened to his CD on the *Cloud of Unknowing* in our group. Another interesting person was Paul Harris. He entertained the audience with recollections of his time with Fr. Laurence.

In another of her presentations, Sarah shared:

"I cannot let go enough. I need to get past myself to be poor in spirit. Something else must happen. Christ comes for me. He leads me beyond myself. He liberates me for my fullest life..."

Some of us had an additional task afterwards. We worked on the essence of how to make ETWs more accessible, less costly and more time available. Discussion took place on sharing the ET in new ways, such as online, or sessions.

4. The Oblates

Oblates



Pre-NZCCM, Avis Ridley had been a Benedictine Oblate. There were also several Benedictine Oblates within the membership of the NZCCM in 2003, but at that time, no formal community. It was not until 15th October **2005** that the Oblates held their formal inaugural meeting.

Earlier that year, four members of the Christchurch Meditation Group had become Novice Oblates, whilst some others had expressed interest in becoming Postulant and/or Novice Oblates. In the summer of **2005**, Jane Hole, Ross Miller and Hugh McLaughlin made their Oblations together at a retreat in Sydney, led by Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB. Diana Halloran made her Oblation later that year in Auckland, and the first Oblate Cell was held at the Cistercian Monastery in Kopua in October 2005.

At the National Council meeting in April **2007**, discussion was held concerning the relationship of the NZ Oblates with the Council of NZCCM. Stan Martin undertook to consult with Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB and Trish Panton (International Co-ordinator of Oblates), about the best way to connect the Oblates with the Council

Since that time, the Oblate Community has grown, and each year commitments are made by new aspirants to the Benedictine Oblate Community.

Prior to the Inaugural Meeting, Stan Martin had the role of preparing and mentoring the Oblates in New Zealand. He continued in this role becoming the first official National Oblate Co-ordinator, a role he held until 2007. Stan was followed by Ross Miller who took up the role until 2009, followed then by Hugh McLaughlin until he retired in 2020. Jo Ward then became the current National Oblate Co-ordinator.

In February **2013**, in response to the WCCM's document *The Way Forward* concerning the Oblate Community, the NZCCM National Council wrote:

'...to keep the Oblate option visible to all meditators'

One of our Community leaders recently commented at a meeting of Trustees that he had only a vague idea of who the Oblate Community were and what they did. We realise we have fallen down on keeping the Oblate Community "visible to all meditators". One of the reasons for this may be that Oblates are careful, within the general Christian Meditation Community, not to give the impression that their calling is "higher" than that of the meditator who is not an Oblate; for this reason they may be reticent about their Oblate involvement. But we recognise that we are not making enough information available about the Oblate Community and are taking steps to address this.

Our first step will be to add an Oblate Section to our website. A further proposal is that we ask for a contribution from the Oblate Community for each

national newsletter. At our AGM later in the year, the Trustees will discuss the relationship between the NZCCM and the NZ Oblate Community, and try to define it clearly for ourselves. We will then be in a position to present that relationship accurately to our Meditating Community and promote Oblation more effectively as a possible path for meditators. While we need to respect the necessary degree of separation between the Oblate Community and the larger Meditating Community, the simple fact is that Oblates fill many of the leadership roles in our Community and do a great deal of the work. We need to take notice of this.

This statement caused the National Council to give more emphasis in its normal administration of NZCCM, and at the AGM in April 2013, the Board of Trustees resolved to ensure that an Oblate representative be a member of the Board. At that meeting, Hugh McLaughlin, the then current Oblate Co-ordinator, gave a brief synopsis of the Oblate Community and how it featured in the work of supporting NZCCM. He requested financial assistance to bring Fr. Michael Mifsud from Australia to lead the Oblate Annual Retreat.

Another result of the Board's commitment to the Oblate Community was the decision to ensure that each issue of the NZCCM newsletter did indeed contain an Oblate article, and that the NZCCM website has an Oblates' page. The first article published in the March 2013 issue of *Christian Meditation* newsletter came from Ross Miller, an Oblate of many years standing, who outlined the whole process of Oblation, its origins and the way of life it informs:

Fr. John Main began teaching Christian Meditation in London, and then in Montreal, in the 1980s. Fr. Laurence Freeman was with him. Both men were Benedictine monks, (OSB). Fr. John envisioned what has come to be called a "Monastery Without Walls." What happened was that meditators were offered Benedictine hospitality, a basic gift set out in the Rule of St. Benedict. Those who chose could seek to become Oblates in the Benedictine Order. They are first received as Postulants; they later may take Novice vows, and eventually full vows as Oblates. These vows are serious commitments, but Oblates generally agree that it is better not to call them vows in the strict sense that monks and nuns take vows. At each stage we state to each other and to God our commitment to go further. We all know that the Rule of St Benedict recognises our limitations and weaknesses.

The final vows are:

Obedience – We understand this word as coming from the Latin meaning "to listen". Obedience requires that we are always open to hear the word of God and the counsel we offer each other. Meditation of course is a very deliberate mode of listening.

Stability – To monks and nuns this means that generally they belong in a particular monastery and do not go shopping around. They are committed to this community and to these people. Oblates interpret this as a general undertaking not to run away from difficulties, to bear with each other. Stability



**NZCCM Oblates on Retreat at the Home of Compassion
Island Bay, Wellington, January 2016. The Retreat was led by Ross Miller**



**NZCCM Oblates on Retreat at the Magnificat Community Retreat Centre
in the Wairarapa, March 2020
The Retreat was led by NZ Oblate Co-ordinator Jo Ward
and outgoing Co-ordinator Hugh McLaughlin**

is an aspect of maturity in Christian discipleship.

Conversatio – The Latin word is *conversatio*, and we always have difficulty explaining it. It means that each day we expect to change, to be changed by the ministry of the Spirit, to become more Christ-like – and to assist each other in our daily conversion. Oblates learn not to say, “Well that’s just the way I am...”

Benedict’s hospitality extends beyond Roman Catholicism. Many Oblates are Anglican. We also have Presbyterians and others. This is all seen as true to the spirit of St. Benedict, although there remain problems, as we know, at the Eucharistic table. The word Oblate means offering, as in oblation.

In a practical sense it means that day by day as well as the times of meditation, we try to give some attention to the Divine Office, to the teachings of the Rule, and to *Lectio Divina*.

Seventeen Oblates attended the John Main Seminar in January **2015**, four made their final Oblation and two others began their Novice year. As a result of the Seminar, four people asked to become Oblates. At that time there were four Postulants, four Novices and nineteen Oblates.

At their bi-annual meeting in January **2016**, three new novices made their commitment and Jo Ward made her full commitment. The new novices were Tim Auld from West Auckland, Shirley Duthie from Central Hawkes Bay and Teresa Manion-Wood from Great Barrier Island. Jo, a member of the Servants Ministry, had her Otaki Community attend the Mass and Oblation ceremony. Fr. Peter Healy was the celebrant. Ross Miller led the studies, the themes being *Affliction of Memory*, *Memories entering our Silences*, and the *Dark Night*. Ross is the Editor and Compiler of the NZ Oblate Community’s regular newsletter. At that time in January 2016, there were 26 members of the NZCCM Oblates.

During their **2018** bi-annual retreat, Graham Howie was accepted as a postulant, Janice Waters and Yvonne Smith as novices, and the final Oblation of Liz Johnson and Laura Holcroft was accepted by Hugh McLaughlin on behalf of Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB.

Twenty-two WCCM Oblates, including several from Australia, attended the 2019 National Retreat *Light & Shade* which was held at the Waikato University prior to the *Meditatio* Seminar.

During the Retreat, Fr. Laurence held a meeting with the Oblate Group

National Oblate Co-ordinators:

pre NZCCM	Stan Martin
2005 - 2007	Stan Martin
2007 - 2009	Ross Miller
2009 - 2020	Hugh McLaughlin
2020 current	Jo Ward

which included five new people, two of whom, made their initial commitment as Oblates.

Fr. Laurence asked about the value that members of the Group found in being Oblates. He suggested that Bonnevaux would provide a base where the communal aspect of Oblate life could be developed in new ways, ways that could provide exemplars for Oblate Groups around the world.

In December **2019**, there was one Postulant, eighteen Novices, twenty-three Oblates with five Cell groups meeting regularly, from monthly to quarterly. During that year, Jo Ward became the National Oblate Co-ordinator, Hugh McLaughlin retiring after eleven years of service in the role.

Over the years, the NZCCM Oblate Community has continued to grow. They have biennial retreats with guest speakers, and also regular regional Cell meetings throughout New Zealand. The biennial retreat alternates with the NZCCM biennial retreats.

At the biennial gathering of Oblates in March 2020, Hugh McLaughlin was honoured for his 11 years of service as National Co-ordinator for the NZ Oblates and Jo Ward appointed to take up the role.

In June **2020**, Oblate Co-ordinator Jo Ward, reported to the Council that there were now 42 Oblates: 23 Oblates, 18 Novices and 1 Postulant. The group uses *WhatsApp* and *Skype* to keep communications going throughout New Zealand, from Great Barrier Island to the Catlins, enabling those more isolated members to keep in contact.



Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB meeting with the Oblates Group during the *Light & Shade* Retreat in 2019

Hugh McLaughlin – a Tribute

In January 2009, at the NZCCM National Retreat, Hugh McLaughlin was asked by Fr. Peter Murphy and Fr. Laurence Freeman to take over as Oblate Co-ordinator, a role he filled for eleven years. At that time there were nine in the Oblate Community; today there are 42, an increase due in no small part to Hugh's encouraging leadership. The most vital achievement, in Hugh's eyes, of his early years in the role was the establishing of Cell groups in different parts of the country. He felt that these Cells became the main source of support for many Oblate Postulants and Novices. Also during Hugh's years of leadership, a system of writing "epistles" was established, by which those in the Oblate Community took turns fortnightly to write a short personal communication to be distributed by email to the rest of the Community. This has allowed the fast-growing Community to get to know one another better, and to strengthen the bonds between them. As changes seem to be afoot concerning some of the processes of the worldwide WCCM Benedictine Oblate Community, Hugh says he will be interested to see what shape these will take. Meanwhile Hugh feels that Jo Ward has the energy and foresight to make an excellent co-ordinator of our New Zealand Oblate Community, particularly as she is able to visit Oblates around the country, which Hugh was not in a position to do.



At the Oblate Retreat in Featherston in March 2020, Ross Miller paid personal tribute to Hugh in words that echo the feelings of many of us:

"I want to say thank you to Hugh. Hugh, along with Jane Hole and I, are the same vintage of professed Oblates, in New Zealand. Our final Commitment was in Sydney, in 2005 with Fr. Laurence Freeman presiding. Hugh, you took over the leadership of the NZ Oblates when I couldn't do it. At that time we were a relatively new Community still under the aegis of the Australian Benedictine Oblate Community, whose leader (and the International Benedictine Oblate Leader) was the formidable Trish Panton. It was during your time as Leader that our Community took its full and independent status. Back then, you stepped up, however reluctantly at the time, at the Community's call. That is something we should remember.

And I now remember times when it was so good to have you there. One year, our arrangement to meet at Kopua fell through at the last minute, double-booked or something, and next I heard that we could meet at your apartment at Karori. So we invaded your domestic life. Ngaire must have been mightily inconvenienced, but somehow it all worked out, and sometime later Ngaire came and prepared delicious meals for us at another venue (it was Christchurch). You have waited for us at airports. You have clarified the page numbers and mysteries of the Benedictine Daily Office. You and Ngaire have managed money for us. You have always sought the advice and counsel of your colleagues.

I think mordant Irish humour and Benedictine liberality go mysteriously very well together. Hugh exemplifies that. He expects the worst, and if he gets it, he knows there's probably worse to come. But topping it all is Hugh's lovely faith in God, his humane Catholicism – do you remember telling me once, jocularly, 'Oh you cannot trust those English Catholics', his manifest humility, his love for us all. So thank you, Hugh."



Hugh McLaughlin
with Jo Ward

