

Founded 35 years ago in Manchester: the world's first and longest running christian meditation group still has 5 original members



? Indeed we call blessed those who have persevered

? Letter of James 5:11

? I know your work, your love, faith, service and endurance? Book of Revelation 2:19

Those words from Holy Scripture aptly describe the longtime faithfulness to the teaching of Christian Meditation by a small group of meditators who gathered together in Manchester, UK, in 1977, under the aegis of John Cotling.

For 35 years now the group has met in various locations, seen many members come and go, and yet five core members out of the original nine have persevered to the present day with the weekly group meetings. Two other members of the group have died. The five members include the group leader, John, a retired textile firm manager, and Sheila Wood, Sean Brown, and Michael and Margaret Gilleen

In recounting the beginning of the group, John says: ?I first came into contact with meditation through a School of philosophy. But because its tradition had a Hindu base, I didn't find it comfortable and subsequently gave up the practice. Then one Sunday while reading a Catholic newspaper, I noticed an advertisement for three introductory cassette tapes on Christian Meditation by a monk, named John Main?.

The three talks had an immediate effect on John. He says: ?My three talks arrived and the authenticity of the content and the commitment of the speaker led me to listen to the talks intently over and over again. I quickly knew in my heart that I had finally found a true teacher

of prayer.?

?Even now,? says John: ?after 35 years, John Main?s talks which we play at each group meeting, still inspire me with the freshness and authenticity that struck me the first time I heard them. To me they are a tremendous legacy for future generations. Fr. John teaches with the courage and conviction of one who was commissioned by the Spirit, to share with those of like mind and heart this path of contemplative prayer. I do believe the group has enjoyed longevity because of the simplicity of his vital teaching?.

In 1983 John undertook a pilgrimage to India, under the auspices of the St Vincent de Paul Society in the UK, to visit various spiritual centres. John Main at this time encouraged John to visit the English Benedictine monk, Bede Griffiths, at his Shantivanam ashram in Southern India. Years later it was Bede Griffiths who stated: John Main is the most important spiritual teacher in the world today?.

Since starting the group in Manchester, John?s journey has led him to become the Christian Meditation coordinator in the Northwest area of England, starting various groups, and becoming an active volunteer for over 20 years in the St Vincent de Paul Society. In addition John has supported many programs in the International Christian Meditation community affiliated with the WCCM.

John insists that his involvement in the meditating community is simply the fruits of the practice. Says John: ?After 35 years, and in hindsight, I believe it is the practice that is by far the most important element in meditation. Only practice, as Fr. John says, verifies the experience within you. Only the practice teaches us what faithfulness, patience and charity are really about. The daily practice of meditation brings one to inner peace, love for others, and ?oneness? with God?.

When I asked John about the importance of the weekly group he responded: ?One of the most important gifts of treading this path of prayer has been meeting fellow group travelers on the way. As John Main says ?the group is a community of love?. We need the support and encouragement of others on this spiritual journey and thus inter-connectedness is such a blessing in the group setting. I think I am beginning to understand that this ?communion? found within a group, necessarily leads all of us to love, service and compassion for others?.

John also points out that in spite of his many travels in the UK and other countries of the world, ?that the greatest journey is an inner one, where we journey from our head to our heart and to the one true centre?.

To the ?faithful five? great thanks for your perseverance and faithfulness and fulfilling John Main?s great statement that the most important thing of all is to ?keep on keeping on?.

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Meditation Groups

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