

Northern European National Coordinators Meeting London March 11th – 13th 2011

Present: José Pype and Siglinde van Ransbeeck (Belgium); Lene Bonnevie (Denmark); Sylvia Thompson, Maria Gavin and Rita O'Connell (Ireland); Toine van Os and Odile van der Hoff (Netherlands); Åse Markussen (Norway); Philomena McQuillan (Northern Ireland); Johan van den Heever (South Africa); Liz Watson and Stefan Reynolds (UK); Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, Susan Spence, Kim Nataraja, Brijji Waterfield and Roger Layet (Guiding Board). Apology from Eileen McDade (UK) in hospital.

1. Introduction

Fr Laurence welcomed all the participants to the meeting which was being held in the 20th anniversary year of the community taking shape as the WCCM. A good time to reflect on how we can best serve the work. Friendship makes an organisation a community – what Fr John called a community of love.

People introduced themselves and spoke of the work of their national communities.

2. Keynote talk

Fr Laurence spoke of ants (how they work together) and bees (how they form new hives). These were organic, contemporary, spiritual models of teams and decision-making. They embodied decentralised control, distributed problem solving and multiple interactions. But as we aim to be a community of love our job is not to succeed, but to be faithful.

3 Meditatio

Fr Laurence explained the origins of Meditatio. He could see the community growing, and also individuals growing spiritually. But he had also been anxious – what pot were we growing in? What context? The catalyst was the need to move from Cockfosters and to house the young oblates. To grow in the context of the secular world gives us a new way of presenting the teaching without changing it. We could say to the secular world that meditation has benefits – but spiritual fruits too. We could evangelise through dialoguing with sympathetic outsiders. Hence the seminars.

The Meditatio house would train young people for future leadership. Meditatio would also make use of the new media – such as through the new WCCM website.

Results of the seminars (e.g. in DVD and journal form) would be given to coordinators. National communities were helping to translate these materials – the Children seminar DVD was so far subtitled in 14 languages.

4. Translations of the basic meditation teaching resources

This was crucial. The School had a list of the Primary Resources for beginners and for new groups – passed around (also attached to these notes, so that all have a copy on computer) Countries could find someone willing to do translation; then apply to the international office for funding; get the translation done; check it (there had been some poor ones!); ideally find a local publisher – if not, print yourselves, applying for money if needed.

5. The School of Meditation

Fr Laurence hoped that all communities – including those countries at early stages of development – could offer The School.

Kim passed around copies of an Update for National Coordinators about The School (copy attached). She said that the aim of The School is to maintain the integrity of the teaching. It generated material to avoid experienced people having to reinvent the wheel when they gave talks. The emphasis of the Essential Teaching Weekend (ETW) was on sharing participants' experience and on deepening their practice. It was NOT a qualifying process.

Kim demonstrated the School part of the main website, highlighting the weekly letters, now to be called Weekly Teachings. Year One of these teachings covered the ETW syllabus: Year two covered problems in meditation, via the teachings of the mystics; year three went deeper into the theology of Fr John. The teachings were currently in English and Spanish – hopefully national communities could ensure more translations.

Kim also showed the user name/password protected area. Any questions about the site, Kim was only an email away.

Discussion:

- *Some coordinators were not aware of the Coming Home resources book*
- *Belgium was trying to translate a shortened version of this book*
- *Laurence suggested updating the book*
- *There was a lot of great material, but several felt overwhelmed by it. Was there a need to look at how it was presented? To focus on the basics?*
- *How does one organise an ETW? The School's guidance on this is being re-edited and will be circulated by Kim when ready.*
- *Laurence would like every group leader to do the ETW. If there was no accessible course, point them to Year One of the weekly teachings on the web.*
- *The UK sends out a starter pack to potential new group leaders. Good idea.*
- *Coordinators should ensure that School (and some other) events in their country that could be accessible to people in other countries were notified to those other countries.*
- *Let Kim know of all School events*
- *There is a need to outline the difference between mindfulness meditation and mantra meditation. Laurence prefers to describe mindfulness as preparation for meditation. Perhaps a new page on the main website, accessed via the drop down list under Meditation.*
- *Toine was writing a chapter (for a book) to explain the relationship of Christian Meditation to other types.*
- *Laurence: "we need to focus on content, not on forms...it's not a matter of consumer choice...all prayer is entry into the prayer of Jesus, as Fr John always said."*
- *Some different views on when, in the journey of a meditator, they should go on the ETW.*
- *Was there a need for a separate group leaders workshop? Some thought so, but not all. An alternative was to get local group leaders together for a morning's discussion.*
- *Question (Johan): "What is the training for national coordinators?" Answer (Laurence) "This is it!"*

6. Meditation groups

Fr Laurence introduced the topic. Groups were a visible place of learning, open to all. They expressed the spirit of the community. They provided support and encouragement to individuals. They were a way of proclaiming the presence of Christ in our midst, and were beneficial to the contexts in which they met.

We split into small groups to discuss issues about groups.

Points from small groups (as recorded on flip chart):

- *Don't be shy of the Christian teaching*
- *Social time fine but not to dominate over silence*
- *Openness to other practices, but teach our own*
- *Re-emphasise practice regularly at group*
- *Use John Main short talks*
- *Variety of Meditatio for ongoing group*
- *Give room for silence, above 25 mins. if poss.*
- *Visit your groups*
- *Get groups to meet each other especially leaders*

Plenary discussion:

- *The UK, with help and endorsement from Fr Laurence, had written to all group leaders to address the issue of the criteria for being a WCCM group, and other issues. This letter is attached to the notes (it is called Qs and As – meaning Questions and Answers)*
- *We talked about what teachings to use in groups. Laurence stressed the importance of listening to Fr John. He especially recommended *In the Beginning* for new groups. He also suggested that leaders pick and choose from the quarterly CDs: and said that, ideally, leaders would sometimes give talks themselves.*
- *Introductory courses were important, as were occasional group leaders meetings, and coordinators' visits to groups.*
- *We have guidelines but ultimately some issues at groups depended on the discretion of coordinators.*
- *Groups can be resistant to being visited. Laurence suggested the coordinator ask simply "Would you mind if I came to meditate with you?"*

7. The Pilgrimage

We watched part 4 of the new DVD. How could we make use of it? Jose wondered about using parts 1 and 2, with discussion periods and meditation, as the basis of a day.

8. Meditation and the Poor

Fr Laurence said that we should work with the poor.

Discussion:

- *Many did not find this easy. We seemed to think there were few natural entry points to the poorer sections of our societies*
- *Sylvia - based on experience in Tralee, Ireland - urged us to "nurture our networks". People who work in social action may have entrees. And the clergy!*

- *Vulnerability makes people open to meditation.*
- *Communication has to be direct and honest.*
- *There are groups (in the US?) in centres for the homeless. Groups in prisons.*
- *Groups for addicts. Word of mouth needed to establish these, as AA permits no advertising. Best led by someone in recovery.*

9.Twinning

It was agreed to twin Scandinavia with the UK, and South Africa with Belgium/the Netherlands. Fr Laurence expected mutual benefit from ongoing contacts.

10.Meditation and Inter-Faith Dialogue

Fr Laurence outlined WCCM's history of dialogue. Meditatio would run an inter-faith retreat in Singapore in January 2012 – Silence and Service. But ground level activity could be as valuable as headline events.

Discussion:

- *A Dutch group had visited a Hindu ashram*
- *Phil (N Ireland)recommended a format for local meetings: people telling their spiritual life story, then meditation, then supper.*
- *Irsih Buddhist nun from Plum Village had led Irish conference*
- *In Belgium there are two regular monthly inter-faith meditation sessions, introduced by different traditions in turn*
- *Bristol interfaith group held two meetings to hear different traditions explain their ways of meditation (suggested by local WCCM coordinator)*
- *“The heart of inter-faith dialogue is developing spiritual friendship” (Laurence)*

11.Meditation and the young.

Hard to define “young”, but being single is often a good indicator. Fr Laurence asked that bursaries to enable young people to come to the JMS should be considered by all. There would be a core group of younger Irish people this year – Laurence would run a Saturday afternoon session for young people.

Belgium has an appealing Facebook profile, De Stille (R)evolutie

12.Websites

Fr Laurence urged national communities to ask WCCM's new IT coordinator, Adriano Massi, for advice on improving the profile of their sites. He could be contacted via the main WCCM site.

13.Oblates

Stefan noted that WCCM oblates take “a sort of a vow” to help the community – so coordinators should get to know who they are!

14.Newsletter

The International newsletter was discussed and Fr. Laurence described how it had become a global and local form of communication. Many countries now add their own national news to the International newsletter. The UK newsletter was shown as an example.

15. Friends Programme

Susan gave the history of the Friends programme which has now been taken over and given fresh energy by Paul and Judi Taylor in Australia. They have produced a Friends brochure suggesting ways of promoting the programme which was enclosed in the co-ordinators information packs.

16. Translations

It was agreed the following were the core teaching books and each country should aim to have them translated into their own language:

1. Christian Meditation – Your Daily Practice – Laurence Freeman
2. The Inner Pilgrimage – Laurence Freeman
3. Christian Meditation – The Gethsemani Talks – John Main
4. Light Within – Laurence Freeman
5. Moment of Christ – John Main
6. Silence and Stillness in Every Season – Daily Readings with John Main

Our bookmark should be available in all languages as well.

It is essential all translations are checked by the National Co-ordinators before going to print. Also to check with Ana Fonseca in Brazil on the language copyrights of the books.

17. Priorities

Each country suggested their main priorities were as follow:

Belgium: Children. Translations. Silent Retreat later in the year. Encouraging group and regional leaders. Website.

Denmark: Translations. Webpage. Holding a Group Leader meeting and Essential Teaching weekend.

Ireland: John Main Seminar this year. (Recording of event to be prompter) Follow-up for schools. Visiting groups of Student Teachers.

Netherlands: Recruiting two new members for steering committee. Weekly teaching translations.

Norway: Establishing WCCM in Norway as a foundation. Retreat to be given this by Fr. Laurence.

South Africa: More work ecumenically. Marketing and resources. Children.

UK: Meditatio. Young Adults. Medio Media. Poor.

Fr. Laurence thanked everyone for coming and it was agreed that it had been a very productive and successful meeting.