



Christian Meditation in PVNC Schools

Prayer of the Heart

Vision

Achieving Excellence in Catholic Education
LEARN • LEAD • SERVE

Mission

To educate students in faith-filled, safe, inclusive Catholic learning communities by nurturing the mind, body and spirit of all.

Table of Contents

- Table of Contents 1
- Christian Meditation at PVNC 2
- What is Christian Meditation? 3
- How to Meditate 4
- The Fruits of Christian Meditation 5
- Christian Meditation and Well-Being 6
- Christian Meditation Guidelines 7
- Sharing the Faith Experience 7
- Meeting Challenges 8
- Religious Education Program Connections 9
- Christian Meditation in the Words of Students 10
- Frequently Asked Questions 11
- Resources 12
- References 12
- Acknowledgements 13



“Teaching students to meditate allows them to shift their focus inward and reconnect to God whenever they need Him. Students become more empowered to self regulate, make good choices and enjoy the feelings of peace, calm and love that it generates, knowing that God is always with them. Their self awareness increases and they are better prepared to learn. In my experience, once exposed to meditation, students look forward to it and even request it, simply knowing that it makes them feel good to be close to God.”

Catherine Whitney, St. Paul CES, Peterborough

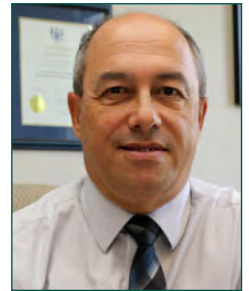
Christian Meditation at PVNC



Prayer is at the very heart of the life of faith. Jesus prayed and taught his followers how to pray. I am enthused by the movement of Christian Meditation in our schools, because it will form individuals and communities who pray and seek a closer union with God. This is a precious gift of our Catholic faith, one that will be a blessing in the lives of our students.

Most Reverend Daniel Miehm, Bishop of Peterborough

We are happy to launch this new PVNC resource, *Christian Meditation*. The ancient Christian tradition is a time-honoured, faith-filled, and grounded practice for ourselves and our students. It wonderfully supports the well-being of all PVNC students and staff, and invites us to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love for each of us. As we enter into meditation, alone or in our classrooms, let us all remember to be open to God's presence and hold each other in prayer. Thank you to all who have contributed to this new and excellent PVNC resource.



Michael Nasello, Director of Education



With all the resources for learning in our schools, the greatest gift we impart to our young people is to know God, not as acquired learning but simply because of who they are, equally and unconditionally loved and in union with their creator and one another. And that, is experienced in silent meditation together.

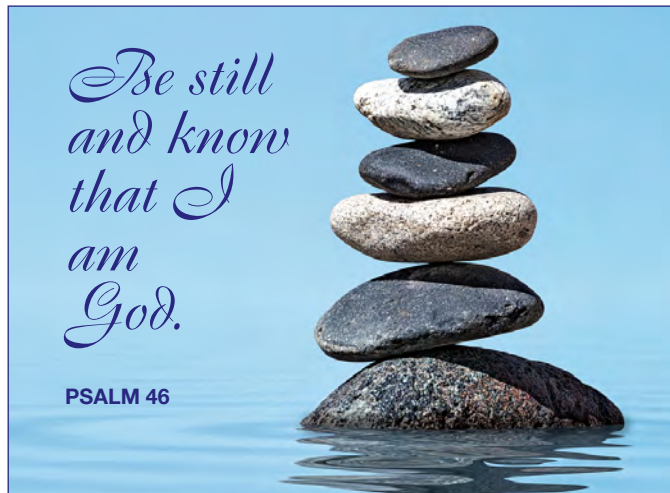
Fr. Paul Massel, Board Chaplain & Faith Animator

Incorporating Christian Meditation into our daily lives encourages our wellness throughout all 3 domains of the Mind, Body and Spirit. Regular meditation in our schools continues to strengthen the foundation of Well-Being, building on the capacity, awareness and culture of wellness which is grounded in our gospel values. Christian Meditation is an excellent tool to continue our work within the Be Well Strategy and to support the development of self-regulation skills for our students.



Jennifer Angelo, Mental Health Lead

What is Christian Meditation?



Christian meditation is a prayer of the heart.

The roots of Christian Meditation can be traced back to early Christians of the third century, who left what they saw as the increasingly corrupt life of the cities, and settled in the desert, to live lives fully dedicated to God in prayer.

These Desert Fathers and Mothers, as they were called, laid the foundations for the monastic movement within the Christian tradition. Their teaching about how to pray and live holy lives was eventually written down in the Rule of St. Benedict, which became the handbook for life in monasteries and religious communities of men and women throughout the Church.

That Benedictine tradition of silent prayer — Christian Meditation — became much more widely known in the last century through the teaching and writing of Father John Main. He believed that Christian Meditation could be practiced by modern people of all walks of life, and he brought the practice to a small community of religious and lay people in Montreal. The work of teaching the practice of Christian Meditation to lay people has been continued by another Benedictine priest, Father Laurence Freeman, and the World Community for Christian Meditation, and is now taking root in school communities throughout Ontario and around the world.

How to Meditate



- ❖ Become aware of your normal breathing pattern for a minute or two as you relax.
- ❖ Silently, interiorly, begin to say your prayer word, or mantra. The suggested prayer word is “Maranatha” which means “Come Lord Jesus”.
- ❖ Listen to the sound of your mantra as you say it, gently and continuously.



- ❖ Sit still and upright with your back straight.
- ❖ Maintain a posture that helps you stay alert and awake.
- ❖ Place both feet flat on the floor (if in a chair) or cross your legs (if seated on the floor).
- ❖ Close your eyes lightly.



- ❖ Do not think or imagine anything, try to clear your mind to the presence of God.
- ❖ If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation; return to saying your prayer word.
- ❖ Maintain a stillness of spirit for the entire period of meditation.

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION WITH STUDENTS

LOOKS LIKE ...

- Students and adults sitting completely still gathered in a prayer circle or community with:
- ❖ eyes gently closed
 - ❖ backs straight
 - ❖ shoulders back
 - ❖ feet flat on the ground or legs crossed
 - ❖ hands relaxed comfortably on lap with palms facing up or down

FEELS LIKE ...

- ❖ hard work to avoid distractions
- ❖ lots of effort and hard work in the beginning, but an easy form of prayer with more practice
- ❖ a special form of prayer
- ❖ self-discipline
- ❖ a special time with Jesus
- ❖ calming to be in the presence of the Spirit and Christ
- ❖ time well spent

SOUNDS LIKE ...

- ❖ a focusing song or intro to the silence
- ❖ a few deep breaths at the start
- ❖ continued silence while repeating the mantra ‘ma-ra-na-tha’ in your mind
- ❖ A gentle sound or song to return to the presence of the group following the meditation

Adapted from the Canadian Christian Meditation Community (<http://www.wccm-canada.ca>)



The Fruits of Christian Meditation

- ❖ Meditation helps us learn about ourselves and God.
- ❖ Children are capable of experiencing the presence of God in simple ways.
- ❖ Meditation can initiate deep faith conversations that bring children closer to God.
- ❖ Children who engage in Christian Meditation at school often share their faith with their families; thus, Christian Meditation helps connect home, school and parish in a simple and experiential way.
- ❖ Meditation increases the desire to build community with others. Children build attentiveness, consideration, love, kindness and compassion.
- ❖ Christian Meditation provides balance in the fast-paced digital world that demands immediacy.
- ❖ Meditation has been associated with a number of subjective physiological effects. Regular meditators report some or all of the following:
 - a boost in energy levels – an increase in productivity, creativity and physical stamina;
 - increased self-acceptance and a gradual release from the tendency to attribute self blame;
 - a greater ability to express emotions (both positive and negative);
 - fewer bouts of irritability or emotional or behavioural outbursts; and/or
 - an improved and expanded sense of identity.

Christian Meditation in relation to PVNC's Be Well Strategy



MIND: This icon represents the importance of positive mental health concepts such as hope, optimism, gratitude, resilience, a positive thinking style, social-emotional skills and self-regulation to overall well-being.

Christian Meditation improves the ability to maintain single-focused attention, even in the face of internal and external distractions; it can also improve problem-solving and decision-making skills.



BODY: This icon focuses on core factors impacting all aspects of wellbeing including mental, physical and emotional health. These factors include sleep, nutrition, hydration and physical activity.

By being attentive to breathing, Christian meditation can deepen awareness and understanding of the bodily process that sustain life and become more in tune with physical health. Long-term meditation increases activity in the limbic system, and decreases cortisol levels thus improving emotional outlook and motivation.



SPIRIT: This icon symbolizes the foundational role that faith, our Gospel values and our Catholic Social Teachings have in terms of our overall well-being as an individual, a community, and as a society. As we support students to achieve the Catholic Graduate Expectations, we develop their capacity for the expression of wholeness and holiness in their lives.

As a form of prayer, research shows that 80-90% of children have experienced the presence of God. Meditation leads to increased self-knowledge and self-acceptance and children also gain patience, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Christian Meditation and Well-Being

Well-Being is a critical priority for PVNC schools. Christian Meditation in schools provides a poignant response to the following key themes which emerged through well-being consultation with students, staff, clergy, parents, committees and community members:

❖ Focus on Faith

This theme emerged from our conversations with students, priests, and principals. We heard that our efforts in the area of well-being need to be grounded within our Catholic Faith lens and connected to the work that we do in faith development. **MIND • BODY • SPIRIT.**

Christian Meditation is a well developed faith-based practice that helps students experience the presence of God.

❖ Focus on Everyday Well-Being Practices

This theme appeared in many conversations but most prominently in our conversations with students. We heard that while schools are doing excellent work in the area of mental health awareness, we still have a lot of work to do in embedding knowledge, habits, and skills for well-being in everyday school and classroom practices.

Christian Meditation can be incorporated regularly into school routines and emphasizes the 'being' in well-being.

❖ Focus on High Quality Resources

This theme was represented in our conversations with staff groups and was particularly evident in our discussions with our First Nations Métis and Inuit committee. We heard that we need access to high quality resources that represent the diverse perspectives, experiences, worldviews and unique factors impacting on well-being that are represented in our classrooms.

Christian Meditation is well grounded in Christian tradition. The World Community of Christian Meditation supports building bridges between different cultures and traditions and bringing people together in the spirit of unity.

❖ Focus on Communication

This theme clearly emerged from all groups that we consulted with and particularly from parents. As a board, we were encouraged to communicate clearly and consistently about our ongoing efforts to support and enhance well-being for all.

Christian Meditation encourages gathering together as a community in the presence of God. This prayerful communication is furthered with an opportunity to share about what was experienced or felt and how this might relate to wellness in a faith community. This document also supports our commitment to open communication regarding the benefits and practice of Christian Meditation.

Christian Meditation Guidelines

- ❖ Make Christian Meditation an established part of your regular class routine.
- ❖ Allow students to take ownership by taking turns to do special jobs (e.g., setting up the prayer space, bringing in a sacred object for the prayer space from home, saying a prayer, turning off prayer candle, etc).
- ❖ Observe students during the meditation until they become comfortable with this form of prayer. Once students are comfortable, engaging in meditation with them will further enhance the experience for all.
- ❖ Keep reviewing the reason for saying the mantra continuously from the beginning of the meditation to the end. Focus on the mantra keeps the mind free of distractions. It helps a person be still and be silent in order to be open to the movement of the Spirit, the presence of Jesus, and the embrace of God the Father. When one finds the mind wandering, gently come back to repeating the mantra.
- ❖ There is no good or bad prayer session. God blesses our desires.

Sharing the Faith Experience

Following a period of Christian Meditation, teachers can debrief the experience by encouraging students to share the experience using guiding questions such as:

WHAT ... ?	SO WHAT ... ?	NOW WHAT ... ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ How are you feeling?❖ What do you like about meditating?❖ What do you find easy about Christian Meditation?❖ What do you find challenging about Christian Meditation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ What do you find helpful about Christian Meditation?❖ What does Christian Meditation mean to you?❖ How does Christian Meditation influence your personal well-being?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ What are our next steps?❖ How might we share our experience with others?❖ How does Christian Meditation relate to other faith practices you have experienced?

Meeting Challenges

- ❖ Do not stop the meditation to attend to issues of restlessness. Wait until afterwards to gently respond to any questions or concerns the student may have and allow them to tell you what would help them maintain the quiet.
- ❖ Inform students that meditation is a discipline and improves with practice.
- ❖ Some students might initially need some specific modification. Place students who have difficulty settling into meditation near good role models, or change where they meditate (e.g., sit on a chair instead of on the floor).
- ❖ Remind students to return to the mantra if they are feeling distracted. This strategy will also benefit the students who are sitting quietly, but are not really engaging in the process.
- ❖ If a student is unable to participate due to behavioural or other needs, and chooses to remove himself/herself from the meditation, let the student leave the meditation space. Provide time and encouragement for the student to join in when ready to meditate. Remember that all students can meditate ... find creative ways to include students in the practice of meditation.



Religious Education Program Connections

Christian Meditation aligns with the Religious Education Curriculum which states that “In religious education, students should have an opportunity to use a variety of forms of reflection: journaling, biblical reflection, silent meditation, guided meditation, contemplative prayer, peer discussion, and meta-cognitive reflection through self-assessment.”¹

Christian Meditation fits within the strand of *Prayer* and helps students grow in their relationship with God - Father, Son, and Spirit - by teaching the forms of prayer as well as the “attitude with which followers of Christ approach prayer.”²

In the *Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ* Religious Education Program, Christian Meditation is formally explained in Grade 4 as a *Way We Pray* and referenced regularly in the Teachers’ resource as a suggested class prayer experience. In addition, Christian Meditation music is included in each grade of the *Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ* program.

Christian Meditation

Sometimes we can sit quietly with God and enjoy being in His presence. This kind of prayer is called **Christian Meditation**.



Some forms of meditation encourage people to empty their minds. Christian meditation is focused on filling the mind and heart with a sense of God’s presence. Some people find repeating a favourite scripture passage or holy word helps them stay focused. Others concentrate on a song, hymn, or even an image to help them think about God.

**Grade 4 Student Book,
Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ
(page 50)**

¹ Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (2012). *Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document Grades 1 - 8: Religious Education*. Page 20.

² Ibid, Page 33.

Christian Meditation in the Words of Students

“Christian Meditation is the best thing to do to calm down. I like it a lot when I am frustrated. It gives me time to talk to God.”

“Christian Meditation is a time when I can calm myself down if I had a bad day.”

“I like it because it’s not noisy.”

“Christian Meditation helps me listen to what God has to say to me.”



“You spend time talking to God and Jesus. Meditation is awesome.”

“Meditation is like giving a hug to yourself and getting in touch with the awesomeness of God’s love.”

Frequently Asked Questions

STUDENT QUESTIONS

Can we lie down while we meditate?

When we lie down, our bodies may feel it is time to rest or sleep. That is why we sit upright, so that we can stay alert, repeat the mantra, and pay attention to God's presence.

Why is it important to keep my eyes closed?

Keeping our eyes lightly closed helps us to keep from being distracted by things around us.

Why is it important to be so still?

When our bodies are still, it helps our minds to be still too, so that we can pay attention to saying the mantra.

Why do we say the mantra?

We say the mantra continuously to keep focused during our time of meditation. It helps us to keep other things out of our minds.

What does maranatha mean?

The word maranatha is from the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke, and it is considered a sacred word. It means "Come Lord Jesus".

What if someone makes a noise and I have to see what is going on?

There will always be noise of some sort, so you just have to keep your eyes closed even if you are curious to see what is going on. What is going on will usually just end up being a distraction.

What should I do if someone (or something) distracts me?

Keep saying the mantra; really listen to it inside your heart, and try not to give the distraction any of your attention.

What if I cannot help making noises or moving around while we are in the meditation circle?

Try to remember that you are a friend to the others in the circle, and friends help each other. When we meditate together, it is important that each person be still and quiet, not just for themselves, but for the others too.

PARENT QUESTIONS

Is Christian Meditation associated with new age practices or other religions?

"Christian meditation is Christian!"³ Although the word 'meditation' is not exclusively Christian, Christian meditation is not a mind activity (not mindfulness) but a pure prayer of the heart which is linked specifically to the Christian tradition historically, theologically, scripturally and communally.⁴

Does Christian Meditation replace other forms of prayer?

"Christian Meditation is not meant to replace any form of prayer that already exists within our Catholic schools."⁵ It can enrich other forms of prayer.

How can I experience Christian Meditation?

Ask your child to share their experience of Christian Meditation and try to meditate together at home.

³ Institute for Catholic Education. *Monograph - A Catholic Perspective: Christian Meditation*. Page 1

⁴ Christie, Ernie. *Coming Home: A Guide to Teaching Christian Meditation to Children*. Page 64

⁵ Institute for Catholic Education. *Monograph - A Catholic Perspective: Christian Meditation*. Page 3

Resources

Apps: WCCM App2

Websites:

- ❖ The World Community for Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org)
- ❖ The Canadian Christian Meditation Community (www.wccm-canada.ca)
- ❖ Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ (www.pearsoncanada.ca/school/growinginfaith/teacher)
- ❖ The School of Meditation (www.theschoolofmeditation.org)
- ❖ Christian Meditation for Children and Young People (www.cominghome.org.au)



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Acknowledgements

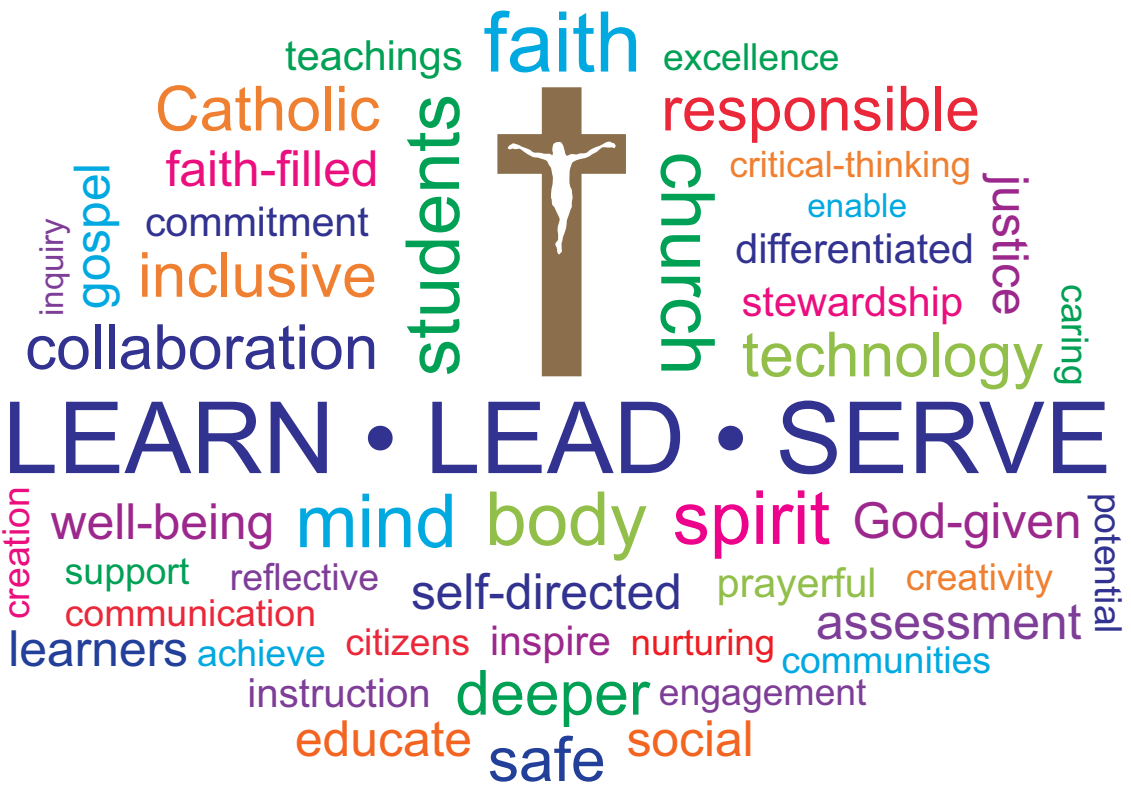
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