



Committee on  
Contemplative Spiritual Formation

Online Meeting Program

**Theme: “Blessed are Those who Mourn”**

**Saturday, March 23, 2024**

**7 a.m.** San Francisco/Vancouver; **8 a.m.** Denver/Calgary/Mexico City;

**9 a.m.** Chicago/Winnipeg/Lima;

**10 a.m.** Toronto/New York **11 a.m.** Sao Paulo/Buenos Aires/Santiago/Halifax;

**2 p.m.** London; **3 p.m.** Hamburg/Zurich; **7:30 p.m.** New Delhi;

**10 p.m.** Manila/Singapore/Perth

**Gaia Room, Meditation Chapel**

[If you have registered with the Meditation Chapel, but can't find the email with the link that was sent to you, please send an email to [dignitytoronto@gmail.com](mailto:dignitytoronto@gmail.com). For new Meditation Chapel users, register ahead of time [here](#).]

**Checking In:**

As a ground rule for our gathering today - for the check-in and for the rest of our gathering today - only share what you are comfortable to do so. In addition, I ask everyone to remember that this is a spiritual space of confidentiality and trust.

God is present in all parts of our lives – not just the easy or serene moments. Acknowledge how you are feeling in this moment. This could be up or could be down. If being calm is hard, acknowledge it. If you find yourself frustrated or stressed, acknowledge it.

As our check-in, I invite you to share:

- your name,
- what county you live in,
- how you are feeling now, and
- one thing you are grateful for today.

## Opening Prayer

Please turn to page 3.

### + Christian Meditation – Silent Prayer +

We'll now move from spoken prayer to 20 min. of silent prayer. It will be an opportunity to stop our repetitive thinking and become more aware of the present moment and the Divine indwelling in us.

I have some suggestions for what to do during the silence, as most persons are not accustomed to this state. Please note that this is not the only way.

First, when your eyes are closed, pay attention to your breathing. Breathing is something we do from birth to death, normally without any awareness. To become grounded in the present, notice your breathing during the 20 min. of silence.

Second, select a sacred word or phrase, such as "Yahweh" the Hebrew word for God, saying "Yah" as you inhale and "Weh" as you exhale. Another mantra word is "Maranatha" meaning "Come Lord Jesus." Recite it as four syllables of equal length: "Ma-ra" as you inhale and "Na-tha" as you exhale. Whatever word you select, gently repeat it over and over during the silence. **Do not try to think or image anything – spiritual or otherwise.**

Third, during the silence, addictive thought patterns and obsessive ways of feeling will circle by, again and again, saying "Think me! Think me! Feel me! Feel me!" as they try harder to be noticed. In 90% of our thinking, our monkey brain rehashes the past and worries about the future. However, God is only to be found and experienced in the present. You may wish to use the imagery of some small boats lining the shoreline of a stream or river that is nearby. When one of these repetitive thoughts arises, gently name the thought or feeling, put it in one of the waiting boats and push it gently into the moving water, letting it flow downstream away from your present consciousness. If you choose, you can deal with it after our session today.

So, we'll start our 20 min. of silence. Please turn off your microphone and your video camera too. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Take two or three deep breaths. Feel yourself supported in whatever position you're in. Sink into that space where silence awaits you. Rest in the Divine who is resting in you. You are consenting to God's presence and action in your life. So, I invite you to be silent, still and aware. Listen and learn, being open to heart wisdom and grace.

## Reading

See the attached on pp. 5, 6.

### Possible Sharing Questions:

*What am I hearing? What phrase or idea from the video **resonates** or challenges me? As an LGBTQ person?*

*How is it **touching** my life now?*

*How will I respond? Is there an **invitation** for me to be or to do in the next few days?*

## LGBTI/ GNRC News

*Any update, news, or a pressing issue in the community locally or globally that affects or concerns us as LGBTI and as Catholics. How am I / are we responding?*

## Spoken Prayers

[Opening Prayer] - <i>Embedded Wisdom</i>	<i>Evolving Spirituality: Mysticism</i> [Closing Prayer]
<p>We gather, mindful of the longings, the hopes and the bond we share with people throughout human history who longed for a better world and who were prepared to work for it.</p> <p>We gather, aware that each of us has been anointed in baptism to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort those who mourn, to replace discouragement with hope, to see possibility in ruined and deserted places.</p> <p>We gather as bearers of good news, each in our own way capable of bringing hope to the world around us.</p> <p>We open ourselves to be receptive, to be productive, to bear fruit that will endure and will benefit all whose lives we touch.</p> <p>We give thanks for men and women throughout the centuries who took a stand for justice who refused to be cowered by powerful people who remained hopeful in times of darkness, who inspire us to work for a better humanity.</p> <p>We gather around the story of Jesus a human faithful to the voices of Jewish prophets who called people to listen to and respond to the urgings deep within them, to work together for a more compassionate, just and peaceful society. We hear Jesus' words today challenging us: "Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!"</p> <p>We are mindful of how he listened, how he responded to the desire embedded within him, how he set himself to help persons of all gender identities to believe in themselves and to establish a better world.</p> <p>We listen today...</p>	<p>We celebrate our common origin with everything that exists. We celebrate the Divine Presence, the Ground and Sustainer of everything that exists, in whom we live and move and have our being.</p> <p>We acknowledge this awesome mystery embodied in every human person, aware that each gives the Divine Presence unique and personal expression.</p> <p>Here, now, the Divine Energizing Presence is everywhere present, visible in every human person who loves.</p> <p>Here, now, this Presence comes to visible expression in each of us. We give thanks for persons of all gender identities throughout human history who sought to articulate human connectedness with the Divine and with all of creation.</p> <p>We give thanks especially for Jesus of Nazareth. He inspires us to name ourselves as "temples" of the Divine Spirit and challenges us to live and act accordingly.</p> <p>Jesus challenges us to look into our hearts, to examine the way we are neighbor, to overcome our prejudices, to put an end to divisions, to stretch our generosity, to overcome our fear of the mystery, to see the Divine present in our everyday loving, to make the "reign" of love visible throughout our world.</p> <p>We believe the same Spirit of Divinity</p>

[Adapted from Michael Morwood. *Prayers for Progressive Christians: A New Template*. 2018, pp.90-92.]

that came to visibility in Jesus  
yearns for visible expression in us.

This is our common dignity  
whatever our race or creed,  
whatever our place or time.

We long to see our common dignity  
proclaimed  
honored  
and celebrated by all religions.

We pray that the one Spirit all people share  
may be given free and generous expression  
for the betterment of humanity  
and our world.  
Amen.

[Adapted from: Morwood, Michael. *Praying a New Story*. Orbis Books.]

For further information on the GNRC Contemplative Spiritual Formation Committee, see  
<https://rainbowcatholics.org/contemplative-spiritual-formation-gathering/>

"Jesus assumes that we will find it easy to love those to whom we are instinctively attracted. There is no great reward in doing that, he assumes. But loving them is the first class in the school of love that will teach us how to love those we find difficult, those who do us harm and those we tend to demonise. Loving those whom we feel it pleasant and natural to love feels different from learning how to love those who find us disgusting and good material for torture chambers or gas ovens. To be told when young that we cannot love those whom we are instinctively attracted distorts and impedes our progress in the human school of love. It creates a crisis in our personal development – a danger, but also an opportunity.

But, eventually – by discovering that life is exactly about learning how to love and not excluding even those who exclude us – we move towards loving like God. Embraced, losing and finding ourselves in this new love, led beyond any fantasy of fulfilment, we are divinised. The theological mantra of the early church was 'God became human so that human beings might become God.' That's what we are learning. We come home. Our humanity is explained by it even as it is blown apart beyond limitation.

All this should be obvious to anyone whose Christian faith comes from the gospel and their experience in their 'inner room' of prayer. Yet, if faith instead derives only from cultural distortions claiming to be 'true Christianity', the essential message is lost, hope is crushed, and humanity everywhere is diminished...

What happens when by such a distorted version of the gospel you are indoctrinated to feel that 'being gay' means being sinful and unnatural, even evil... A dark secret is whispered in your ear, that if you love those you are attracted to, you will be expelled from God's school of love if you dare to explore and enact it sexually? This is one of the horrific flaws and sins of institutional Christianity, Pentecostal, Reform or Catholic. It needs to be exposed and publicly repented of. This book is a courageous and prophetic contribution to this work of Christianity in repenting for such a cruel and stupid sin. Without blaming or demonising their oppressors, the contributors here fearlessly call the churches to repentance.

Since the invention of homosexuality as an 'abnormality' requiring punishment, repression or curing, whole societies were fooled into thinking of it as a major crime against humanity. The latest absurdity is that it undermines the 'family'! Sex as a whole thus became legalised and controlled by social ideas of 'sexuality'. As a result, even 'normal' sexual expression acquired a tinge of dirtiness and naughtiness. The best were sexless or at least publicly so. The invention of homosexuality demanded the invention of heterosexuality, two aspects of a spectrum that became polarised and antagonistic. Men, women, straights and gays all need liberation from this. Religion and secular society scored own goals when they invented homosexuality as a perversion. Every kind of love divinises us...

... Describing faith in the light of their 'sinful' sexuality is part of the transformative revolution of the gospel itself. As you read this book, I hope you will see what I mean by hearing what these writers say. ... if your faith is not deepened by seeing how their faith became more authentic as a result of their existential and social ordeals, please read them again. Patently, this is not only about Christian faith. Christianity, Judaism and Islam and all other institutional religions have much to be confronted with by their gay members. A new spiritual solidarity is waiting to be discovered in an interfaith work of restoring health and truthfulness to religion itself.

Now that the cat of inclusive love is out of the bag into which religious thinkers had pushed it, what next? Reasonable people know that the sticky labels of sexual orientation are not very different from those concerning being left-handed or having eyes of different colours. Different, not worse. And there are advantages to being different. This book is part of a process of recovering our full humanity and as in any process there will be stages (counter-attacks and defeats included) but progress is now inevitable.

The first stage is being as open and honest about one's own nature as one cares to be. This may be in Gay Pride parades, in intelligently confronting religious bigotry with its lack of logic, double standards and

hypocrisy: and for its being so un-Christlike in its rejection of wisdom and kindness. Thoughtful and moving books like this collection have a quieter but powerful contribution to make to the major metanoia that religion and societies need. We may need to be shocked and challenged in order to change. But we also need to have hearts and minds tenderly converted. This is a global and historical issue, of course, but individual voices and personal stories, as we read them here, touch hearts, change minds and make the spiritual truth inescapable.

The second stage is to remember human wisdom about same-sex love and its intimate expression in all cultures and periods of history. The first piece of recorded literature (four thousand years old) – the Epic of Gilgamesh – describes the relationship between the king and his companion Enkidu. No apologies are necessary. It is about love without the shadow of secrecy or shame – although modern scholars often feel uneasy about labelling it. It is both erotic and cosmic. The Sufi poet and scholar Rumi and the mysterious Shams Tabrizi fell in ecstatic love that brought them emotional death, but also birthed one of the greatest of all mystical poets. I remember the look of shock and confusion when a friend of mine learned that the Sonnets of William Shakespeare, or most of them, were written to a man. David and Jonathan. Hildegard and Richardis... John Henry Newman and Ambrose St John. These examples have only one thing in common: they involve love between members of the same sex and were, in the fullest, non-religious sense, holy and divinising. But each manifestation of love is unique and mysterious, involving the open, inexpressible 'secrecy' inherent in the human heart.

The third aspect of this process testifies to the way in which all the crimes of homophobia may eventually be forgiven and reintegrated in the one great love. Everyone raised to feel shame and self-rejection for their sexual nature is pushed against the margins. False identities may be created to protect and to survive socially. But marginalisation also frees from attachment to any construct of identity. The rejected person and group touch the overlapping zones between the social, psychological and spiritual. Being excluded and marginalised, the risk is to lose our sense of personal worth and true identity. Those who are marginalised need extra support and solidarity but often have a gift for it that socially acceptable people lack. On the margins of the respectable, beyond the pale, we can also discover how close we are to our true self, the kingdom of heaven where love overflows all labels and boundaries. This may come in flashes of deep prayer. But a contemplative practice will bring us directly to it and then integrate it with our still-to-be-concluded life story.

Meditation is simply such a practice, woven into daily life, redeeming the spilled wine of love and healing the split identities that cause mental illness and psychological dysfunction, reluctance to trust, blocking basic freedom to accept and give love. Meditation is found in all branches of the wisdom traditions. It is the healing of the rejected, oppressed and broken heart. It also creates community among those who practice it, establishing a community of faith among people of different beliefs and orientations.

My personal thanks and congratulations to Eros Shaw for commissioning and compiling this collection of Christian gay perspectives. It is brave, timely and necessary, and also part of a now irreversible wave of the Holy Spirit bringing us back to human normality.

Dom Laurence Freeman OSB, Director, World Community for Christian Meditation