



Committee on  
Contemplative Spiritual Formation

Online Meeting Program

Theme: **Women and the Church**

7 May 2021

9 am Toronto/New York; 2 pm London; 3pm Hamburg; 9 pm Manila/Singapore

Wisdom Room, Meditation Chapel

### 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
- what you are most grateful for today.

### Opening Spoken Prayer

We give thanks for the Divine indwelling in ourselves, totally unmerited. And if in me, then in all others too, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religion or any other human characteristic.

In our gathering today and in the days to come, may we become more conscious of our true selves as children of God, and let go of our false selves - our egos - that we have built and grasped over the years. May we also treat others with deep respect, as they too are inherently holy, now and forever.

**+ 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 where the Creator can be encountered.

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. It's 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. Use the imagery of some small boats lining the shoreline next to 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. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Take two or three deep breaths. [pause] 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.

## Spoken Prayer

Moved by a compulsion of the Holy Spirit we cannot remain ignorant of this injustice in our midst. We long for all humanity to be acknowledged as equal, particularly among your community of the church, so we pray grieving for the lost gifts of so many women. We ask you, God of all peoples, to bring insight and humility to all those in positions of dominance, and an understanding that the ascended Lord called us all to act,	doing Christ's work here and now. We ask this of you, God our Creator Jesus our Redeemer Spirit our Sustainer.
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## Discussion

*Please observe:*

- We accept one another as we are.

- We share experiences from our lives. Please use “I” language.
- We share briefly so that everyone who wants to do so has time to share.
- We listen attentively and without interruption when someone else is speaking.
- We pause a few seconds after a person shares before sharing ourselves.
- We are always free to remain silent.
- We keep the sharing in the group confidential.

### **How do we move forward? Some suggestions**

1. We can begin by being radically inclusive, at all levels of our ecclesial communities. We need both women and men in all ministries, as well as people who fit into an imprecise human gender. The first criterion for leadership is that people be reliable witnesses to the Gospel.
2. The current theology of the priesthood, which claims that the priest is another Christ (*alter Christus*) must be deconstructed and a new theology of ministry must be built on the example of Jesus and those who are dedicated to service to the community.
3. We must set aside an understanding of Church as made up of two hierarchical castes, clergy and lay, where clergy hold the key to salvation and the laity is a flock which simply follows. We need equality.
4. Dispense with titles, be it Reverend Father (or Mother or Sister or Brother). Not to mention Excellence, Eminence, Monsignor (= My lord), Your Holiness. We have parents who are our fathers and mothers. All members of our church community are our sisters and brothers with whom we maintain brotherly and sisterly relationships.
5. Abolish all hierarchies, including those of material means, social standing and education. Every person has value and everyone has a voice.
6. There is no need to dispense with the vow of celibacy per se, but we do not impose it. Celibacy is not a condition to be admitted to ministry. Chastity, on the other hand, which is the holy and healthy exercise of human sexuality, is a precious Christian virtue required of everyone.
7. Insist, however, that Church leaders refrain from pontificating and trying to regulate the sexuality of persons, especially as they relate to contraception, abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex, etc. Rather, speak out on the important issues of respect for the dignity of all persons, openness to the poor and most needy, and loving others as ourselves.
8. Develop a new understanding of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (vowed Religious, for example), so that obedience of all Catholics does not become blindly servile and self-destructive.
9. Demand that the current atmosphere of secrecy, silence and submission be replaced by the acquisition and continuously developed processes of discernment, self-esteem and self-confidence – in other words, learn to love ourselves to love others better.

### **Some questions**

How do you think we can move forward on these issues when so much of the church is so conservative and opposed to change?

Do you feel there are any theological arguments against the ordination of women?

Why do you think many women are opposed to women priests?

Do you think it is necessary to reform the nature of the priesthood before admitting women to it? Might admitting women simply temporarily prop up a whole structure that is unfit for purpose?

Ordaining women would be a major change and require the church to admit it has been wrong to exclude them. It would almost certainly provoke schism. How long do you think women must wait before this can happen?

Do you think it is better to work for change inside the church or will the church only listen if women start to leave in large numbers? (Apparently 700 young people left the diocese of Antwerp after the CDF responsum on blessing same sex couples.)

## **Closing Prayer**

Dear God who are both our father and mother

We who love your church pray that you will help all of us who are the church

To follow the calling of Jesus to ever greater holiness and love

And to acknowledge that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female" but we are all one in Christ Jesus

That we may utterly discard all within us that protects our power and privileges

Or discriminates against anyone because of their gender

So that the gifts of all your children may be free to enrich

And make more fruitful the life and work of your church.

We ask this in the name of Christ our Lord.