

## Church News September 2018 - Translation

### **Calm and meditation strengthen the brain**

Sssh...When did you last have a completely calm moment? And did you have more than just a minute? It would seem that it doesn't happen often enough or for long enough.

WHO describes noise as "the scourge of the western world", and research shows that every fifth European is exposed to invasive noise in the night – apart from the daily background noise at home and at work, online and offline. Once again it shows that humans were not designed to live in 2018. We were not built with traffic noise, background music, open plan offices, or washing machines in mind, or for constant bombardments of 'likes', news, text messages or other types of messages on our mobiles. We were designed to be aware and wary of intrusive noise. Something we have to act on and guard ourselves against. We were designed to fight or flee the dangerous animal that's approaching. And that's how our minds still react in 2018.

*["Don't be hard on yourself. Whatever you do today, Let it be enough."]*

Studies from the University of Greensburg and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health confirm that constant exposure to noise increases the body's stress level and can cause all sorts of stress related disorders. But the interesting thing is that we now also know quite a bit about what the opposite of noise, quiet, does to the human brain.

The deepest and most intense physical and mental calm is to be found in meditation and similar activities. New studies from Harvard and the University of Derby among others show that meditation, mindfulness and compassion training for instance can cause the brain to reduce activity in the areas that deal with mind chatter, anxiety, and self-criticism.

In comparison, another study shows that people who have practised complete quiet and have meditated for more than 20 years have brains that are quite simply better preserved than those of people who haven't meditated, and the many mindfulness and meditation courses start making sense on a whole other level.

In Christianity we're also familiar with the concept of meditation. Many people think of meditation as an eastern tradition, but Christian meditation has been part of the Church since the early days as a way to feel close to God. The word meditation is of Latin origin and means to 'ponder' or 'consider deeply'. The first Christians to use meditation were probably the Desert Fathers who withdrew to the isolation of the desert in order to spend most of their time in meditative prayer. Theologians have engaged in meditation since then, and the various Christian orders of nuns and monks have also used meditation right from the beginning as a common practice in their faith. These days many people use meditation and prayer as a way to get energized and find peace in a busy world. Prayer and meditation are closely related.

When somebody says 'prayer', most people associate it with something you ask for, but as you delve deeper into prayer, and the wordless prayer of meditation, the difference between prayer and meditation becomes less noticeable. Christian meditation is a listening prayer in which you become better at understanding God's guidance by listening inwardly. That's why prayer and meditation are often used interchangeably. Many people long to get closer to God, and to experience peace in their lives, and this is where Christian meditation can be helpful.

It can, however, be difficult to stay focused, so Christians have developed various methods to help us stay focused. What they all have in common is that they can be practised wherever you can be undisturbed. This could be at home in the lounge, in nature, at church or another special room which has been arranged to keep the focus on God. The Desert Fathers used short prayers that they repeated over and over again. Nowadays, many people use the Jesus Prayer which in all its simplicity goes like this: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."

*Rev. Anja G. Mathiasen*

*(Bibliography: Marguerita Hvid, "What is Christian Meditation?" and Henrik Tingleff, psychologist, "Quiet Please! Stillness Strengthens Your Brain.")*

## **News**

Since our last newsletter the church council has seen some changes, and we have to thank and welcome on board the following people:

**Thank you to** Annette V. Jensen who has chosen to step down as the chairman of the council for the Danish Church in New Zealand. Annette has been a member since 2012 and chairman since 2014. Thank you so much, Annette, for your competent work and contribution to the church, which has benefited the Danish Lutheran Church in New Zealand. It has been a pleasure to work with Annette who has not only been an intelligent and capable chairman, but who has also been amazingly perceptive. Annette has managed to bring together, encourage, support and motivate the Danes and the church council around the church and its ministry. Annette has a wonderful warm and caring personality and has been a highly treasured chairman and friend over the years. She has always been a loyal and dedicated supporter of the pastor and her work, and she has had a keen interest and involvement in the church finance side of things, as well as the Church's social and cultural importance in New Zealand. We shall miss Annette as chairman, but are happy that she will continue to be part of our congregation.

**Thank you to** Helle Rosenlund Gilderdale, who joined the church council in 2015 and has been a loyal, capable, diligent and intelligent council member, and we thank her sincerely for her involvement. Fortunately, Helle has agreed to proofread and translate parts of the Church News, which is much appreciated. Helle will also continue to be part of our congregation.

**Welcome to** Lene Sandfeld Nielsen who joined the council in April 2018, and was elected as the new chairman of the council of the Danish Lutheran Church in New Zealand at our annual general meeting on 1 August. Lene is from West Jutland and has lived in Hamilton since 1993. She works as a Product Development Manager at a goat milk dairy and lives with her NZ husband and their 2 boys in Hamilton. We're looking forward to working with Lene and warmly welcome her aboard.

**Welcome to** another new member of the church council: Birgitte Saaby Bendsen.

Birgitte is originally from Randers (in Jutland), but moved to Lolland and then New Zealand with her husband and their 4 children in 2013 after 25 years on their own farm growing arable crops. They now live on a farm just outside Geraldine, and Birgitte works as the Export Administrator at Barker's. We are delighted to have Birgitte on board the church council and look forward to working with her. Welcome Birgitte.