



## Faithful City

“Silence is  
God’s first  
language.”

### Vicarious trauma takes its toll on people’s lives and work. Is there a way to help?

Yes. It is clear that first responders, counsellors and others who work with victims of sexual assault and family violence often suffer the effects of vicarious trauma.

FaithLink’s 2005 research clearly indicates that centred meditation can and does help mitigate the effects of vicarious trauma. It makes people feel better in their work and in their personal lives. It opens a new awareness and sense of being.

#### How is Faithful City involved?

- The Very Reverend Robert Pynn, a dedicated advocate of centred meditation, says that FaithLink’s research has proven how centred meditation will also rewire our brains to respond differently to colleagues and clients and open us to collaborative innovation.
- Faithful City, in its support of contemplative life, highlights the link between our inner and outer work that inspires and creates new ways of achieving the mission of whatever field of service (for profit, non profit or voluntary) we may engage.

#### What can you do?

Explore centred meditation as part of your self-care strategies. If you practice centred meditation, share your expertise so others may learn its positive effects.

You can also make a contribution to further our work, or simply spread the word. You can make a real and meaningful difference to causes that are important to you.

Faithful City –  
Sharing faith.  
Igniting ideas.  
Building community.

Bringing a faith perspective and spiritual foundation to Calgary’s social services community, Faithful City endeavours to raise up our community – and all who live here.

We seek real change on a systemic level; not bandaid solutions. And we believe that, together, the spiritual, social welfare, government and business communities can affect this change – for all.

**Volunteer.**  
**Donate.**  
**Share.**

Please contact us at  
[info@faithfulcitycalgary.com](mailto:info@faithfulcitycalgary.com)

# Centred meditation and vicarious trauma

## About centred meditation

“Silence is God’s first language.”  
Contemplative prayer or centred meditation is a wordless, trusting opening of the self to the sacred presence at the centre of our core. It is accomplished by an inner gesture of releasing thoughts, concerns and attachments.

Mastering this inner gesture of surrender can be a gateway to profound attitudinal change and the rewiring of our consciousness. Research has shown that daily meditation increases attention span, sharpens focus and improves memory. Ancient wisdom further holds that centred meditation opens us to the spacious wisdom of the heart.

## Practicing centred meditation

Sitting on a chair, a prayer stool or a mat, allow your heart to open toward that invisible source of all that exists. Whenever a thought comes, simply let it go and return to an open, silent attendance to the depths. Use a sacred word such as ‘peace’ or ‘be still’ to let go of the thought promptly and cleanly. When twenty minutes has passed, simply get up and move on with your life.

This affirmative contemplation does not seek to suppress thought through concentration on a single object or image. It accepts, welcomes and lets go in a continuous motion of the spirit. Its objective is not an intense emotional experience of the divine, but rather an inner awakening that shows itself in compassionate living.

## Centred meditation and vicarious trauma

In 2005, FaithLink’s Director Dr. Irene Sevcik worked with Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault, a noted contemplative and Wisdom teacher, and the Very Reverend Robert Pynn to conduct a two phase research project about centred meditation and vicarious trauma.

First, the effects of vicarious trauma on the work and lives of people working in the fields of sexual assault and family violence were explored. Participants offered a varied list of personal, relational and agency based experiences, including:

- A high level of stress;
- The inability to ‘leave work at work’ (sleep disturbances, nightmares);
- Relational tension; mistrust of and a skewed perspective of men;
- Hyper-vigilance about their safety;
- Ill health;
- The need to vent frustrations;
- Desensitization to clients;
- Staff turnover / ‘burn out’.

Participants were then shown how to perform centred meditation as an element of their self-care. After twelve weeks, participants were interviewed again.

During the second set of interviews most participants noted they were more aware of the effects of vicarious trauma. There was a consistent theme that the meditation practice had a positive effect on how they felt about and viewed themselves, and they related feeling better and having ‘better days’ on the days they meditated. Participants spoke of:

- Being more accepting and in control of themselves.
- Increased awareness of the importance of one’s inner self and of acknowledging that some difficult issues may need to be addressed.
- Increased awareness of the need to maintain boundaries between one’s own emotional states and those of one’s clients.
- The need to respond to others from a less defensive position.

Participants also used a variety of phrases to describe their emotional experiences, such as:

- a sense of peace and serenity;
- being more relaxed;
- the enjoyment of ‘being quiet’;
- an increased ability to deliberately ‘slow down’ the pace of their lives.

## Is centred meditation for you?

The FaithLink study had a finite time line, but it did establish the willingness of agencies to support centred meditation on the job, where some continue today. The work of poet and author David Whyte also demonstrates the desire of corporations to introduce such practices into the work-life of their executives. If you are working in either sector ask after these opportunities. Also check out the weekly opportunities offered through Fire and Grace: [onalark48@yahoo.ca](mailto:onalark48@yahoo.ca).

If you are interested in finding out more about centred meditation and how it can help you or your organization, please contact us or FaithLink.