



# Maranatha yoga made in Cumbria

I am a British Wheel of Yoga teacher and trainer, a committed Christian and founder of Maranatha Yoga. This is a form of Christian prayer and worship using the physicality of well-established yoga postures to prepare the body and mind for Christian Meditation. The correlation of prayer and posture creates a synergy which deepens the understanding of the words of the scriptures and enhances the element of spirituality in the practice of yoga. It is an opportunity to take time to slow down, listen to God's message and discern our path of devotion and service. This article outlines the background and development of this project within Cumbria, the UK and beyond.

It all started from a meeting in 2000 with the late Reverend David Wood of Maryport, who was the Regional Co-ordinator for the World Community for Christian Meditation [www.WCCM.org](http://www.WCCM.org) for Northwest England. He introduced me to a form of Christian meditation that uses the mantra *Maranatha* to focus and still the mind. Maranatha is an Aramaic word meaning 'Come, Lord'. He encouraged me to explore the beneficial effects of yoga to enrich Christian Meditation, to lead Christian Yoga sessions as part of his retreat days and to put my ideas into writing. This expanded into workshops further afield, including a feature on the BBC programme 'Songs of Praise' in 2008.

Having established Christian Yoga classes at my own church, St Martin's, Bowness-on-Windermere, the next step along the path was at a 'God for All' meeting in 2016 at St Mary's, Allithwaite, introducing Richard Passmore as the new Fresh Expressions Enabler for the Carlisle Diocese. He supported my suggestion of Christian Yoga as a Fresh Expression and, with his wife Lori, we developed the project, agreed on the title Maranatha Yoga and ran further classes in local churches. In 2019 my book *Maranatha Yoga – a preparation for Christian Meditation*, with a Foreword by the Reverend Ian Adams, was published by Columba Books (ISBN: 978-1-78218-354-9).

The next challenge was to find new teachers and to bring this to a broader community, for which we organised a website [www.maranathayoga.org.uk](http://www.maranathayoga.org.uk) and Lori established a Facebook Group. The Reverend Pauline Steenbergen and her husband the Reverend Steve Carter, then joined the team. Pauline and I had met previously in 2011 on a Spiritual Direction Course organised by the Cumbria Ecumenical Spirituality

Group at Rydal Hall, where I first shared my ideas with her. In the meantime, Pauline, a Church of Scotland minister and former Hospice Chaplain in Carlisle, had trained as a Yoga Scotland teacher in 2016 and was teaching classes [www.limegreenyogi.co.uk](http://www.limegreenyogi.co.uk) in her local area. Together, Pauline and Steve have injected vision, enthusiasm and creativity into teaching, including a presence on social media.

Maranatha Yoga is now reaching a growing number of those who are curious or seekers, disciples and teachers. The Covid pandemic has, of course, put a temporary halt to the majority of indoor gatherings but, paradoxically, the restrictions imposed by the pandemic have stimulated wider interest and participation. Since April 2020, Pauline and Steve have been hosting regular, on-line Maranatha Yoga sessions on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of the month. Pauline regularly creates content for the website and the Maranatha Yoga Cumbria Facebook Group community. This has had the effect of opening up the experience to a much wider group of practitioners, including experienced and new yoga teachers, with participants from all over the UK and Europe. Moreover, it has attracted interest from overseas, resulting in sessions led by Christian Yoga leaders from the United States [www.christianspractisingyoga.com](http://www.christianspractisingyoga.com) and from Denmark [www.CrossYoga.org](http://www.CrossYoga.org)

Maranatha Yoga was recognised as part of the county-wide vision of God for All by Bishop James in July 2020. Being rooted in the Diocese provides a sense of belonging and prayer support for the future. We are a hard-working non-stipendiary team. I handed over to Pauline as Team Leader in March 2020 with Steve, Lori and myself as Associate Leaders. Maranatha Yoga as a movement is non-profit making and donation based. A grant enabled us to make video resources for training purposes and in the last year we have been able to offer workshops for The Diocese, for the Fresh Expressions National Gathering and for The Church Mission Society's annual festival for Pioneers. Plans are in place to implement a Maranatha Yoga Foundation Course online and expressions of interest are welcome. A subsequent Transition Course for Yoga Teachers who wish to integrate Christian Spirituality into their teaching is in the pipeline. Fresh Expressions is a national movement and we enjoy the UK network and links with other pioneers in Cumbria Fresh Expressions and in the Northern Mission Centre. Cumbria Fresh Expressions Facebook Group is a doorway to discover what others are doing and there is potential for meaningful collaboration. Aware of the isolation of Christians practising and teaching Yoga in the UK, Pauline has begun a regular online support group. This is also a forum for theological reflection, discussion and prayer.

The ultimate purpose of Maranatha Yoga is to prepare us in body, mind and spirit for the discipline of silence and stillness as practised in the tradition of Christian Meditation. When John Main founded WCCM and reintroduced the ancient monastic teaching of meditation into the broader Christian church, his vision was that

this deeper form of prayer, beyond words, would bring the different parts of the Christian community together. This unity was not an end in itself, but one that would empower the Church to be fitter for God's mission in the world. Maranatha Yoga is fulfilling a need in the health and wellbeing sector for an ecumenical Christian presence, witness and mission during this pandemic. Our Fresh Expression supports the refreshed God for All vision to 'follow daily, care deeply, speak boldly and tread gently'. I am humbled and heartened by what Jesus is doing in and through our team and community. Contact us [maranathayogacumbria@gmail.com](mailto:maranathayogacumbria@gmail.com) to join in.

Christine Pickering 2021