

# HEALTH, HEALING & RELIGION

C O N F E R E N C E

**May 25-27, 2012**  
**Vidya Institute, Toronto**

**NIPISSING**  
U N I V E R S I T Y

## Itinerary

Hello and welcome. Because we are committed to the idea of holistic health the organizers of the Health, Healing and Religion Conference feel it is of central importance that the medium reflect the message. For this reason the conference was developed as a hybrid between a retreat and a more conventional academic conference. As a result we do not have parallel sessions and hope that participants will take part in all aspects of the conference including lectures, panels, yoga, stress reduction practices and treatments. The idea is that you will emerge not only more informed but also rejuvenated and with take home ideas about how to take better care of your health and that of people in your family and community. Also as part of the vital task of taking care of the earth the conference organizers are committed to as little environmental impact as possible.

*One free treatment is offered to all participants subject to availability.*

### **FRIDAY MAY 25, 2012**

**8:00-9:00 am**

#### **Registration**

**9:00-9:30 am**

#### **Welcome – Gitta Bechsgaard**



**9:30-10:00 am**

### **Navigating the Secular and the Sacred in Health Care**

**Gillian McCann, Religions and Cultures, Nipissing University**

At last year's conference we discussed the question of "what is health" from a wide variety of perspectives. This year we will engage with idea about how we can bring this wealth of knowledge regarding health and healing into the secular world. While many agree that this is desirable there are many challenges that can arise when trying to bring these two paradigms together. While recognizing the difficulties inherent in this process the conference will focus on those who have been successfully engaging in the important dialogue between the sacred and the secular.

**10:00-11:30 am**

### **Transformative Practices in Nursing**

**Dr. Rick Vanderlee, Dean of Applied and Professional Studies,  
Nipissing University**

This talk will examine new approaches to nursing including the innovative Scholar Practitioner Program Dr. Vanderlee developed in co-operation with the University Health Network and Nipissing University. Drawing on his own experience as a nurse and as an administrator the talk will conclude with a discussion of the implications of these new approaches for improvements in health care in general.

**11:30 am-1:00 pm    LUNCH**

### **Treatments by Appointment**

**1:00-3:00 pm**

### **Keynote Address**

**Dr. Christina Puchalski, Founder and Executive Director, George Washington  
Institute for Spirituality and Health**

In this talk Dr. Puchalski will discuss her experiences in developing curriculum for medical schools that integrates an understanding of the patient as a whole person and acknowledges the importance of religion in the healing process. Dr. Puchalski will also address the challenges of negotiating sacred and secular paradigms with the healthcare system. As a key player in this emerging field of health, healing and religion the role of the George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health will be discussed.



**3:00-7:00 pm**

### **Treatments by Appointment**

**3:30-7:00 pm**

#### **Yoga Practice**

*Please wear comfortable and loose fitting clothing and feel free to bring your own yoga mat*

#### **Core Stability and Digestive Health: Agni practice**

**3:30-5:00 pm with Gitta Bechsgaard**

**5:30-7:00 pm with Claire Wicks**

The Sanskrit word *agni* is most easily understood as “digestive fire”. In a practical sense, yoga practices which engage *agni* strengthen the muscle groups in the abdominal region, lower back and pelvic floor, and tonify the digestive system. These combined actions results in a plethora of positive health outcomes including improvements in: core stability, postural problems, metabolism, digestion and injury prevention in adjacent joints. In this experiential session participants will learn a traditional set of Ayurvedic yoga practices for balancing *agni* which are dynamic and safe to practice at home.

### **SATURDAY MAY 26, 2012**

**7:30-10:00 am**

#### **Yoga Practice**

*Please wear comfortable and loose fitting clothing and feel free to bring your own yoga mat*

**7:30-8:30 am with Gitta Bechsgaard**

**9:00-10:00 am with Mikkel Kristensen**

#### **Invigorating morning practice: Surya Namaskar**

*Surya Namaskar*, or sun salutation, is a stimulating and invigorating series of yoga postures that build endurance, stamina and strength. This series is typically practiced in the morning, to increase ones energy at the start of the day. It works on many anatomical and physiological systems of the body: creates flexibility and movement in the joints and skeletal system, stimulates the cardiovascular, lymphatic and respiratory systems, oxygenates the blood, strengthens the heart; and balances the endocrine system allowing its various glands to function properly. It is well suited to sedentary individuals or those suffering from depression or mood disturbances. Research based protocols use this practice specifically because it increases positive mood, motivation, cardiovascular function and can be used in positive weight management.



**10:30 am-12:00 pm**

## **Health, Psychology and the Sacred**

**Chairs: Gitta Bechsgaard, Gillian McCann**

In this section the discussion will centre around the ways in which wisdom from a variety of religious traditions can be integrated effectively into the practice of psychology. Growing research has demonstrated that meditative practices, including concepts of mindfulness and witness consciousness, can have a profound impact on psychological health. The discussants will address some of the ways these techniques can be used and how they can best be deployed within the larger health system.

**12:00-1:30 pm LUNCH**

**1:30-2:30 am**

## **FILM: The Fires that Burn**

This Vision produced documentary examines the life and mission of Sister Elaine MacInnes, nun and Zen Master, who has been instrumental in implementing yoga and meditation program in prisons in Britain and Canada.

**3:00-5:00 pm**

## **Cheryl Vanderburg, Program Coordinator, Freeing the Human Spirit Foundation**

Cheryl Vanderburg and the team from Freeing the Human Spirit Foundation will talk about their experiences in fulfilling the vision of founder Sister Elaine MacInnes. This will include a description and discussion of the various initiatives of the foundation including teaching yoga and meditation in prison both to inmates and personnel.



**5:30-9:00 pm**

### **Restorative Yoga**

*Please wear comfortable and loose fitting clothing and feel free to bring your own yoga mat*

**5:30-7:00: with Claire Wicks**

**7:30-9:00: with Robin Hurlow**

### **Relaxation evening practice: Chandra Namaskar**

*Chandra Namaskar, or moon salutation, is a calming practice that utilizes some of the postures practiced in Surya Namaskar in combination with less strenuous postures for a less intense practice. This sequence of postures generates feelings of calmness and peace of mind, and is particularly well suited to individuals who suffer from insomnia or anxiety. In addition, within Ayurvedic literature, this practice is considered to be particularly important for women's health and reproductive system function in all phases of life.*

## **SUNDAY MAY 27, 2012**

**8:00 am-12:00 pm**

### **Yoga Practice**

*Please wear comfortable and loose fitting clothing and feel free to bring your own yoga mat*

**8:00-9:00 am: Invigorating morning practice: with Mikkel Kristensen**

**10:00 am-12:00 pm: Stress management through Yoga and self-reflective practice. [smriti sadhana] Gitta Bechsgaard**

It is well known that modern society exposes us to many kinds of stress; the advent of technology, demanding professions, busy family lives, financial pressures etc. often leave individual development on the back burner. However, contemplative practice, which has long been a cornerstone of traditional systems of healing, is increasingly relevant to foster inner sanctity and a sense of meaning and purpose throughout various phases of life.

Through developing a connection with the inner self, well-being and psychological balance are cultivated and the individual learns to adapt with flexibility in the face of stress. Contemplative practices, which are subtle in nature, complement the more tangible self-care and disease prevention practices taught through physical practice and life style education.

**12:00-2:00 pm LUNCH**



**2:00-5:00 pm**

## **Radiating Kindness: Expanding our Capacity for Kindness and Compassion**

### **Talk and Guided Practice**

#### **Khenmo Drolma, Abbess Vajradakini Nunnery**

Just like the Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King, Gandhi and Mother Theresa, we too can learn to expand our hearts to lovingly include all beings. We each have the capacity to realize a vast, openly loving heart and to genuinely help others. This is our natural state. Yet our habitual patterns are to shut down or run when faced with difficulties. Surprisingly, it is only the investigation of our shared humanity, including our own vulnerabilities, that allows our sincere compassion to arise! Khenmo Drolma ancient and tried and true techniques, drawing from Lord Jigten Sumgon's special practice of training in loving kindness, and the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life. You will learn: How to train your mind to see all whom you meet as beloved. How to practice compassion/loving kindness, on and off the cushion.

**5:00 pm**

### **Closing Remarks**



## Biographies

### **Gitta Bechsgaard, RYT, MTC**

**Gitta** is the founder of Vidya Institute and has been practicing yoga for over twenty years and teaching for the past fifteen. She received her foundational training in Europe at the Yoga Institute of Copenhagen (1990-1997), and in 1999 completed a two year program at the Esther Myers Yoga Studio, Toronto. For the last nine years she has been studying yoga philosophy, Eastern psychology and Sanskrit privately with Krishan Mantri. Gitta holds a B.A. in psychology from Copenhagen University, and a PhD and Masters of Therapeutic Counseling from the Open International University. The focus of her work has been the transformation of consciousness and healing of mind, body and spirit through a variety of healing paradigms.

### **Khenmo Niyama Drolma**

Khenmo Niyama Drolma is the Abbess of Vajra Dakini Nunnery. She spent two years in training at Gampo Abbey guided by Ven. Pema Chodron. In 2002 she took full ordination as a Buddhist nun in Taiwan becoming the first woman in the Drukung lineage to do so. In 2004 she was installed as a Khenmo in the Drikung lineage, becoming the first westerner in her lineage to hold the responsibility of abbot. Since then she has worked continuously to establish Vajra Dakini Nunnery and teach the Dharma internationally. Khenmo Drolma, a breast cancer survivor, has spent many years in the Art and Healing and Hospice fields. She served as an Art Fellow at the Connecticut Hospice and board member of the Addison Respite Care Home in Vermont and Maine Respite Home.

### **Christina M. Puchalski, MD**

Dr. Puchalski has been principle investigator or co-principle investigator in several research projects in spirituality including evaluation of a spiritual assessment tool she developed which is currently used widely in a variety of clinical settings; an NIH funded study on spirituality and will to live in HIV-AIDS patients; and an innovative study to integrate spirituality into healthcare settings called INSPIR. Dr. Puchalski developed and was PI for an awards program in spirituality and health education since 1996 which resulted in a model curriculum in spirituality and health. In a collaborative project with City of Hope and GWish, Dr. Puchalski co-led an initiative to create national spiritual care guidelines for palliative care.

Her many publications and presentations have urged the development of a patient-centered perspective in healthcare, with specialization in the importance of integrating spirituality and compassion into one's professional practice. Her work has been featured on numerous print and television media including Good Morning America, ABC World News Tonight, NBC Nightly News, The Washington Post, The New York Times, and the Washington Times.



Dr. Puchalski is also a member of a contemplative lay order, The Discalced Carmelites. Part of her clinical practice in internal medicine and geriatrics is integrating patients' spiritual beliefs into their health care. With her expertise, she can knowledgeably address the sensitive medical issues surrounding palliative and end-of-life care and care of seriously ill patients. Dr. Puchalski's work in the field of spirituality and medicine encompasses the clinical, the academic, and the pastoral application of her research and insights.

### **Cheryl Vanderburg**

Cheryl is the Program Coordinator at Freeing the Human Spirit, a foundation created by Sister Elaine MacInnes in 2004. The aim of the Freeing the Human Spirit Foundation is to support the physical, moral, and spiritual development of inmates in Canadian correctional facilities through the practice of yoga and meditation. Classes for prison staff are also offered. The staff and volunteers train yoga teachers to work within the prison system and also support letter writing campaigns to inmates.

### **Rick Vanderlee, PhD. Dean of Applied and Professional Studies, Nipissing University**

Dr. Vanderlee along with being a visionary administrator, has taken a leadership role in innovations in nursing. A former nurse himself he created the Scholar Practitioner Program in a co-operative venture between Nipissing University and the University Health Network in 2011. This program is aimed at fostering leadership and continuing education for nurses and at the larger goal of improving health care in Ontario.

