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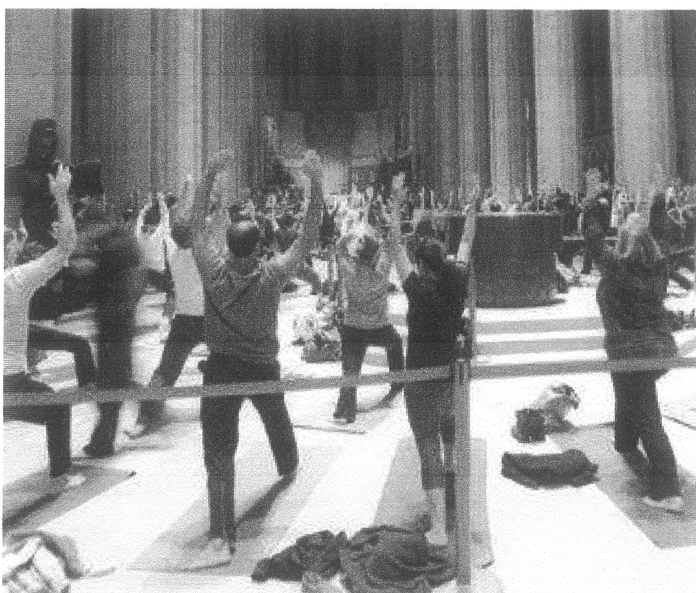
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Faith in flow

By *admin*

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Grace Cathedral's yoga team talk love, church, and the Christian-yogi connection



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ON THE OM FRONT Every Tuesday evening, hundreds of people flock to the Grace Cathedral Labyrinth to practice yoga with local teacher Darren Main. With Easter around the corner, I talked to Main and the Reverend Jude Harmon, who manages the program, about how this unlikely class came to be, and why it works so well in San Francisco.

San Francisco Bay Guardian *Darren, how did you wind up teaching the class at Grace Cathedral?*

Darren Main Jamie Lindsay, a yoga teacher who had been attending Grace Cathedral for years, started the class there. When he moved to New York in 2009, he asked me if I would take the class. I had long admired Grace Cathedral for both its architectural wonder as well as how it has been on the cutting edge of social justice and spiritual equality. Right from the start I could feel something magical happening. What started off as a small group of students has now grown to over 300 people each week.

SFBG *How does yoga fit in at the church?*

Jude Harmon Grace Cathedral was established with the founding vision "to be a house of prayer for all people." We were at the forefront of civil rights, welcoming Martin Luther King Jr. to preach here, and we paved the way forward for the embrace of LGBT people in the sacramental life of the Church long before it became the norm at a national level. This yoga class is just a natural extension of our commitment to welcome all people, from every walk of life, and to support them in their spiritual growth.

SFBG *What's it like to teach yoga at Grace?*

DM It's an amazing experience. You can't help but feel something sacred by simply walking through the door. It's like teaching in the Taj Mahal or the Great Pyramid. People come from all over the world just to see this building, walk its labyrinth, and admire the architecture and artwork. I am moved to tears sometimes when I think of how much this cathedral — and specifically doing yoga in this cathedral — represents the magic of San Francisco.

SFBG *Do you have to be a churchgoer to attend?*

DM Not at all. Yoga is a science, not a religion and so it requires no belief to be effective as a practice for quieting the mind, opening the heart, and balancing the body. In fact, many atheists find yoga extremely rewarding. Non-Christians attend the class for the community, the practice, and the beauty of the cathedral.

SFBG *Can yoga enhance one's spiritual practice?*

DM Yes, because it helps us to more easily access the divine when we have a quiet mind, a balanced body and an open heart. Yoga can also be a way of exploring the same universal questions that religion explores, like "why are we here?" and "who are we?"

SFBG *Does the practice of yoga connect in any way to the practice of Christianity?*

JH I remember the first time I saw the yoga students ascending Grace Cathedral's great steps in droves on the dusk of a July evening. They seemed like angelic visitors from some Hyperion realm. But they weren't carrying Books of Common Prayer in their hands, or hymnals, or even Bibles — they were carrying yoga mats! While most of them wouldn't dream of setting foot in a church for a traditional Eucharist, I felt my heart bond with them. At the heart of a yogic practice, just as at the heart of our Eucharistic practice, is the possibility of a self-integration that opens out our consciousness toward the world in compassion.

SFBG *What is the yoga class like?*

DM Given that the class is so diverse in terms of age, physical ability, and level of yoga practice, I focus on the more gentle and meditative side of yoga. The cathedral itself invites a more inward and contemplative experience as well, so it is really a perfect fit. Every week, I invite Bay Area musicians who have a transcendent quality to play at class.

SFBG *Why do you think a class like this became so popular in San Francisco?*

DM San Francisco has always been known for being open-minded, and that quality makes people open to the unique experience of doing yoga in a church. That said, I would not be at all surprised if we see this idea spreading beyond the Bay Area over the next 10 years or so.

Karen Macklin is a writer and yoga teacher in San Francisco. Read her [On the Om Front](#) [2]