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# CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

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Volume 2, Issue 3

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## LECTIO

by Tom Ward  
*University of the South, Sewanee*

For years before centering prayer discovered me, I had been asking God to direct my reading. After being given this practice, I saw that my prayer had been answered before I prayed it. For instance, early in college lines from T. S. Eliot haunted me: "...there will be time/ To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet..."; "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons..."; "This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper." Later I read others: "Teach us to care and not to care/ Teach us to sit still."; "Where shall the word be found, where will the word/ Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence." Still later I read Eliot alluding to the "still point of the turning world."

These lines prepared me for centering prayer when it came along, and through centering prayer, I now understand them in a deeper way. For instance, the first set of lines seem to me to point to the false self and its consequences. The face that I prepare for others is a false face. The second set has some glimmer of hope: sitting still and seeking the silence puts me in the place to hear the God whose first language is silence. The third reference declares

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## RANDOM REFLECTIONS

by Carolyn Goddard  
*Christ The King Church*

While reading the Spring 2002 edition of *Church* magazine, I came upon this Sufi prayer:

O Divine One, to thee  
I raise my whole being  
A vessel emptied of self.  
Accept, O gracious God,  
this my emptiness,  
and so fill me with thyself -  
thy light, thy love, thy life -  
that these thy precious gifts  
may radiate through me  
and overflow the chalice of my heart  
into the hearts of those  
with whom I come into contact this day.

As it may for you, this prayer brought to mind my practice of centering prayer. During a time when many words are being printed and spit out to highlight the differences between the Christian and the Islamic traditions, I was heartened to find this emblem of connection.

I assume the Sufi pray-er shares with me the experience of coming before the "Divine One" empty, powerless, in need. This is the stance I seek as I sit to center. It is also the stance I take as I walk forward for communion. Beggar like, I cup my hands and stretch out my arms as I near the eucharistic minister. I am given something tangible - a thin translucent disc. Yet, my attention is not captured by the host. I am transfixed by the eyes of my communer who looks at me and identifies me as "the body of Christ." Perhaps I must come forward in need to notice such a gift, emptied in order to make room for such an announcement.

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# From the editor

The Voting Members of Contemplative Outreach Ltd.,— Board of Trustees, Faculty and Coordinators—will gather in Nashville, TN at the Marriott Airport Hotel for the annual national conference October 9–13, 02.

Saturday, October 12th, has been designated as a Day of Enrichment. On this day, everyone is invited to attend! The national newsletter *Contemplative Outreach Ltd.*, will provide much more information about this event.

We are hosting a Facilitator Workshop led by Bonnie Shimizu of Snowmass, CO, April 13th, at St. George's Church, Nashville, and April 14th, at St. Peter's Church, Chattanooga. Register with Carol Wray at carolwray@aol.com in Nashville or Margaret Marshall at revmcm@aol.com in Chattanooga. All centering prayer participants are invited.

St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church will have a Introductory workshop May 18, 9a.m.–3p.m. Contact Kay Curtis, 615-848-3081 or you may email Kay at LKAYCURTIS@AOL.COM for more information.

We have begun notifying people by email with updates and current events. If you are not receiving this information via email, please send us your new email address. Our newsletter will continue to be another source of information.

We enjoyed a beautiful day at Mercy Convent celebrating the annual Global Prayer Day. Thirty participants from support groups around the Nashville area joined in a silent bond of centering prayer united with other groups from around the world. Prayerful silence was observed throughout the day. Thanks to the Dickson Support Group for hosting this event!

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments. ⊕

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## REFLECTIONS.....Continued from page 1

The nourishment I am given requires time to digest; the revelation I am given requires silence to assimilate. It is the quiet and serenity of the post communion experience that is echoed for me in centering prayer. Sitting in my centering chair, I am transported to that constellation of contentment - its ease flows back into me. Thoughts do tug at me during centering, but I have been taught to let them go, to rest in stillness.

This practice at letting go of distractions, of setting aside responsibilities, has proven to be a handy skill. The circumstances of my life often require that I turn people, situations, results over to God. I have learned to speak my peace, listen to others and wait. At first, this method of dealing with some people and situations did not feel loving. Only with experience did I come to see the practice of detaching and trusting as deeply loving of myself, others, and God.

This rambling reflection has led me to recognize a number of qualities in my practice of centering prayer. First, emptying myself in centering connects me to people in other traditions. The connection is at the level of experience rather than articulation or action, both of which can divide and obdurate. Second, however I seek to empty myself, the experience makes room for gift. When in a womb of wordlessness, I can hear the words "You are my beloved" or "You are the body of Christ." The words will vary from tradition to tradition, culture to culture, epoch to epoch; but stories of the experience and the experience itself endures. Third, centering has given me skills in detaching, listening, trusting. I carry these skills with me as I reenter the work-a-day world, refreshed and renewed. As one who has been gifted, I walk out able to give.

So I return to my chair and to the circle of co-travelers who meet each Friday morning to "Be silent, still, aware." I listen for the words of the mute spirit praying within me. And I hope that the grace I receive will flow from me like a sparkling brook. God grant that, as a brook, I don't babble too much. ⊕

**CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH PRAYER SUPPORT GROUPS OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE**

<b>Nashville</b>	Christ Church	Rev. Geoffrey Butcher, 615-255-7729 Steward McCloy, 615-661-4590	Sun 10:00 am, Thur noon Tue 5:30 pm
	St. George	Dr. Carroll Young, 615-385-2150	Mon 5:00 pm
	St. Edward	Patricia Flandell, 615-832-0873	Wed 11:30 am
	Christ the King	Carolyn Goddard, 615-386-3412 Sister Eileen Pistor,RSM, 615-315-9254	Fri 8:00 am. Fri 7:00 pm
<b>Antioch</b>	St. Ignatius	Carnnie Harmon, 615-834-1259	Fri 9:00 am
	St. Mark	Gretchen Miller, 615-794-6720	Sat 8:00 am, Wed 5:30 pm
<b>Clarksville</b>	Immaculate Conception	Dr. Ron Oakland, 931-358-9471	Sat 9:00 am
	<b>Dickson</b>	St. Christopher	Corena Harris LSCW, 615-446-2134 Bobbie Williams, 615-446-5484
<b>Franklin</b>	St. Paul's	Frank F. Baugh, 615-347-4705	Wed 5:30 pm
<b>Murfreesboro</b>	St. Rose	Kay Curtis, 615-848-3081 Patricia Darrell, 615-896-2742	Tue 7:30 pm
<b>Sewanee</b>	Otey Parish	Jennifer Michael, 931-598-5094 Beth Shrader, 931-598-5428	Mon 7:00 pm
	St. Augustine	Rev. Tom Ward, 931-598-1274	Thur 2:30 pm
<b>Chattanooga</b>	St. Peter's	Rev. Margaret Marshall, 423-877-2428	Tue 5:30 pm Sun 10:00 am
	Christ Church	Kathy Russell, 423-209-5929	Tue 5:00 pm
	St. Paul's	Elaine Giardino, 423-266-8195	Wed 5:15 pm
<b>Lookout Mt.</b>	Good Shepherd	Rev. John Talbird, 423-821-1583	Sun 9:00 am, Wed 4:30 pm
<b>Knoxville</b>	St. John XXIII	Rev. Terry Ryan, 865-523-7931	Mon 7:00 pm

**Lectio**..... *Continued from page 1*

that there is a center, a still point to this turning world. Eliot went on to affirm the apophatic way even more definitely in Four Quartets, where he wrote: "I said to my soul, be still and let the darkness come upon you/ Which shall be the darkness of God."

As I have struggled to understand the spiritual reading that is lectio divina, I have begun to see that the Spirit is breathing through all things to deepen our relation to God. The primary book for us Christians is the Bible, and the Bible is the central focus of lectio. But God speaks to us through other books as well, as we read, reflect, respond, and rest.

My hunch is that you have certain writers who speak to you the way T.S. Eliot has spoken to me over the years. You may not have connected your attraction to them to your attraction to centering prayer or to the Trinity. It may be that the Spirit will bring you to see the connection between your reading and your praying in the apophatic way. For the Spirit searches everything, as St. Paul tells us, even the depths of God.

May God grant us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the living and active Word. ⊕