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# CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

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## CENTERING PRAYER AND THE ACTIVE LIFE

by Tom Ward  
*University of the South, Sewanee*

Those of us who sense some call to contemplation often go through a long struggle with the activist voice within us. That voice says that taking this twenty minutes twice a day for centering prayer is not faithful: that the world has many needs; that we are very important; and that we should spend our lives twenty-four hours a day seven days a week in extraverted activity. Of course, there is an obvious truth here: we are called to serve others in God's name. The lie comes in thinking that we can and should do this through our own power, on our own time-table, and in our own way.

There is a remarkable passage in John of the Cross that speaks to this dilemma. In the middle of the passage John says that "it is beyond all doubt that good works can be performed only by the power of God." (*Spiritual Canticle*, 29. 3, p. 524 in the Kavanaugh edition). Those of us raised in the Christian tradition are familiar with the apostle Paul's distinction between being justified by faith and being justified by works of

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## FATHER THOMAS KEATING IN SEWANEE OCT. 7 & 8, 2003

Father Thomas Keating will be the recipient of an honorary degree conferred by the University of the South in October of this year. During his visit to Sewanee there will be two opportunities to hear Father Keating. He will speak on "*The Inter-faith Conversation and Global Transformation*" Tuesday evening, October 7 at 7 PM. His topic on Wednesday evening, October 8 at 7 PM will be "*Contemplative Prayer*". Both sessions will be held in Convocation Hall at the University of the South. Convocation Hall is located on the corner of University and Georgia Avenues. There is no charge for either session. Please join us in welcoming Father Keating back to Tennessee. ⊕

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## THINKING ABOUT THOUGHTS.....

by Lynne Lockie  
*St. Peter's Church, Chattanooga, TN*

The sacred word, that soft and simple symbol of our intention and consent to return to God's presence and action in our lives is not a cudgel wielded against "troublesome thoughts". Thoughts are some times described by the Buddhists as creating "monkey mind" because of all that activity and jumping around.

Instead, as I learned again in Formation for Contemplative Outreach Service, thoughts

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# From the editor

Having recently attended an eight-day post intensive retreat, I am still reaping the fruits of it. Mostly, I experienced a deep rest of mind, body and spirit. There was an added joy of sharing this experience in silence with five other members of our Centering Prayer Support Group. This bonding in silence truly goes beyond words, thoughts and emotions. Our Support Group will benefit from this experience, as it will enrich the whole support group. The pool of silence has deepened. We all came back refreshed, changed, smiling, and unable to put into words how the Ultimate Mystery had penetrated the ground of our beings.

Silence and solitude are the hallmarks for a balanced life with our busy schedules of work and meetings in our ordinary life. Our little group had heeded the call to “come away and rest awhile”; the fruits will be lasting. The mindfulness in listening to others, listening with the ear of our hearts will grow within us and be reflected in our families and workplace. The quiet joy is there. This fruit is to be shared with all whom we meet.

On a more practical note, please send any changes of address or emails to me so we may keep our databases updated. Also keep me posted on any Support Group changes of time or place. Remember to go on line and check our national web site:  
[www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org).

May the remainder of your summer be filled with special times for silence and rest. ⊕

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## Centering Prayer ....Continued from page 1

the law. And we know that we are “saved by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8) and not any other way. But we stumble when this is carried to its logical conclusion, as it is in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, “apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5). Some part of us does want to claim our good works for ourselves. But it is only by the power of God that we can do good works.

And so we return to our daily practice. In my case at least, I return only after I have again tried to bring in the kingdom by myself, in my own way, on my own terms, through my busy activity. In returning I am often near burnout again, feeling like a failure and seeking the rest that Jesus promises. (“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28). What keeps me in the practice is the experience of renewal that comes. I don’t know how it comes; I only know that energy for doing what I am given to do returns. For the longest time, I continued to practice because of this energy boost alone. It was like a caffeine high or a sugar rush—only very different too. And I knew enough even then to seek God for God’s self alone and not just for the energy I received when I returned.

What I was given me to do became clearer as well. In my activist mode, I take on too many good things, do few of them well, and feel guilty about those at the bottom of the “to do” list I don’t get to. When I am faithful to the practice, I am given the grace to know what is mine to do and what I need to let go of. While the cycle soon recapitulates itself, sometimes for a moment I know the peace that is the gospel promise.

We are indeed called to active service in God’s world. But we need a way to discern what actions God truly calls us to in minute particular and to receive power to act faithfully. Centering prayer is one such way. ⊕

# CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH PRAYER SUPPORT GROUPS

## MIDDLE TENNESSEE

<b>Nashville</b>	Christ Church	Rev. Geoffrey Butcher	615-255-7729	Sun 10:00am, Thur noon
<b>Nashville</b>	Christ Church	Stuart McCloy	615-661-4590	Tue 5:30pm
<b>Nashville</b>	St. George	Dr. Carroll Young	615-385-2150	Mon 4:45 to 6:15pm
<b>Nashville</b>	St. Edward	Patricia Flandell	615-832-0873	Wed 11:30am
<b>Nashville</b>	Christ the King	Carolyn Goddard	615-386-3412	Fri 8:00am
<b>Nashville</b>	Sister Eileen Pistor, RSM		615-463-2776	Thurs 6:00pm
<b>Antioch</b>	St. Ignatius	Carnie Harmon	615-834-1259	Fri 9:00am
<b>Antioch</b>	St. Mark	Gretchen Miller	615-794-6720	Sat 8:00am, Wed 6:30pm
<b>Clarksville</b>	Immaculate Conception	Dr. Ron Oakland	615-358-9471	Sat 9:00am
<b>Dickson</b>	St. Christopher	Corena Harris LSCW	615-446-2134	Mon 4:15pm
<b>Fayetteville</b>	First Presbyterian	Farris Raulston	931-433-0652	Tue 7:00pm
<b>Franklin</b>	St. Paul	Frank F. Baugh	615-347-4705	Wed 5:30pm
<b>Murfreesboro</b>	St. Rose	Kay Curtis	615-848-3081	Mon 7:30pm
<b>Murfreesboro</b>	St. Rose	Patricia Darrell	615-896-2742	Mon 7:30pm
<b>Sewanee</b>	Otey Parish	Jennifer Michael	931-598-5094	Mon 7:00pm
<b>Sewanee</b>	Otey Parish	Beth Chamberlain	931-598-5428	Fri 12:00 noon
<b>Sewanee</b>	St. Augustine	Rev. Tom Ward	931-598-1274	Thur 2:30pm
<b>Chattanooga</b>	St. Peter's	Lynne Lockie	423-842-3663	Tue 5:30 - 7:00pm
<b>Chattanooga</b>	Grace Church	Kathy Russell	423-517-0645	Thur 5:00pm
<b>Chattanooga</b>	First Christian Church	Rev. Lanny C. Lawler	423-267-4506	Tue 4:00pm
<b>Knoxville</b>	St. James	Rev. Lou Tucker Parsons	865-523-5687	Mon 5:30pm
<b>Knoxville</b>	John XXIII Student Center	Beverly Froning	865-426-4411	Mon 7:00pm
<b>Knoxville</b>	Lakeview Center	Barbara Haning	865-671-0766	Thur
<b>Clinton</b>	Clinton Centering Prayer Group	Sandy Berger	865-457-3170	
<b>Lookout Mt.</b>	Our Lady of the Mount	Brit Oehmig	423-756-4118	Tue 8:00am before Mass
<b>Lookout Mt.</b>	Good Shepherd	Rev. John Talbird	423-821-1583	Sun 9am & Wed 4:30pm
<b>Saturday "Mornings of Silence"</b>				
<b>Antioch</b>	<b>1st Saturday at St. Mark's</b>	Gretchen Miller	615-794-6720	Sat 9:00am
<b>Chattanooga</b>	<b>2nd Saturday at St. Paul's</b>	Rev. Margaret Marshall	423-757-9580	Sat 9:00am

### THINKING ABOUT THOUGHTS... *Continued from page 1*

are also God's gift to us. Without these thoughts (feelings, insights, self monitorings, plannings) God would have a difficult time "working" within us as we are transformed by God during Centering Prayer. I was reminded again how important and integral thoughts are, like the grains of sand that polish, sand polishing rock, or the grains of sand fused into beautiful glass objects.

In Centering prayer, we may gently sweep away the thoughts that we cling to when we find ourselves 'thinking' about these thoughts, but these grains of precious sand are to be valued as precious gifts from God.

"Love is forever...."

Courtesy decorates the world,  
The whole world is a classroom  
and each phenomena our teacher."\*

Our thoughts are our teachers as we notice them and let them go. Without these thoughts I would not know that a volcano sometimes lurks inside me nor that love is there also. I would not be able to feel 'letting go' or moving into 'existing in the moment' as the bird sounds in the trees beyond me.

I would not know the grace of God. ⊕

\* A verbal gift from a teacher.