
CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE



Summer 2012

Embracing Silence

by Rev. Geoffrey Butcher

My introduction to centering prayer came through the Rev. Tom Ward at Christ Church, Nashville, in 1992. Tom hired me to be Associate for Pastoral Care at the church. Having practiced a form of meditation since my teenage years, I eagerly participated in the weekly centering prayer support groups that Tom had established. What I hadn't anticipated was letting go of all thought and imagination in the prayer. That seemed contrary to what I had previously practiced in meditation wherein my mind flowed with the Spirit drawing me into a deeper relationship with God. After two years of practicing centering prayer I finally realized that I could let go of the control that my thoughts reinforced. It was okay to waste time for God. I didn't need to do anything but to be present for God in the silence.

In this silence I meet the ineffable sense of the presence of God. No words can capture God. God is without form and transcendent, yet immanent. Like an energy field in science that is real but invisible, so is the mystery of God experienced without sight or description in the silence.

As a former church musician, music used to express for me what words failed to convey. Now my favorite music is silence. As Raimon Panikkar has written, "Silence is our only attitude, not because of the fact we cannot speak of divinity, but because its specificity neither hides nor reveals. Divinity is silence because it says nothing; it has nothing to say." (The Experience of God)

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The Effects of Centering Prayer at Twenty-Five Thousand Feet

by Carolyn Goddard

The flight from Nashville to Chicago takes about an hour. It can seem longer. I am used to the small jets that make this flight, the ones with two seats on each side of the aisle and no overhead storage. Being a savvy traveler, I have learned to leave my roll-on suitcase at the end of the jet way before ducking to enter the tiny, tube-like fuselage. On that particular morning, I was carefully tucking my baggage claim stub into my pocket when I first saw him. I glanced down at my boarding pass, hoping to see a different letter or number. No, my seat was the aisle seat next to his - or at least most of the aisle seat. Obese, he spilled over a bit onto "my side" of the armrest.

I had never seen him before, but I gave him only a curt nod and the weakest of smiles as I positioned myself and snapped my seatbelt. Thinking my book might serve as a defensive wall, I pulled it out immediately. The defense failed, the wall was breached. Before the other passengers had all boarded, I knew that he was a preacher, that he had ten children and that his oldest son, Junior, would be tending the flock while he was in Chicago auditioning for The Biggest Loser. "I'm trying to lose some weight. Did I tell you this is the first time I have ever been on an airplane?"

As if on cue, the plane jerked back from the gate. "Is that normal?" The terror in his voice frightened me. I took a breath and assured him that the plane needed to back out so that it could carry us down the runway where we would pick up speed and then take off. He nodded as if affected by Tourette's disease and breathed deeply, trying to suck some sense of security from the air.

It was after take off that he got theological. "All this bad weather we are having, like that Katrina thing, it is God's punishment on our country. We are accepting things, things like homosexuality that are just not acceptable in God's sight. The Bible is very clear on this point." A

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Contemplative Opportunities

If your church or group wishes to host a Centering Prayer or a Lectio Divina Workshop, please contact our Workshop Coordinator, Janis Lovecchio: Janis.lovecchio@holyfamilycc.com or 615-373-4351 at extension 235.

Since 2008 we have been hosting National Contemplative Outreach programs at St. Mary's Sewanee. On September 7-11, 2012 [Friday 6pm – Tuesday 11am] Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, David Frenette, and Hadley Morris will present *The Sacred Breath of God: Practicing the Presence of God in Everyday Life*.

Our 6th Annual Gathering of Contemplative Outreach of Middle Tennessee will be held at St. Bartholomew's Church, 4800 Belmont Park Terrace, Nashville on Saturday, August 11 from 9:30 am to 2:30 p.m. Our keynote speaker is the Rev. Gordon Peerman ~ *How DO you pray without ceasing?*

Gordon is an Episcopal priest and psychotherapist in private practice in Nashville, Tenn. He teaches Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction at Vanderbilt's Center for Integrative Health as well as mindfulness practices at Vanderbilt's Law and Medical Schools. He is an adjunct faculty member at Vanderbilt Divinity School, where he teaches a class in Buddhist Christian Dialogue.

An Introduction to Centering Prayer, small group reflection, and sessions on Lectio Divina will be offered to support our practice of contemplative living. Reservation information will be available in early summer. To add your name to the email distribution list, please contact Jean Hastings: jeanhastings@comcast.net or 615-356-0030 for more information.

Those interested in forming a Centering Prayer Group in Franklin County, TN are invited to contact Marsha Carnahan from Estill Springs at mcarnahan5@gmail.com or 931-626-7575 .

Silence Sent Me Behind Bars Centering Prayer in Prison

by Jean Hastings

How does one travel the path from silence in community to silence behind bars? My path was one I would not have expected. It began when I joined a gathering of more than 500 people to hear the words of Fr. Thomas Keating in a Nashville sanctuary. As I sat in silence in community that day and listened to Fr. Keating's words, I remember being struck by his comments on the practice of Centering Prayer in prisons. A seed was planted in me that day that would take years to grow and make its way behind bars. As we experience so often in life, many of our paths are not straight or clear.

During a Centering Prayer retreat I had the opportunity to listen to a series of Fr. Keating's tapes. Again I heard words about prisons and Centering Prayer. While reading the transcripts of this portion of the DVD I knew that this was something I wanted to offer. It made sense to me that silent prayer could be helpful to those in prison – men and women who like monks live in cells, men and women who have extended time for contemplation. For me, at this time, the "seed" stirred and reached out toward the light. I soon discovered two resources from CO Ltd, a video made in a prison where men shared stories of how Centering Prayer had helped them and a brochure "Locked Up and Free." I began to explore how to get "behind" the bars of the six prisons in an area not too far from my home.

In prison nothing is easy. The desire and willingness to offer this silent prayer does not make it easy to be allowed to do so. I began by volunteering with an organization already active in the TN Prisons for Women and I also began to plant the seed with the prison Chaplain. After four years of "knocking on the door," the Chaplain finally agreed to let me come in for Centering Prayer. A friend who has been involved in prison work for many years remarked, "Wow! That was quick." This comment acknowledges that patience is helpful when working with prisons.

Once the door was opened, and after conversations with several who sit with prisoners in other cities across the United States, I also walked behind the gates, behind the bars, with an open mind and an open heart to offer silent prayer. Over the past four years sometimes

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE PRAYER GROUPS

Antioch	St. Ignatius	Carnie Harmon	615-834-1259	Fri 9:00 am
Brentwood	Holy Family Catholic Church	Janis Lovecchio	615-373-4351	Mon 10:00 am Thur 7:00 pm
Brentwood	Holy Family Catholic Church	Janis Lovecchio	615-373-4351	Quarterly
Chattanooga	Church of the Good Shepherd	Rev. Margaret Marshall	423-290-1640	Wed 4:30 pm
Chattanooga	Grace Church	Kathy Russell	423-517-0645	Fri 1:00 pm
Chattanooga	St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Barbara Ray	423-490-0735	Wed 12:30 pm
Chattanooga	St. Peter's Episcopal Church	Joani Koch	423-877-3140	Wed 5:15 pm
Clarksville	Immaculate Conception	Dr. Ron Oakland	931-217-1292	Wed 5:00 pm
Gallatin	Home Meeting	Tammy Hawks	615-230-7364	
Johnson City	St. John's Episcopal Church	Frances Jackson	423-434-0560	Tue 6:00 pm
Knoxville	Church of the Ascension	Fr. Rob Travis	865-588-0589	Thur 4:30 pm
Knoxville	St. John's Cathedral	Rev. Canon Tom Rasnick	865-525-7347	Thur 5:30 pm
Knoxville	John XXIII Student Center	Barbara Froning	865-607-3627	Fri 11:00 am
Murfreesboro	St. Paul's	Ronald Clemmons	615-867-6318	Tue 6:00 pm
Nashville	Cathedral of the Incarnation	Diane Gregory	615-414-6254	Sat 9:30 am
Nashville	Christ Church	Peter Saana	615-618-4687	Sun 9:45 am
Nashville	Christ Church	Mimi Shimmin	615-298-2483	Tue 5:30 pm
Nashville	Christ Church	Laura Copeland	615-500-4683	Thurs 12:15 pm
Nashville	Christ the King	Martha O'Brien	615-484-0934	Fri 8:00 am
Nashville	Christ the King-Lectio Divina	Carolyn Goddard	615-438-3216	Mon 8:30 am
Nashville	South Minister Presbyterian	Helen Blakely	615-331-3652	Wed 11:30 am
Nashville	St. George's	Bets Ramsey	615-463-2583	Mon 4:00 pm
Nashville	The Cloisters	Martha Likins	615-352-0025	Wed 1:00 pm
Nashville	VU Center/Integrative Health	Jean Hastings	615-356-0030	Mon 7:00 am
Nashville	Westminster Presbyterian	Rev. Guy Griffith	615-292-5526	Thur 11:30 am
Oak Ridge	Home Residence	Janice Watkins	865-335-9921	Tue 7:15 pm
Sewanee	Otey Parish	Jennifer Michael	931-598-9110	Mon 7:00 pm
Sewanee	St. Mary's Sewanee	Rev. Tom Ward	931-598-5342	Tue 4:00 pm

SILENCE BEHIND BARS *Continued from page 2*

I have sat with one, sometimes with a dozen and sometimes alone. In a hard, noisy prison environment, I am amazed by the way we often find a deep silence (one prison is within easy earshot of a firing range!). I am amazed to have been told by inmates that our times together were an answer to their prayers. I am amazed by the willingness of friends to join me in the prisons. I am amazed and humbled by the shared silence, smiles, tears, laughter and love.

While in these particular prisons and in my own life the time for Centering Prayer behind bars has come to a natural conclusion, I hope there will be a day in the future when once again I will go behind the bars to share the practice of this silent prayer with women, men, inmates and guards. I am grateful for the seed planted in my mind and heart that day when Fr. Keating visited Nashville. I am grateful for those who have shared Centering Prayer practice with me. I am grateful for this practice of silent prayer that saves my life every day.

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EMBRACING SILENCE *Continued from page 1*

God simply is; and in the silence the God within us unites with the God who is our beginning and our end, and our beginning again. We enter a sea of love without needing to do a thing. We don't struggle to swim nor do we sink. If any sound is heard, it is only the whispering waves of Love's embrace. + + +

EFFECTS OF CENTERING *Continued from page 1*

number of responses came to my mind - including pouring my coffee into his lap - but I only said, "I don't see it that way." My words had no effect - they were a few drips against the pressurized gush coming out of the fire hose of his mouth. He was talking "without ceasing."

I found myself going inward, listening with the inner ear of the heart. There the voice was much different, not anxious at all. "He is very frightened, Carolyn. Your listening to him eases some of his pain. Listen to him. This is my beloved son, listen to him." I settled back into my seat, sipped the very hot coffee. It was going to be a long hour. + + +

The Table of Life

by Rob Morrell

Come to the Table of Life,
groaning under its bounty,
and partake of the feast laid out for you:
the Cabernet-red cherries eaten by the handful,
the peaches whose juices run down to your elbow,
the tomatoes so ripe and sweet
that your mouth wants to sing out in tribute,
the aged cheeses and just-baked breads,
wonderful alone, indescribable together.

Come to the Table of Life
and lay down your illusions of scarcity.
The feast is ever-present,
ready to replenish your plate and refill your goblet.
The Table of Life requires no remittance,
no expression of thanks,
though there is a longing to witness the unique gifts
you may be willing to share with all.

Come to the Table of Life
and peel off your armor, piece by piece.
Let your pace slow and your heart soften.
There is nothing to protect, nothing to defend;
your seat at the table cannot be earned or taken away.
Join the company of prodigal sons and daughters
as they enter the banquet hall and marvel, speechless,
at the utter grace in all that lies before them.

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For further information on retreats:

www.centeringprayermidtn.com
www.StMarysSewanee.org
www.contemplativeoutreach.org
St. Mary's Sewanee: 931 598-5342

2012 Fall Retreats at St. Mary's Sewanee

Sept 23-25	3 Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Oct 14-16	Centering Prayer as 11th Step
Nov 30-Dec 2	Lectio/4 Senses of Scripture
Dec 14-16	3 Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Contemplative
Outreach
aims to transmit
the experience of
Divine Love
to the
"global community."
- Fr. Thomas Keating



Contemplative Outreach of Middle Tennessee
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