



COCFL News

NEWSLETTER MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to increase communication between COCFL Centering Prayer Groups through news, direction to resources, Q&A, personal sharing, in an informal way, creating in the process a stronger connection between all our members.

It is the Leadership Circle's prayer that this endeavor will serve as support for better understanding, and increase in spiritual desire and importance of the centering prayer goals.

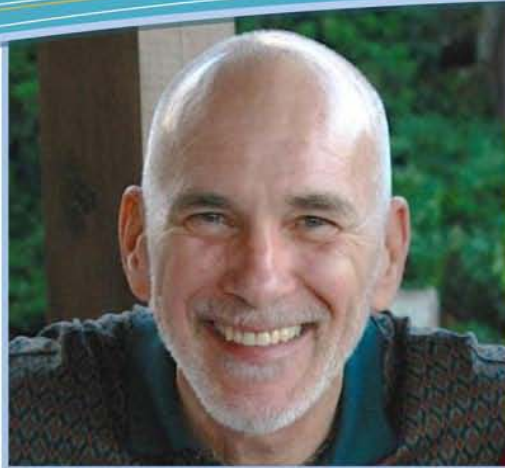
CONTACT US WITH YOUR NEWS!

Please send us information about your group history, news of interest, photos, questions, or sharing, as well as special events planned in your area. Please help find a name for our newly created newsletter.

Email to Alma Garcia
ajg810@yahoo.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This newsletter is the result of a concerted effort by members who have supported it through submission of articles, ideas and technical support. We thank them and thank especially the Holy Spirit that has guided us along.



A word from Nestor de Armas, COCFL Coordinator

Dear Friends,

It is a blessing to accept our Chapter's call to serve you as our Chapter's Coordinator for the next three years. Since many of you don't know me, it seemed to me I should share my contemplative journey with you.

My journey began in 2005, when I was invited to an Introduction to Centering Prayer Workshop at Annunciation Catholic Church in Altamonte Springs. The speaker, a monk I had never heard of, turned out to be Thomas Keating. His description of Centering Prayer promised to be the answer to the longing for resting in God I had been experiencing for some time. On the way out, I acquired Open Mind and Open Heart, a set of Fr. Keating's and Fr. Rohr's CDs, and the address to the Contemplative Outreach website. Those were my only resources for the next five years, as I practiced Centering by myself, in my room. My wife Donna was the only person who knew I was centering.

Five years ago I began attending the 3-day retreats our Chapter was sponsoring. My first retreat, led by Basha Perez at San Pedro, was truly

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transformative. In 2012, my pastor asked me to help start a Centering Prayer group at our church. Through the CO website, I found a Facilitator Workshop being offered in St. Louis. There I met Denise Hall who introduced me to COCFL, and recruited me to help Kathy Kotas and Elmer Seifert organize our Chapter along the new Service Team concept being implemented throughout CO. New friends blossomed, as together, with the other dedicated members of our Servant Leadership Service Team, we worked to support our Centering Prayer groups in Central Florida. This included facilitating our own Facilitator Workshop in 2014. Last July, while attending a National Servant Leadership retreat in St. Louis, Susan Komis, Director of CO Chapter Programs and Services, invited me to join her National Contemplative Outreach team to help empower CP group facilitators. CP has become the fulcrum of my spiritual journey. Since our chapter's Visioning Day last October, serving the needs of our CP groups in Central Florida has become my top service priority. Please pray God grant me the grace of a servant's heart.

Blessings,

Nestor de Armas

Leadership Circle Nourishing Team on the Road

Our visits to pray with our many COCFL Chapter groups are underway! We hope to foster communication between groups and our coordinator. The ideas and needs of our members are important for future programs that enrich and inspire us to further deepen our prayer life, or as Father Sheehan says, "Putting teeth into our prayer."

St. Francis' facilitator Elmer and members have been together 10 years! Elmer's deep concern for each member's path is quite evident. After CP, Elmer leads the group in Lectio Divina using the upcoming Psalm reading for Mass.

We also visited St. Ann's in Debary, with Maryann and members. Maryann, whose caring and joyful attitude makes every member feel special, carries on a very successful meeting. She liked the suggestion of printing out the schedule of events from the COCFL website.

We thank both groups for their warm welcome!

Gwen Robinson and
Dan Wagner

*"When you want to pray,
go to your inner room,
close the door, and pray
to your Father in secret.
And your Father who
sees in secret will reward
you."*

Matthew 6:6

St. Luke's Centering Prayer Group



An Ecumenical Centering Prayer Group How it Came to Be St. Luke's United Methodist Church (UMC) By Denise Hall

The St. Luke's United Methodist Church (UMC) on Apopka-Vineland Road, near Windermere, is home to a three year old Centering Prayer group, which meets on Tuesday mornings from 10:00 a.m. – noon. The group is an offshoot of a prolific bible study movement dating back more than ten years. How did bible study morph into Centering Prayer? Lectio Divina was the key, along with one astute, intuitive woman, Pastor Beth Farabee, and staff member Joline Krolicki.

The popular Disciples Bible Study began around the year 2000 and drew seekers from not only St. Luke's membership, but neighboring churches along what is known as "church road" – Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Non-Denominational. The Tuesday group grew to about 29 members, and attendance today, as a Centering Prayer group, averages 12-14 members.

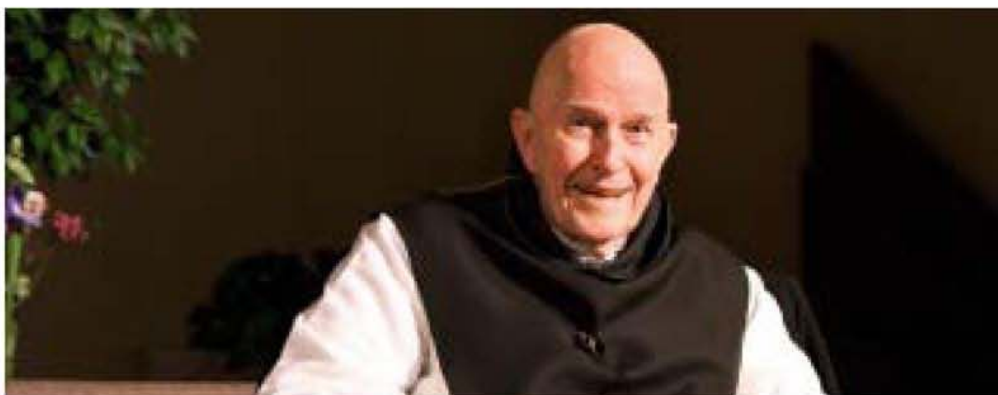
In 2008, through the gracious intervention of Basha Perez, who escorted Father William Meninger O.C.S.O. to our Tuesday class, we soon learned about Centering Prayer and *The Cloud of the Unknowing*. We experienced our first twenty minutes centering, and things after that were never the same. The Trappist sandals left "new seeds" of contemplation, as he walked around St. Luke's campus. Our group was soon ready to learn more.

Shortly after, Pastor Beth Farabee and staffer Joline Krolicki started a 30-minute evening session, following Head Pastor Bill Barnes' well attended bible study. After listening to a short bible passage from that evening's study read aloud four times, people were invited to worship silently for 30 minutes. The experience was so well received that it led to COCFL bringing a Saturday Centering Prayer Workshop to St. Luke, presented by Kathy Kotas and Betsy Skinner.

The Tuesday group decided to learn about Centering Prayer, and embraced the transformation from head to heart, while saying "yes" to a deepening relationship through the Holy Spirit to God and Christ, through daily 20-minute sits. Our two hours together start now with Centering, a prayer walk, Lectio Divina, journaling, and sharing. Then we transition to a study, which for Lent was CO's Welcoming Prayer: Consent on the Go. Our group has remained ecumenical in makeup. We welcome anyone who seeks us out and seldom ask religious background unless it is offered. We have found, as Fr. Thomas Keating advocates, in silence all are united as one – whoever, wherever in the world. All are welcomed, and we are committed to an ecumenical approach to spirituality and a collective state of mind and heart.

FATHER THOMAS KEATING ON DEATH AND DYING

by Nestor de Armas



When I was at Snowmass Monastery in February 2015, Fr. Keating visited our group and spent a couple of hours answering questions. Following is his answer to my question to him at that time.

Question: *Word has it that when people ask you how you are doing, you respond, “Well, I’m dying, you know.” My question to you at this stage of your life is: What have you learned? What new insight have you gained?”*

Answer: I don’t feel like judging myself because I’ve already done that many times and it turned out to be wrong. (laughter).

It is very important to come to terms with dying, and of course, as you get older this becomes more urgent. If you want to know where God is most at work, it’s precisely in the process of dying in the moment of death. So if we were deprived of those things we would not have the opportunity of knowing God in His great love as intimately, as that will take place.

So it’s just the completion of the spiritual journey. And as many mystics say, nothing really dies except the ego and the false self and all of its allies, you might say, in the brain, and in all those reactions that habits of functioning have built up. It just goes. So at the moment of death you have the remarkable capacity to choose God without any hindrance from the false self or the emotion or the memory. It’s all new.

So it’s the crown of all your efforts, but it’s also joining the redemptive activity of Christ if you are a Christian. So you’re on the cross with Christ. And that is redeeming the world, not in a way that you can see, but you are identifying with Christ. So you may be invited to descend into hell like Christ did. This is not a disaster either. All you need to do is hang on to Him. And you realize what the consequences of deliberate rejection of God is – its sense of alienation, desolation, hellishness, and misery.

In other words, we are invited by Christ on the cross to share as we grow in our prayer and union with Him, His passion, which is not just physical suffering, which can be terrible enough as it is in our time, but it is also besides that the emotional suffering, that is the consequence of alienation or separation from God.

So it’s the thought that we are separate from God that is the source of all evil. Although there may be these other factors like the devil, etc., that are mentioned in scripture. But also we’ve got enough negativity in ourselves, with or without the devil, to keep us busy for a while.

Death is the peak of our spiritual lives. So it’s the ultimate liberation or crowning of all our efforts, not something to be afraid of. What you’re usually afraid of is the pain. You may not have any pain. You might have a nice stroke, (laughter) or you might die in your sleep as my mother did.



My Journey
By Josh Witherington

It’s a pleasure to meet you via this abbreviated autobiographical sketch, if we haven’t yet met in person. I was introduced to Centering Prayer not by a church or a prayer group, but through the writers on the perennial philosophy, that transfixing idea that tries to find the universal truth held within the foundation of all the world’s religions. I read Joseph Campbell and Aldous Huxley, which led me to Ken Wilber and Cynthia Bourgeault, which led me to John of the Cross, Richard Rohr, and finally to Fr. Thomas Keating.

Since that time, I have developed a new found beaming appreciation for the religion of my youth, and have found sanctuary within the Episcopalian expression of that Christian faith. I have fostered a wholesome centering prayer routine, been on two silent retreats to the enchanting Monastery of the Holy Spirit, joined as a co-facilitator under the facilitator, and now COCFL Coordinator, Nestor de Armas at my church. I am happy to serve here as a member in the Communication Circle at Contemplative Outreach of Central Florida.

MEMBERS SHARE

“...is a way to be grounded in the love of God who is closer to me than I am to myself. From a deep center I have come to love and accept myself just as I am.”



Upcoming EVENT
FACILITATOR FORMATION
WORKSHOP- Level 2
Saturday May 16, 2015
 All Saints Episcopal Church,
 Winterpark, Florida,
 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
 \$20 donation, bring bag lunch

All current facilitators, those who assist, or anyone interested in learning more about facilitating a centering prayer group are encouraged to attend. **Nestor de Armas** will facilitate building on level 1 formation presented in October 2013. It will provide enrichment for facilitators of mature groups, but will also include valuable help for the new facilitator. (No need to have attended level 1 to participate). Information and registration forms available at: www.cocfl.org

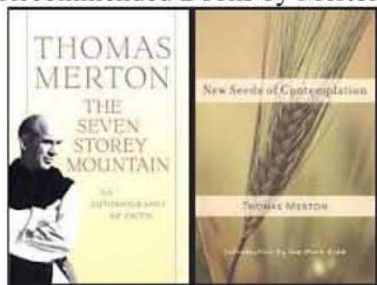
THOMAS MERTON EVENT
Presented by Gray Matthews, Ph.D.

On February 28th, at Divine Mercy Catholic Church in Merritt Island, and attended by over 100 members, Gray Matthews led a day-long conversation on Thomas Merton and contemplation, and what he taught about "healing silence."

Merton tells us that we must awaken to the sacred in the ordinary:

"Life is this simple: We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent and the Divine is shining through it all the time. This is not just a nice story or a fable. It is true."

Recommended Books by Merton:



Handouts from the event are available on our website at: www.cocfl.org.

COCFL THANKS KATHY KOTAS



On April 18th, at a special Centering Prayer event, held at Annunciation Church in Altamonte Springs, Kathy Kotas, our Contemplative Outreach Coordinator since 2009, was honored for her wonderful and generous service to our Central Florida Chapter. As of April 2015, she is succeeded as COCFL Coordinator by Nestor de Armas.

Kathy, who has lived in Daytona Beach, FL, for 43 years, is a member of Epiphany Catholic Church in Port Orange, and over the years has served in various ministries there, currently as a Lector. She and her husband Jim have three married children, and three grandchildren.

Kathy began practicing centering prayer nineteen years ago, at the suggestion of a former pastor at Epiphany Catholic Church. She has been involved with the Contemplative Outreach of Central Florida since 2002. In 2009, she was discerned, along with Elmer Seifert, as COCFL Co-Coordinator. Kathy has been devoted to Centering Prayer, influencing the rest of us by her steady, deliberate and constant strong presence. Her preparation and guidance through each Centering Prayer event fostered for us, and for so many people in our Central Florida area, a real experience of God and his loving kindness. This leadership has a wonderful ripple effect for our community, our families, and our personal lives.

Under Kathy's leadership and during her 6 year tenure, our Florida chapter has experienced significant growth. To accommodate the growing needs of the chapter, a Leadership Service Team was formed to provide better communication, CP introductory workshops and retreat opportunities for those seeking the contemplative path.

Kathy's openness to life is a gift to us, which we receive with gratitude and blessing. In return, we all wish to bless Kathy and support her efforts as she continues her growth as a Centering Prayer practitioner and a Centering Prayer Commissioned Presenter, blessed by the Contemplative Outreach Community of Snowmass, CO

Kathy, be blessed by our gracious and merciful God. We love you and we see you as our mentor, guide and companion on our spiritual journey. We greatly respect you and are grateful for your service in the past, and we continue to rely on your leadership and example.