



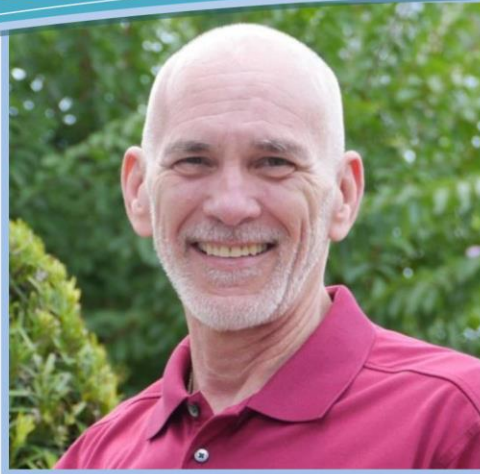
COCFL News

CONNECTED by **Vickey Cheney**

*I sit in silence by the sea.
And feel God's peace
inside of me.
I breathe in rhythm with
the tide.
And feel His presence by
my side.
I sense the force that
lifts the bird
from sand to sky without
a word.
That lets it glide, and
dive, and soar.
That lures a jelly fish to
shore.
That leads a school of
fish to feed.
That grows the sea grass
from a seed.
I sit in silence by the sea.
And let God's love pour
out of me.
To see His light in
creatures eyes.
To hear His voice in
nature's cries.
I sit in silence by the sea.
Connected to eternity.*

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Feedback and editorial
contributions are
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A Word from Nestor de Armas, COCFL Coordinator

As I write this, I am filled with gratitude. Another year of loving service has come to a joyful end. We have been blessed with a group of dedicated volunteers whose principal motivation has been to help you, our Centering Prayer community, embrace the process of transformation in Christ through the practice of Centering Prayer. More importantly, these volunteers have demonstrated a commitment to the principle that what matters most in our service is that we love you, and one another, as we serve.

We began the year with Fr Carl Arico leading us into a weekend of silence and prayer in which we explored what it means to "take on the mind of Christ." In February, Susan Komis introduced us to the concept of "Soulfriending," a relationship where we "communicate honestly and authentically with each other so that our relationships go deeper than our masks of composure, and we can develop a significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, to delight in each other, and to make others' conditions our own." We closed out the year in April with our dear friend, Maru de Guevara. Maru facilitated a wonderful day of experiencing what it means to be open to the Spirit's guidance and to consent to being filled with the fullness of God.

Contemplative Outreach of Central Florida

June 2017

COCFL website: www.cocfl.org

All this was made possible by the generous hospitality of our Centering Prayer Groups. You volunteered to host us. You prepared a prayer space for us. You served us refreshments and welcomed us as we came in. You cleaned up after us after we left. And you did all this in Love and Charity! Our Service Teams worked lovingly behind the scene. Our Event Service Team worked diligently for months to ensure that, from recruiting the speaker to your registration, your event experience exceeded your expectations.

Our Communications Service Team kept our website vibrant and rich in resources. They published this *Newsletter* faithfully. They sent out fliers informing us of the upcoming events. Our Book Ministry Service Team ordered enriching books and made them available to us at each event. Our Introduction to Centering Prayer Team held introduction to Centering Prayer Workshops in every region of our Chapter.

Five new commissioned presenters of Centering Prayer were formed this year. Thank you, everyone, for your commitment to the practice of Centering Prayer, for nurturing one another in your Centering Prayer Groups and for manifesting Utmost Charity: the fruit of Centering Prayer! I can't wait to experience what God has in store for us next year!

Fr Meninger O.C.S.O. Visit to St. Maria del Mar in Flagler Beach

by: Susan McBride

REFLECTIONS

Nestor deArmas

Esther 3:1-4:3; Psalms 93, 96;
James 1:19-27

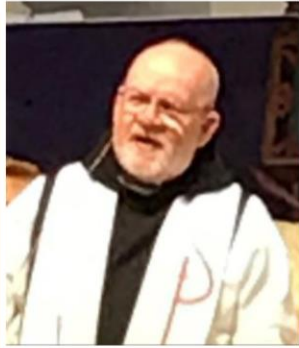
Monday, Acts 18:1-11 "*Do not be afraid ... for I am with you.*" (vv. 9a and 10a)
"Your MRI shows a spot in your lung." I catch my breath. Cold grips my heart. "Have you ever smoked?" "No!" "Are you sure?" "Yes!" "If you were a smoker I would say the spot we see is probably lung cancer." My mouth tastes funny. Embarrassed, I notice the phone trembling in my hand. "I am going to recommend you have a PET scan to rule it out." As I hang up, I enter a land only those facing the real possibility of a long and painful death can know. Distracted and obsessed, I wait for the results. I listen to others make plans taking a future for granted I cannot.

Occasionally, I am surprised by a sense of Presence ... by calm and joy. Mostly, I am afraid. Now, I am about to get the results ... the phone rings ... "You don't have lung cancer!" I have a future again! My celebration is cut short when I remember my friend, Tom, who does.

Share your reflections and
comments about all the articles

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Sometimes grace visits us in a very special way. Such was the case from March 18 - 22, 2017 at the parish at Santa Maria del Mar of Flagler Beach. During that time the parish was privileged to host a visit from Fr. William Meninger, one of the three Trappist monks who reintroduced the all but lost practice of Centering Prayer to the Christian community. Fr. Meninger presented a Lenten mission on the practice of Centering Prayer that was enthusiastically received by practitioners and the curious.

In 1974, Fr. Meninger lived and served at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts. It was there that he discovered a dusty copy of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the abbey library. The book was written in Middle English, the language of the common man, as opposed to Latin. As he read the little 14th century book he was delighted to discover that it presented contemplative meditation as a teachable, spiritual process that could enable ordinary people to enter and receive a direct experience of union with God. Fr. Meninger began teaching Contemplative Prayer according to *The Cloud of Unknowing* at the abbey retreat house. During this same time, Fr. Thomas Keating and Fr. Basil Pennington were searching for a teachable method of Christian contemplative meditation. They attended Fr. Meninger's retreat and as a result, these three men were instrumental in reintroducing the ancient practice of Centering Prayer to the Christian community. Fr. Meninger presently resides at St. Benedicts Monastery in Snow Mass, Colorado and travels around the country on a limited basis to teach and share the invitation and practice of Centering Prayer.

The topic of *prayer* was a major emphasis of Fr. Meninger's visit. During the morning Mass on Monday through Wednesday, Fr. Meninger taught on *The Lord's Prayer*. According to Fr. Meninger, when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray they were not asking for a prayer that they could memorize and recite. Rather they were asking for Jesus to teach them HOW to pray. They were asking for the dispositions and motivations that should be behind all of our prayers. When we pray "in Jesus' name", that means that we pray with the same motivations and dispositions that Jesus taught us in *The Lord's Prayer*. Over the three mornings Fr. Meninger went on to share the seven dispositions presented in the prayer and how they teach us to pray.

However, Fr. Meninger's primary mission was to teach about and introduce those attending to Centering Prayer. According to Fr. Meninger, Centering Prayer is the highest form of prayer. He cited the story of Jesus at the home of Martha and Mary. When Martha was upset at Mary because she chose to sit at the feet of Jesus rather than assisting Martha with lunch preparations in the kitchen, Jesus told Martha that although she was busy about many things, Mary had chosen the better part and that it would not be taken away from her. Fr. Meninger likens Centering Prayer to Mary's choice to sit at the feet of Jesus. According to Fr. Meninger, Centering Prayer is a practice and an invitation to union with God.

During the evening mission time on Monday, Fr. Meninger shared with us some of the history of, as well as, the scriptural basis for Centering Prayer. He shared with us an explanation of the difference between *cataphatic* and *apophatic* prayer. And he introduced us to *The Ladder of Monks*, a work by Guigo the Second that describes the contemplative life as a ladder based on the practice of *Lectio Divina*. The four rungs of the ladder are *lectio, meditatio, oratio and contemplatio*. He explained how the first three rungs of the ladder move us toward the highest rung, which is contemplation. At the end of his teaching, he challenged those in attendance to do some “homework” in regards to Guigo the Second.

On Tuesday evening, following a food and fellowship filled reception in the church vestibule, Fr. Meninger led those attending in an experiential time of Centering Prayer. He gave the simple guidelines for the prayer and then led a 20-minute session. Afterwards he spoke of the fruits of this transformational practice. He explained that the transformational power of Centering Prayer is not experienced during the prayer itself but in the inevitable fruits this practice produces in everyday life citing the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The response to Fr. Meninger’s visit was enthusiastic and encouraging. Many people were able to spend time with Fr. Meninger over the course of his visit and were able to ask questions and sometimes chuckle at his dry wit.

The contemplative community at Santa Maria del Mar took advantage of the momentum begun by Fr. Meninger’s mission and scheduled an Introduction to Centering Prayer Workshop to be presented by Kathy Kotas on the Saturday following his visit. The attendance at the workshop was larger than anticipated. As a result of Fr. Meninger’s visit, many people have learned more about the practice of Centering Prayer, and two new Centering Prayer groups have been established at the parish.

Anne Lamott says “I do not understand the mystery of grace – only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.” Grace met us, and moved us this March at Santa Maria del Mar. Many thanks to Fr. William Meninger for being the vessel of that grace!

Approximately three and one-half years ago I experienced a strong desire to feel more connected to God intimately, in a relational way. My spiritual life was intact, however, something was missing. I prayed for guidance, and God, ever faithful, answered my prayer by introducing me to a prayer practice called Centering Prayer. One of the first opportunities presented to me was that of a seven day intensive prayer retreat in North Palm Beach. I had the good fortune to secure a ride with Basha Perez and Alice Logan.

As the fruits of this prayer practice began to manifest within me, I felt a tug to inquire about the possibility of taking formation classes to become a presenter-in-training for introductory workshops. So, I had a conversation with my friend Basha. She replied that the day for classes would be determined by group consensus. So, I waited...and guess what! The group selected Friday, my only open day! I was elated!

This serious commitment consists of five-one day sessions, each day beginning and ending with 30 minutes of Centering Prayer. The first session consists of a discernment process to determine one’s level of commitment to the time frame, and most importantly, to discern the purpose of our commitment. Is it for spiritual self-enrichment or to serve Contemplative Outreach as a certified presenter?

I quickly became immersed in the essentials of the Centering Prayer introductory workshop program, with Basha as our loving, and exacting leader. She is indeed committed to the integrity of this method of prayer, and she stressed the importance of commitment and integrity to her students. There are four main themes addressed in the essentials: Prayer as Relationship, the Centering Prayer Method, Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word, and Deepening our Relationship with God. A full day is given to each theme.

Basha always presented first, and then came the words, “now it is your turn.” I made my first presentation with trepidation, with my mentor making notes quickly. We were asked first to give self-feedback, followed by feedback from each of our classmates, and finally, feedback from our leader, who occasionally followed her feedback with a “zinger” question. This was to remind us that our answers should not come strictly from how well we knew the material, but from our hearts in relating personal experiences of how the fruits of this practice were manifesting within us by enabling us to love others in extraordinary ways.

I can truly say that the time invested in this opportunity was a gift for which there is no value! I will be forever grateful to my “transmitter of information” as she calls it, guide, and mentor, Basha Perez, who opened her home as a spiritual haven, and gave unselfishly of her time in guiding us through the process with love and unceasing integrity to this beautiful practice called Centering Prayer!



COCFL Mission:

Support Central Florida Centering Prayer Groups and their members to foster transformation in Christ in one another through the practice of Centering Prayer.



Area Centering Prayer facilitators gathered in Melbourne on April 29th for a feedback session to help Contemplative Outreach evaluate communications and plan for the future.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GOOD NEWS DAILY

By Nestor De Armas

Acts 22:30-23:11 *that night, the Lord stood near ... and said, "Keep up your courage!"* (v.11)

Courage often comes dressed in precious rags. It sobs when facing death ... feels disoriented ... isolated ... can't catch its breath. It smiles and jokes around while it waits to lose its breasts; then, counts in milliliters until the drains are pulled from its flat chest. It smiles through chemo orientations while its heart is filled with dread. It lays awake at night worried its husband is so stressed. It sits, and chats, in chemo chairs while "red devils" roam its chest. With sweaty palms, it picks the hair chunks off its bed. It takes its nausea medicine then stares at the thermometer as it feels the fever's edge. It befriends one met in chemo knowing it will end in death. It smiles calmly into the little, anxious face. It giggles as its chemo mind acts out and then forgets. It learns what really matters. It lets go of the rest. It cherishes each sunrise... each ride to school ... each dirty little face. She learns to know, and love, the Presence who is nearer than her breath.

2 Samuel 17:24-18:8; Psalm 106:1-18; Mark 11:12-26

What Can One Say About Our Experience with Maru? by: Susan Arneson



Humans are wired to contemplate profound questions, like "Who am I?" "Where am I from?" "Where am I going?" "Where was God before the Universe began?" When I entered the lovely, peaceful All Faiths Chapel at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne on April 29th, I wasn't expecting to be brilliantly confronted with a new set of strikingly profound questions, but that is what happened.

Our presenter, Maru Ladrón De Guevara, along with our Servant Team, provided an all-encompassing opportunity that invited us to truly move into the experience of the highest human qualities such as Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control. This fruit grows from rootedness in our Divine Ground and moves us to freely offer it to others, trusting God's Presence and action in each of us wherever we are right now. God loves us and desires to co-create the world with us.

Presenting bits of wisdom from Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, and others, Maru also shared her own wisdom. Guiding us from a place of inner awe, to open our hearts and reflect upon questions such as:

- 1) What would it take for me to believe that God is really in me, that I am invited to co-create with God and participate in the New Creation?
- 2) What if I could accept that my unique essence is essential to the fabric of life, just as everyone else's uniqueness is essential? Just as animals in Nature listen for the calls of other species to get information they need for survival, do we not depend on others, and they on us, for survival?
- 3) What if sitting in silence, setting aside concerns and desires, actually allows us to transcend the world and be transformed, which is to say, to find the hidden wholeness that makes us One with Him in love?

I find that struggling with our False Self presents us with perhaps our greatest challenge if we allow ourselves to be lead astray from authenticity and relationship with God. Many of us, as we shift our weight away from self-control/self-desire toward a desire to be nearer to God, lose our balance and "fall into the infinite abyss of God." We may recognize this as the Cloud of Unknowing or the Dark Night of the Soul, a very trying, frustrating, dark state. Yet, we are brought through by attending to the deepest cry of our inner being, the yearning for communion. And when we say "Yes" to communion, "Yes" to God's offer for us to be One with him, we discover our deepest Joy. This is our dance with God, this saying "yes" when God invites us. This raises for me another profound question:

- 4) When God gently bows, reaches out, and says "Will you dance with me?" what will my answer be?

Maru set before us the graced possibility of saying "Yes" to waking up to God in the world all around us; "Yes" to practicing reverence for nature and all of creation; "Yes" to opening to God's heartbeat in others. As we consent daily to enter into inner silence and solitude, we allow the Spirit to free us from the tyrannies of our little self, and we find ourselves embraced and embracing the one and only holy dance.