



COCFL News



UPCOMING EVENTS

Introduction to Centering Prayer

January 16, 2016
8:30 a.m. to noon.
St. George Episcopal Church, The Villages

The Welcoming Prayer with Mary Dwyer

February 5-6, 2016
St. George Episcopal Church, The Villages

United Day of Prayer

Saturday March 9, 2016
Theme and location TBA

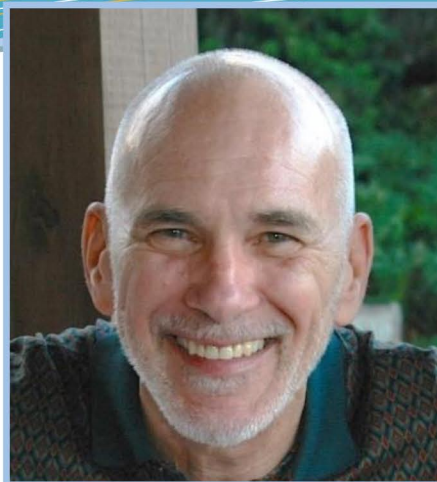
Night of Sense, Night of Spirit with Susan Komis

NEW DATE: April 22-23
Church of Our Saviour
Catholic Church,
Cocoa Beach

More information on events at: www.cocfl.org

COCFL Mission:

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



A Word from Nestor de Armas, COCFL Coordinator

"Oh, how good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] live together in unity!" begins Psalm 133. This verse expresses what we experienced at the Canterbury Retreat Center in early November. Jim McElroy, our retreat speaker, wrote, "It's been a blessing to be in Orlando and a real honor to spend time with you." A person new to Centering Prayer commented, "I am deeply grateful ... learning about the Welcoming Prayer process was like receiving manna for me -- so nurturing." A participant who has been centering for years remarked "[The] service group [Team] did a great job with the retreat and I am looking forward to more of them."

What is most meaningful, from my perspective, is that our Chapter was responsive to the top priorities you expressed to us during Visioning Day last October: promote growth in Centering

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Prayer and provide a retreat opportunity in the Central Florida area. Furthermore, the way our Service Team went about making this retreat possible is most inspirational to me: our Team put the "why" and the "how" of service ahead of the "outcome." As Thomas Keating teaches, motivation is more important than actions and serving with utmost charity is more important than outcomes. It was my joy to see the members of our Service Team motivated primarily by the desire to allow the "God in them serve the God in you." Over and over, I observed "how" they went about it: manifesting utmost charity to the attendees and to each other. Finally, after they had done what they could, they left the actual number of people who attended in God's hands. Now, that is Gospel!

Blessings,

Nestor De Armas



CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOUR – COCOA BEACH

By Beth Murphy

“And He said, Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Now there was a great wind so strong that it was splitting the mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of gentle stillness and a still small voice”

1 Kings 19:11-12

MEMBERS SHARE

“I began Centering Prayer more than 20 years ago. After a few false starts, there was a gradual Inner Calling that I could not ignore and I joined a Centering Prayer group in my area.

Commitment and faithfulness to Centering Prayer, daily; reading and contemplation of sacred Scripture; experiencing kenosis (personal self-emptying) and other gifts given to us through the Holy Spirit and the love God has for us. Among those, Centering Prayer retreats, workshops, discussion groups and of greatest value, learning deeply within my spirit, that it is by reading in community the works of the masters of Centering/Contemplative Prayer that has led to transformation and Spiritual awareness of the Lord present in my life always.”



*“Silent friends meeting
The sounds of chairs being moved
To enlarge the circle”.*

A haiku poem by Robert Major
Contributed by Carolyn Huber

The oak trees covered with resurrection fern fill the grounds at the Church of Our Saviour in Cocoa Beach, providing a heavenly setting for our contemplative prayer. There was a Centering Prayer group at Our Saviour when the prayer was introduced to the area 30 years ago. It was led by one of the Sisters of Mercy that taught at the school. When the sisters returned to their home in Limerick, Ireland, the group disbanded.

In 2007 when we brainstormed ideas for Advent activities, and decided on four prayer talks including Contemplative Prayer, we never imagined the result. Basha Perez came to our parish to teach us about the prayer and at our invitation came back in January with Rosemary VanPelt and Barbara Smythers to present our Introductory Workshop. Adal Henriquez was with us for our six week follow up sessions. Then we were on our own, or so we thought. We were a group of twenty to start and after a year there were five of us – four year round and one winter visitor from St. Louis who has returned every year.

My husband and I became the group facilitators without any prior involvement with Centering Prayer. For the first couple of years we attended the Centering Prayer group at St. Mary's in Rockledge to keep our own group on track. Praying and sharing with this group of experienced practitioners let us see the fruits of the prayer and encouraged us in our own prayer life and with our group. For five years the four of us gathered, prayed and shared our experiences every week – watched the Spiritual Journey – read *Open Mind Open Heart*, and *The Invitation to Love*. Then something happened and more people started showing up to the group. Last summer, Adal Henriquez gave us another Introductory Workshop and this time we had forty people attend. We now have a total of 15 people and we have split into two groups. We meet Wednesday evenings at 6:00 and Tuesday mornings at 7:00. We have four qualified facilitators who have all attended the facilitators workshops (Fr. Jim Murphy, Sharon Wright, Anne Goodin, and Beth Murphy), and three members who serve on Service Teams. Sharon Wright is the bookkeeper for the financial team and Anne Goodin and Beth Murphy serve on the event team. In March of 2014, we hosted the United Day of Prayer. We asked our winter visitor from St Louis, Rita Sturgeon, to talk about her experience on our theme of “Falling into the Arms of God.” This is when she revealed that she was the St Louis co-coordinator. We had been advised and encouraged by a chapter coordinator for 6 years. She had never mentioned it until her talk.

We are very excited to be hosting the **Night of Sense Night of Spirit** event with presenter Susan Komis on Friday, April 22 and Saturday, April 23, 2016. We hope that you will join us for this wonderful opportunity to learn and pray and grow in community. If we are fortunate we will have rain beforehand so that the resurrection ferns that look brown and dead when dry will be resurrected to their full regal green beauty, drawing us into the infinity beauty and mystery of God's love.

WHY CENTERING PRAYER GROUPS?

NURTURE & SUPPORT TEAM VISITS

August 18-20

By Gwen Robertson



By Alma Garcia

We have been drawn to a Centering Prayer Group by a deep inner drive. Seeking support for personal suffering has perhaps led us there. Our original motives are not always selfless. Maybe we have been searching for a group of like-minded people with our unique spiritual goal: to experience God's presence through silence and inner transformation. Are we ready to commit?

The right environment we choose for a particular goal always benefits and reinforces our goals. As we commit to attend a Centering Prayer group, our connection with others with our same values emerges. This begins to purify the level of our intentions, influencing and reinforcing our spiritual goals. Our strength is intensified by the encouragement and support of others, especially as we share our experiences of joy, sufferings and disappointments. Sharing with others in total confidentiality fosters authenticity and our ability to be vulnerable.

The dynamics of a group create a field of connection between its members that amplifies the energy that Centering, Lectio Divina and prayer generates. It acts as an instrument of "change" and inner healing, and its success depends largely on the trust, connection and concern for each other. This awareness of "others" begins to transform this "me" and become this "One" – one vessel trying to have all its parts reach God. The group creates a platform for us to leave our "false self" out and unite with the circle of friends instead, at which center there is no competition. Elitist and exclusive attitudes are non-existent. As we connect with other's spiritual goals, and center in silence, a fertile environment of love is created that fulfills the law "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself." (Mark 12:31) Our groups serve as a laboratory where, as we heal and learn to love each other, our love grows into selfless compassion, from which we go out into the community at large to serve others.

As the group meets weekly in a collective effort, a phenomenon emerges. The process of human interaction by itself, in a prayer group, produces a degree of holy presence. ("For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Mathew 18:20). This "Holy Presence" experienced by the members is a catalyst in healing and eventual spiritual transformation in Christ.



- **Church of the Epiphany**, Port Orange. Entering in silence, I saw many familiar faces. We promptly began to settle into our chairs for scripture reading and Centering Prayer. The life of the Church of Epiphany community was steeped in a deep commitment to prayer and each other. After Prayer, and Lectio, coffee and donuts were shared during social time. This was the first time I knew we had a newly updated website!

- **Our Lady of Lourdes Church**, Daytona. Fr. Phil Egitto greeted us at the door with a very warm friendly welcome. He showed us around the church pointing out the areas of the Icon Chapel and an area dedicated to deceased parish members. I can see how much he loves his parish community and they love him! Tony and Audrey Lewis were gracious Centering Prayer Facilitators with open arms and hearts to all. A new couple joined us for C.P. and sharing. Tony and Audrey gave very devotional prayers for everyone in all life circumstances!

- **Sacred Heart Church**, New Smyrna Beach. I was greeted by Jeana Moore and joined them in viewing a video of Fr. Carl Arico speaking on going deeper into the silence. This was a loving close community very devoted to each other. Facilitator, Irene Babineau, was away for the summer, but her leadership was evident by the group's continuing on!

- **St. Peter the Fisherman**, New Smyrna Beach. Wrapped in the arms of a quiet and natural Florida setting is this wonderful CP group. For years, Maj-Britt Pehler facilitated the group and thanks go out to her for her service. Current facilitator Ann Zimmerman led us with her soft voice and gentle manner into Prayer and Lectio followed by deep sharing. Liz Withington led a lively spirited teaching on St. Cornelius. This gave us a sense of being back in his time of conflict and courage. He is known for starting many monasteries and was elected Pope in 251.

With each group, I provided information about our Chapter and invited them to share questions, concerns or suggestions for upcoming events in their area.

From the very beginning, under the guidance of Sister Claire Gregg and others, our community has grown. Group Facilitators have kept us true to our CP guidelines. Without a doubt, personal growth and chapter growth came to be because of God's blessing, the work of others who came before us and the continued service of those today. Service is the key to growth and caring for all people. The Holy Spirit is our guide! While I spoke about upcoming Chapter events and invited questions to be answered by Service Team, I had the feeling in meeting each person that God was blessing me beyond anything I could have imagine! *Oh what a lovely time I had visiting our CP groups on the Florida East Coast!*

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT For Beautiful service

By Veronique Sallin

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Alma Garcia for her loving service to COCFL this past year and a half. Alma has been the spirit behind the newsletter, which she designed, launched and produced since its inception. She literally built it from the ground up. Without her, we would not be able to enjoy lively news and information from the chapter which contribute to keeping us connected as a community of people and prayer.

Alma has wanted to pass the baton, and we hope that one of us will step up and be inspired by the Holy Spirit to volunteer for this beautiful service. The hardest has been done: getting it started. The making of the COCFL quarterly newsletter now consists mostly in gathering articles from chapter volunteer writers, editing and coordinating the production of the issue. In this, they will be helped by the communication service team of which they will become a member. If you are interested, please contact Veronique Sallin at veronique.sallin@cherrylake.com.

Dan Wagner has volunteered to substitute for Alma for the next 3 months. Thank you, Dan! You can help him by submitting articles and by sharing thoughts or news about events in your areas. dwagner119@gmail.com

Fr. Keating considers Contemplative Prayer and Contemplative Service as the two banks of the River that is our spiritual life.



EXTENSION CONTEMPLATIVA INTERNACIONAL In Central Florida



Written by Ilse Reissner, Margarita Shephard and Rosana Villarreal

The history of the Spanish Centering Prayer Groups in Central Florida started in 1991, when Ilse Reissner moved to Altamonte Springs from Miami. She had learned and practiced Centering Prayer for a few years with Father Bill Sheehan, who in turn was one of the first disciples of Fr. Keating. She searched for a prayer group in Orlando where she could continue practicing Centering Prayer. She first met Sister Clair Gregg, also a disciple of Father Sheehan and founder of Centering Prayer in Central Florida. Claire in turn referred her to Basha Perez's Centering Prayer group in Altamonte Springs. There Ilse met Maria Teresa Torregrosa, a parishioner of Mary Magdalene Church in Maitland, where she directed a Bible study in Spanish. Soon, Ilse joined them. These two friends decided to introduce Centering Prayer to the Spanish speaking group and invited Dr. Adalberto Henriquez to give a talk about Father Thomas Keating's works and Centering Prayer. After Maria Teresa's death, they regrouped and have been practicing since then on Friday mornings at Mary Magdalene Church, organized by Nena Shidemantle. After attending Dr. Adalberto Henriquez's workshop in Mary Magdalene Church, Carmen and Pedro Delorbe founded a second Centering Prayer group at Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Orlando. This group gets together every two weeks on Saturday mornings.

Eventually in 2000 Ilse was contacted by some ladies from Annunciation Catholic Church in Altamonte Springs who after attending a Father Ignacio Larrañaga's course, became interested in learning about Centering Prayer in Spanish. This group still practices on Tuesday mornings. In 2013, Paulina Nichols was invited by one of our practitioners to attend an introductory workshop, and felt motivated to start a fourth group in South Orlando at St. Luke's Church on Monday evenings.

From the beginning, the Spanish speaking groups learned about Thomas Keating's teachings by reading *Invitation to Love*, which was in English and had to be translated to Spanish by Ilse during each session. It didn't take long before Fr. Keating heard about the translations and asked Ilse to translate the whole book which was published in 1995 followed by *Open Mind Open Heart* and *Mystery of Christ*, and his articles in the *Contemplative Outreach* newsletter. Other volunteers in the Dominican Republic had already translated other writings. All this material plus many videos and other recordings have been translated and distributed throughout the years in at least 12 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Centering Prayer in Spanish was not only having a great acceptance in Central Florida, it also found followers in many countries in the Caribbean and Central and South America like Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Argentina among others. In the late 1990s, Ilse and Dr. Adalberto Henriquez saw the need to start an international organization and founded *America Contemplativa* which later became *Extension Contemplativa Internacional*, an entity that united the heads in different countries to organize workshops, retreats and talks with Fr. Thomas Keating.

THAT IS HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN OUR LIVES. WE OFFER OUR EFFORT WHICH MANY TIMES IS VERY SMALL, AND HE DOES THE REST!

For more information, please visit our website for Extension Contemplativa Internacional: www.extensioncontemplativainternacional.org