



# COCFL News

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### COCFL Workshop on Julian of Norwich

Presented by  
Patti Merlo MPM  
(Master in Pastoral  
Ministry)

Saturday, February 9, 2019  
8:30 AM – 3:00 PM  
St. Patrick Church  
6803 Old Highway 441  
Mt. Dora, Florida 32757

8:30 AM – 3:00 PM

Check our website in the  
coming weeks for more  
information:

[www.cocfl.org](http://www.cocfl.org)

For an outline of the  
workshop please visit:

[www.pattymerlo.com/html  
/julian\\_of\\_norwich.html](http://www.pattymerlo.com/html/julian_of_norwich.html)



### 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.

## Contemplative Outreach of Central Florida

# November 2018

COCFL website: [www.cocfl.org](http://www.cocfl.org)

## In Honor and Memory of Father Thomas Keating



On Thursday, October 25, Fr. Thomas Keating was ushered into the face-to-face presence of the God whom he loved and served for most of his life. Fr. Keating, along with Fr. William Meninger and Fr. Basil Pennington, was instrumental in reintroducing the practice of Centering Prayer within the Christian community. Fr. Keating's introduction, support and encouragement of the practice resulted in the founding of Contemplative Outreach, an organization that is now worldwide. He has written numerous books including Open Mind, Open Heart, Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation and Intimacy with God. Contemplative Outreach, has produced numerous materials to provide encouragement and growth in the practice of Centering Prayer and related spiritual practices such as Lectio Divina and the Welcoming Prayer. It is with much love and appreciation for his contribution to our lives that we at Contemplative Outreach of Central Florida wish to honor his life, his work and the gift of his everlasting friendship.

# Going Deeper: Consider a Seven-Ten Day Intensive Retreat

By Basha Perez



## A Very Good Choice By Alice Logan

What an amazing experience I had at this year's June Intensive /Post-Intensive retreat! This was my sixth retreat, but it was different for me this year. Was it how the other retreatants respected the silence? Was it the wonderful videos of Fr. Thomas' Spiritual Journey series? I'm sure those played a part. What I think affected me most was my willingness to put aside the Martha in me and choose "the better part."

The results speak for themselves. I have brought home the effects of the retreat and let the silence engulf me as I walk early in the morning on the trail. The walk has become Contemplative. I am immersed in the silence even with birds chirping, gentle breezes rustling through the trees, and only a few others on the trail. I am in God's presence in nature. What a joy!

After you have developed a daily practice of Centering Prayer 20 minutes twice daily and are a participant of a weekly Centering Prayer group, have attended workshops, days of prayer and/or weekend retreats...then the next step would be to attend a seven-ten day intensive retreat.

When you have been faithful to the Centering Prayer practice and your heart is open, the Spirit can lead you into the desert as the Spirit led Jesus. The desert is where you encounter yourself and discover where you are in your relationship with God. It is where your head knowledge of God becomes transformed into heart knowledge. It is experiential. And that is the purpose of an intensive retreat.

The experience happens because we "let go" of all the familiar daily routines as we consent to a deeper experience of daily life. The schedule is tailor made for this to happen. Prayer, nourishment, information, activity, rest, and Eucharist are arranged for you to go with the flow. It is recommended that you refrain from all reading so as to not fill your head with more information but create the space for evacuation of thoughts. Your openness and cooperation are all that is needed.

However, if you go with expectations and judgments, then you become the obstacle in your relationship with God. So it is fair to say that you learn a lot about yourself. As scripture says "nothing is hidden that will not be revealed" (Mark 4:22). It is about the healing of the unconscious. Thomas Keating calls it "Divine Therapy."

The trained staff is available every afternoon for soul friending. The rhythm of the retreat, the facility, the grounds, the food, the staff, all help to make your experience transformation. You grow to a new level of trust in your relationship with God and realize that 20 minutes twice a day is for beginners. God deserves and wants more time with you. The 7-10 day intensive retreat is not a one-time event. The relationship is ongoing and the intensive retreats are offered every June within the state of Florida for affordable travel. It eliminates the need for additional expense by flying out of state. These yearly retreats foster and deepen your relationship to new levels.

When I made my first 10-day intensive retreat in June 1990 at San Pedro Center in Winter Park, I did not have a daily practice of 20 minutes twice a day. It was hit and miss. And I really wanted to go to Snowmass, CO, to be with Thomas Keating. That is where many of the COCFL people had gone and I was very envious. But, our coordinator, Sr. Claire Gregg, said that Snowmass was coming south to San Pedro Center and we should sign up. So with reluctance I obeyed or maybe just cooperated.

It was on this retreat that I made the most significant discovery on my spiritual journey....God was calling ME to an INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP! ME!!! Not my husband! ME! But naturally my thought was, "what if I say YES and my husband thinks I am becoming a religious fanatic?" God said, "I'm calling YOU, not your husband." So I answered, "YES."

Ever since then, my priority became a 10-day intensive retreat every year. It was my gift to God; my willingness to give God ten days of my life so he could love me and heal me. It was the first date on my calendar.

Let nothing, neither thoughts nor money, stand in your way. Do not let pride or fear be an obstacle. Take your relationship to a deeper level. Scholarships are available through your chapter. Experience God's healing love and transformation.

## A Word from our Co-Coordinator



**Dan Wagner**

### A Memory of Fr. Thomas Keating

I first met Fr. Thomas in the late 1990s at Bethany Retreat Center in Frenchville, Pennsylvania. I won one of the five private interviews with Fr. Thomas. Well you can imagine what I was thinking! How can I talk to this scholar of many books like Open Mind, Open Heart? I had read this book three times, underlined and studied it. I was in awe of his work. What could I ask him that would further my practice of Centering Prayer?

I finally decided on a question: how to breathe? My first teacher, Sr. Jean Lavin, had taught us how to marry the breath with the sacred word during our practice. I had, like all of us, been having problems quieting my thoughts. I don't know where I got the idea, but I decided to ask him, "Is it ok after you inhale your sacred word, to hold your breath for a second or two to help quiet the mind and then exhale?"

This was all I could come up with for meeting with the great man, and so I went through with it. His answer was that it can help you with your practice! That is all I recall of our conversation. But I do remember that he exuded acceptance, peace and love without criticism.

One of the traits that I most admire about him is that he never ever criticized anyone in any way shape or form in his videos or talks. Not a critical word ever!



**Jesse Fox**

### Reflections of Grace

**“Union with God is not something we can or need to acquire...It is we who, with complicated and cluttered minds, remain unaware of that this foundational Light is flowering perpetually in the fertile and unfathomable right now.” Martin Laird**

God seems so gracious that he doesn't seem to require any payment, prerequisites, no prior education, no training, no background check, no qualifications of any kind, to be in his company. Fr. Laird reminded me of this reality during our retreat. It reminded me of the first time I saw Fr. Keating teach about prayer. I remember feeling that this man truly knows God, and the grace with which he spoke about God's love and grace, warmed my heart and made me feel like I had found home. I was never able to meet him in person, but I cherish his writing, his teaching, and most especially his grace filled presence. Pope Francis recently said that the name of God is Mercy. You couldn't help but know that truth each time Fr. Keating spoke or wrote about anything. It was very special to be present with the Central Florida chapter of Contemplative Outreach during Fr. Keating's funeral mass at St. Joseph's. Something felt so right about being together with so many people he had personally touched and guided along the way to deepening the intimacy that God offers to all. Accept that you are already accepted. Fr. Keating helped me to realize that in my own life, and he continues to do so each day I wake up and say "yes."

***“Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation.”***

***-- Fr. Thomas Keating***

**NEWSLETTER MISSION:**

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 prayer of the Servant Leadership Group that this endeavor will serve as support for better understanding, and an increase in spiritual desire and importance of the Centering Prayer goals.

## Reaching North By Liz Lefevre



On September 22, 2018 Commissioned Presenters Donna Davis and Liz Lefevre shared an introduction to Centering Prayer hosted by The Center for Prayer and Spirituality and The Center for Spirituality at St. John's Cathedral in Jacksonville, Florida. Over 40 participants traveled from as far south as Nocatee near Ponte Vedra in St. Johns County and as far north as Christ the King Catholic Church in northern Jacksonville to participate. COCFL received a very warm welcome and began a shared friendship in this outreach to our north.

## Light Sitting in Light: A look at contemplation with Martin Laird and a farewell to Father Thomas Keating by Glenda Meekins

Seventy contemplatives gathered at Canterbury Retreat Center in Oviedo, Nov. 2-4 to listen to Fr. Martin Laird, the renowned contemplative of the Order of St. Augustine. The author's retreat came one week after the passing of our dear Fr. Thomas Keating, providing for the unique opportunity to share as a community in his funeral, spiritually through our practice, physically through our sharing in the incensing of his body and intimately through our love for him.

I must admit, when I looked at the rigorous "sit" schedule, I was a little intimidated. However, it proved a cherished time, allowing the mind to sift the ocean of information and concepts Fr. Laird shared with great care and enabling us to focus our intention and consent to God's presence both within us and in one another.

Father Laird unpacked the three stages of the mind as it seeks to liberate itself of the ego's clutter: the reactive, receptive, and luminous mind. At the root of this clutter is the illusion that God is something apart from ourselves. Yet, in reality we are as inseparable from God as light can be separated from air. "The ocean of God is within, but not contained," he explained. "Like a sponge is full of the ocean, but all the ocean is not the sponge." He noted that, "We cannot acquire union with God, we must realize it." In other words, there is nothing to acquire. We have it; we must simply become keenly aware of this reality. Through movement from the reactive mind to the receptive, then luminous mind - explained in greater detail in his most recent book, *Oceans of Light* - we are able to realize this union.

He spoke of the reactive mind as what is on the surface - the afflictive thoughts that set off our immediate response to situations. "The frequent inner chatter, the story we tell ourselves about how our lives should be, are the attitudes and story that support the reactive mind," he noted. "In reactive mind, our thoughts are in the forefront and we think that is who we are; that is what life is."

He explained, when we take a step back, out of the story and see it, "What was threatening is no longer threatening because it is not perceived in an afflictive way..." When we can see the anger, envy, resentment, fear of intimacy, or other afflictive emotions, then we are free of them. He clarified, "We don't feel our feelings. We feel the story about it. That is what's frightening about fear—the story we tell about the fear." A daily centering practice cultivates this crucial training, moving us to the receptive mind and into a deeper awareness that, "We are vessels of reverent beholding."

The shift is from victim to witness. It is then, he says, that "You can look straight through persecuting thoughts and see luminous vastness because they've lost their grip. It is this luminous vastness that is the who of who we are. Our hidden selves are realized through returning to practice through daily life."

Fr. Laird's final presentation was on depression and how Centering Prayer can be a great healer of this disorder. He acknowledged that depression can be a better teacher than joy because, in acknowledging this affliction, we can come to know that "our pain is personal, but not private to us." In this way, "depression becomes our contemplative practice." As one sits in the silence, one is joined in solidarity with others who are suffering, becoming a "bridge for those who have no bridge." He reminded us of the role of the suffering servant—to be a bridge for others and asked, "What do you do with your pain?" In the words of Blessed Julian of Norwich, "In heaven, our wounds will be our trophies and they will be transformed in silence." May we allow our light to sit in the light of silence and be healed by its glow.