



Community Letter

Dear Centering Prayer Community,

Welcome to a new year and a new decade. Chronological time relentlessly moves on. We are grateful that our centering practice places us in “vertical time,” “Kairos,” “God’s time,” on a daily basis. In that eternal space, all is refreshed and we sense the promise that everything is held in God. We have the opportunity to wake up to the present moment where we share in eternity. We are so thankful.

This year, here in Arizona, we hope to build on the fruits of our meeting with the national Board of Trustees last February. For that to happen, we will need to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and to listen to each other. Throughout the year, we will prepare for a community gathering day in the fall by asking for prayer intentions and discernment. We want to hear from you what is working in your prayer life or group, what is challenging, what is possible. There are new and fascinating resources available from the national office, and we will share them throughout the year and at our fall gathering.

We spend time in this newsletter reflecting on Fr. Michael Fish’s retreat day last fall. There is much spiritual richness there. Also, we asked a newer member of the community to share his path to Centering Prayer. These days there are many teachers and practices that prepare the heart for Centering Prayer. What is your story? What about those around you??

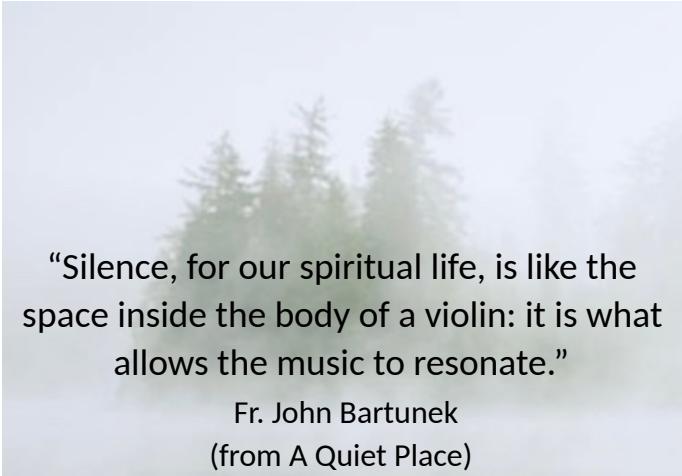
Contemplative Outreach supports the Centering Prayer practice and Lectio Divina (receptive reading of scripture for personal transformation). Other vital practices are the Welcoming Prayer and the Prayer of Forgiveness. We will offer a workshop on the

Welcoming Prayer in April, and would love to be invited to your church to present this practice.

On Saturday, March 21, 2020 we hold our annual International United in Prayer day at Shepherd of the Hills UCC from 9:30 am to 1 pm. For those of you in other locations the materials and program will be available on the national website. You can plan your own event, hopefully, bringing members of various prayer groups together in one location. Just let us know if we can help.

You are the reason we meet each month as your Chapter Service Team. We are eager to hear from you, and to hear your own thoughts about how we can nourish the organism that is Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. Centering Prayer is our hearts desire, our peace, and our sanity. We invite you to think outwards. How can we bring this practice into our twenty-first century world?

In peace, silence and service,
Your Chapter Service Team



“Silence, for our spiritual life, is like the space inside the body of a violin: it is what allows the music to resonate.”

Fr. John Bartunek
(from A Quiet Place)

Announcements

More information can be found at
www.contemplativeoutreach-phoenix.org

March 21

United Day of Prayer for Worldwide
Contemplative Outreach
Saturday, March 21, 2020
9:30 am to 1 pm
Shepherd of the Hills UCC
5524 E. Lafayette Blvd.

April 4

Introduction to Centering Prayer
Saturday, April 4, 2020
9:30 am to 3 pm
St. Barnabas on the Desert
6715 E. Mockingbird Lane
Scottsdale, AZ

April 25

Practice of Welcoming Prayer
Saturday, April 25, 2020
9 am to 1 pm
Shepherd of the Hills UCC
5524 E. Lafayette Blvd.
Phoenix, AZ 85018

April 29 to May 31

12 Step Retreat: Improving Your 11th Step
Meditation Process
Friday, May 29, 2020 at 4 pm through
Sunday, May 31, 2020 at noon.
The Franciscan Renewal Center
5802 E. Lincoln Drive
Scottsdale, AZ 85253

Nov 7

SAVE THE DATE : Community
Gathering: Connecting, Sharing and
Reflecting
Saturday, November 7, 2020
Shepherd of the Hills UCC
5524 E. Lafayette Blvd.
Phoenix, AZ 85018

**QUOTE FROM
INTIMACY WITH GOD
BY THOMAS KEATING**

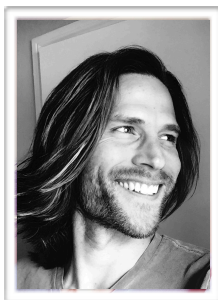
Motivation is everything in the spiritual journey. God, I think, cares less about a change of lifestyle or ideal circumstances than about our attitude toward what we are doing. Our motivation can be inspired by the false-self system dressed up in religious or spiritual garb. This letting go into the unknown, this submitting to the unloading process, is an essential step into the mystery of our own unconscious. Hidden there is not only our whole life's history, especially the emotional wounds of early childhood buried in the warehouse of our bodies, but also the positive elements of our potential for growth in faith, hope, and divine love, and where the Divine Indwelling is also present. We must gradually recover the conviction, not just the feeling, of the Divine Indwelling, the realization that God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - is living in us. This is the heart of the spiritual journey to which Centering Prayer is totally in service.

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FINDING MY WAY TO CENTERING PRAYER

BY DANNY COLLIER



Greetings brothers and sisters.
Grace to you and peace in
Christ and all the names of the
Holy One.

I've been asked to share with
you a little about my journey
with Centering Prayer. "What

drew you to Centering Prayer and what is the practice like in your life?" To really answer these questions, I need to start with my childhood and the spiritual inheritance I was given. I was raised in a deeply conservative Pentecostal milieu. Church twice on Sundays (morning and evening) as well as on Wednesdays was the norm in my household. It's taken me many years to say this and nearly twenty years away from institutionalized Christianity, but I'm now grateful for it. Order > Disorder > Reorder as Fr. Richard Rohr explains is the ideal trajectory for spiritual development. Another way of saying it is; simple consciousness (pre-rational) to complex consciousness (rational) to nondual consciousness (trans-rational), for which the Centering Prayer practice helps to awaken and cultivate.

The Christianity of my childhood gave me lots of order. But as I matured into my late teens the once solid structures of my worldview began to crumble. I didn't have the peace I once had with the conservative ideology, rigid interpretation of scripture and the complete disregard of the sciences. The world just seemed far too complex for the easy black and white, either/or answers I once relied on as a child. So at nineteen, with far more questions than answers, I left the church and embarked on a journey of new discovery and continual paradigm shifts.

The first paradigm shift came upon learning what a paradigm shift even was. Reading Steven Covey's explanation in a book, I was given after high school, taught me that there's a depth to reality beyond dualism or what language can even adequately articulate. How you can see the same thing as before, but with completely new and enlarged eyes. This realization created a hunger for deeper forms of spiritual transformation and ultimately lead me to explore some of the great traditions of the east; Buddhism, Taoism and Hinduism. One of the greatest

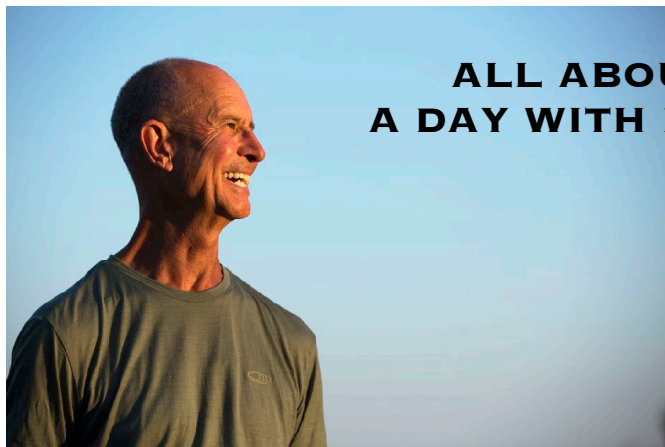
influences on me at this time and really throughout my twenties was Eckhart Tolle.

Tolle's writings on the present moment and how our deepest identity is not found in our incessant stream of thoughts, prompted a major shift in consciousness for me. As I approached my early thirties however, my interest in meditation as a daily practice began to increase. I began taking and teaching yoga and experimenting with various forms of meditation over the course of a few years. I was eventually lead to the writings of contemplative Christian teachers such Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, and Cynthia Bourgeault among others. This mystical Christian thread (which goes back to the time of Jesus and before) reintroduced me to a depth of my religious heritage I never even knew existed.

I was particularly taken with the method of Centering Prayer taught by Fr. Thomas Keating. What resonated most was its simple intention; It's not to experience enlightenment, reduce stress or anxiety etc. (although these are benefits many practitioners experience) but simply to consent. To consent to reality (i.e. God) as reality is. To simply let go and let be. When thoughts or distractions arise, you simply let go via a sacred word. My sacred word is Grace. Grace upon Grace upon Grace upon Grace... Until often the word is no longer necessary and I just rest in GRACE.

Like many people, I tend to be a control freak. Centering Prayer has helped to loosen the reins on my need for control, which is really just an illusion anyway. CP twice daily has been a consistent practice in my life for nearly two years now. I do my first sit for thirty minutes in the morning and later again for thirty minutes in the evening. I'm also so grateful to be a part of an amazing Centering Prayer group at Saint Barnabas Episcopal Parish led by Liza Bell.

Daniel Collier is currently in the process of training to become a Centering Prayer commissioned presenter and is also a second year student in the Center for Action and Contemplation's Living School taught by Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault and James Finley.



ALL ABOUT THE HEART: A DAY WITH FR. MICHAEL FISH

Talk Number One: Celtic Spirituality

Last October about one hundred of us gathered to hear the wisdom of Fr. Michael Fish, OSB, the Camaldolese monk from Big Sur, California who makes his living leading retreats. He radiates a joyful enthusiasm for the spiritual life, a radical Presence of trust and invitation. His charisma is to bring the gifts of deep solitude and silence into the busy distracted lives we lead and to give us experiences of Christ's transforming love for each of us.

The retreat was divided into three sections, the first drawing from Celtic Christianity and entitled "Listening to the Heart of God". Celtic spirituality grew from desert monks who arrived in Ireland bringing the Gospel of John. Their understanding of faith drew from the belief that God's original Word continues to reverberate in every created thing. It embraces God in all of Creation and the natural world. Fr. Fish showed us an early 14th century carving of St. John Resting on the Bosom of Christ by Master Heinrich of Constance. Here a teenage John leaning on the heart of Jesus with total trust "listening to the heartbeat of God in the heart of everything".

So what is prayer? Fr. Michael suggested we listen to our hearts, to the soundless sound of our true name, the name St. Peter will call when we stand at the Pearly Gates! He quoted the poet

Jessica Powers: listen for "a timeless heart under my own heartbeat/ a bird of beauty singing under my mind".

He spoke about the quality of "equipoise of the soul". We can cultivate this by becoming more aligned with natural rhythms and cycles. Our society, he suggested, has become too "sun," meaning too active and outward (the masculine principle) and out of balance. In order to "flirt with the moon," he recommended using imagination, in art, music, poetry, listening to our dreams, and sitting in the gloaming (the transition from dark to light when the sun and moon hold hands before leaving the stage to the other). My older sister has taken to sitting in the evening gloaming. "It takes a long time," she said, "It goes on for an hour. I hate missing it when I am too busy."

"Go for a walk in the evening," he smiled. "Say to the Beloved 'Wow, look at this!' Laugh with God as you discover things together. Nature comes to know itself because we have seen it." Paraphrasing the French mystic Simone Weil, Fr. Michael told us that the real aim is not only to see God in all things; but that through us God should see all things that we see, touch what we touch and hear what we hear.

May each of us become open to God's loving presence in every heartbeat, and bring the Beloved along wherever we go, sharing our human experiences with the one who created us.

Review by Kathy Kramer-Howe

TALK NUMBER TWO: THE CHILD AND THE HEART

The session began with this parable from Matthew 13:

“The kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field. The one who finds it buries it again; and so happy is she, that she goes and sells everything she has, so that she may buy that field”.

Fr. Michael asked us to reflect on this parable. Do we always know what is the field and what is the treasure? He told the story of reaching a point, before making Solemn Vows, of leaving his Camaldolese order. He felt overworked, unappreciated and unfulfilled, and one of his friends announced that he would be leaving. He was agonizing over this decision during mass one evening when the parable above was the text. He heard an inner voice (of his beloved Holy Spirit) say, “Michael, the Hermitage is not the treasure. It is the field”. He reflected on his religious history, beginning as a Redemptorist priest in South Africa and making the huge decision to move to America and join a different order. “I kept finding the treasure, selling everything, buying the field,” he said, “and then getting lost in the field”.

Fr. Michael suggested that the Church has concentrated on just the field – our brokenness and weakness, and much less on the treasure. To shed light on our treasure, Fr. Michael outlined The Four Elements of Being formulated by André Rochais: the who of us, the why of us, our capacity for relationships, and our capacity for the Divine. First, think about your gift - the who of you.

Second, think about your purpose - the why of you. Third, consider your capacity for relationships and friendships because through meeting others we discover ourselves. Finally, consider your capacity for relationship with God. We all have these elements and we all have/are a treasure. Fr. Michael reminded us not to get lost in the field or in our wounds and to excavate and dig beyond to our treasure.

There is a part of us that will never forget where our treasure lies, and that is the inner child, our in-depth conscience. Fr. Michael suggested reading children’s books because once we start hearing stories we will awaken the child within. He also suggested finding a photo as a reminder of our child. Our task is to find our child so the child takes us to the treasure which is in all of us.

If we hold our little child (in imagination) every day, looking at our treasure box with our little girl or boy and going through the who we are, why we are here, our gift of love in relationships and capacity for God, we will find our treasure every day and no longer be lost in the field.

Review by Lisa Weichart



TALK NUMBER THREE: THE CAMINO

Fr. Michael's final talk was on the Camino. He has made the pilgrimage of Santiago de Compostela several times on foot, so the metaphor of life as a pilgrimage is very rich for him. Quoting Eckhart Tolle, he told us "your entire life journey ultimately consists of the step you are taking at this moment. There is always only this one step, and you give it your fullest attention". He recounted the story of arriving at an inn close to Santiago de Compostela on the evening of Easter Sunday. One of his companions had purchased wine, bread, and cheese for their meal. Before long, several other pilgrims arrived having missed Easter mass, and they begged him to preside. An impromptu service was laid on the long communal table and Fr. Michael chose as his text The Appearance on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The wine and loaf of bread became the sacred elements.

After we heard again about the dispirited couple walking slowly away from the Crucifixion, heads down, all their hopes dashed, Fr. Michael asked us, "What has died in you? Church? Country? Relationships? Whatever it is, notice that Jesus wants to know about it". Jesus (unrecognizable to the couple) presses them for more details, for the whole story. "What has happened? What things?". Then Christ tells them the God story of the Bible, the God story of brokenness and healing.

Fr. Michael asked us to write a paragraph to Jesus telling him in deep confidence about what is most broken in us, what has died. Then he asked us to imagine that Jesus came up behind us and leaned against our back to look over our shoulders and read what we wrote. We then wrote what we believed would be Christ's response to our story. He cautioned us that if there were any "shoulds" or "oughts" in the response, it probably was

more us than Christ, as Christ is the voice of compassion and healing. This was a very moving experience for many of us, and worth doing more than once.

As the couple on the Emmaus road neared an inn, they said to the stranger, "Sir, it's nearly evening and the day is almost over. Stay with us". What a beautiful prayer, Fr. Michael said, one to say often and especially at the end of life. Once the bread was broken and wine passed, they recognized their Savior and he vanished. He was gone, said Fr. Michael, because if they can see Him in a stranger and in bread, they can see Him everywhere.

After the retreat, Fr. Michael was preparing for a year of sabbatical. He plans to walk the ancient Via Francigena, from Canterbury to Rome. The first mention of this arduous walk through four countries was in 876 AD. He asked us to pray for him, specifically that he would let his journey be led by the Holy Spirit, that it would be a daily surrender. Buon viaggio, Fr. Michael! You are in our prayers.

Review by Kathy Kramer-Howe



SPECIAL COMMUNITY GATHERING EVENT:

Saturday, November 7, 2020

Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix Service Team invites each of you to join us for a day of Community Connection, Sharing and Reflection. We will create the space for Centering Prayer groups and practitioners from across Arizona to hear from each other about what's working, what's not working (challenges) and what's new in your groups and Centering Prayer practice.

The day will include a couple of prayer sessions, some roundtable discussions and dialogue with others from all across the state and some short videos. Resources and updates will be shared, including possibilities to connect electronically. The service team will host a lunch of hearty soups, bread, beverages and, of course, dessert!

Members of the Service team will be reaching out to various Centering Prayer groups in advance of this event to say hello and hear what might be meaningful for your groups as we shape this Day of Community Connection, Sharing and Reflection. Stay tuned....

"Contemplative Outreach, as a community, is a living organism that is interactive, interconnected, interdependent and dynamic. It aspires to function without a hierarchical structure and is designed to share Centering Prayer and its contemplative vision as widely as possible"

Thomas Keating Commentary on Guidelines for Service: Theological
Principal 1

SAVE THE DATE for Saturday, November 7, 2020

“HEALING DIVISIONS:” WORLD-WIDE UNITED IN PRAYER DAY

**SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2020
9:30 AM TO 1 PM
SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS UCC
5524 E. LAFAYETTE BLVD.
PHOENIX, AZ 85018**

**There is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither slave nor free,
nor is there male and female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Galatians 3:28 (NIV)**



**Refreshments will be available.
Your presence will make all the difference.
Please register on our website
www.contemplativeoutreach-phoenix.org**

The annual day of prayer and 24-hour prayer vigil are devoted to whole-making in ourselves, our relationships and our world.

Please join your local Centering Prayer community for our annual worldwide United in Prayer day. We will see a video “Christian Non-Duality and Unity Consciousness” and explore together this important topic in relation to a conflicted world. We are encouraged to sign up for a 24 hour vigil where individuals and groups can sign up for one or more 30 minute Centering Prayer segments (www.contemplativeoutreach.org)



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