

## A RESOURCE GUIDE: OPTIONS FOR THE CONTINUING SESSIONS OF THE CENTERING PRAYER INTRODUCTORY PROGRAM

Traditionally Contemplative Outreach commissioned presenters offered the Centering Prayer Introductory Program as four conferences on the basics of Centering Prayer, followed by six Continuing Sessions. Each of the continuing sessions featured a video presentation by Fr. Thomas Keating.

Over the past few years, CO chapters have explored new options for both the content and format of the Continuing Sessions. Chapters have expressed interest in having more updated teachings, making them available to more people and taking advantage of available resources and technology.

In response, the Centering Prayer Introductory Program Service Team conducted a survey of Chapter leadership regarding their use and implementation of the Continuing Sessions. Drawing on the survey responses, the team created this guide that provides complete details. The team also created [The Centering Prayer Introductory Program](#) brochure, which gives a brief description of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program, including the Workshop and the Continuing Sessions and it lists other resources available for the Program.

**Where to get it:** [The Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure](#)

Fr. Thomas Keating recommended offering the Continuing Sessions immediately following a Centering Prayer Introductory Program to help participants clarify and deepen their understanding of the content presented in the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. The Continuing Sessions provide support and conceptual background as well as the opportunity to share the initial Centering Prayer experience with others who have made a similar commitment. Ideally, Continuing Sessions are four to six weeks in length so that participants have time to become grounded in their personal Centering Prayer practice. Because individual needs and group circumstances vary, it is necessary to be flexible.

Chapter leaders and commissioned presenters know best the needs of participants in a particular locale. Following is a summary of suggested options for scheduling the Continuing Sessions and for materials that may be used.

### ***Scheduling the Continuing Sessions***

- Convene morning, afternoon or evening sessions
- Weekly meetings in person or on Zoom (four to six weeks is recommended)
- Half-day or full-day weekend meetings
- Retreats
- When it is not feasible to offer distinct Continuing Sessions, some chapters incorporate new people into an appropriate existing Centering Prayer group that is willing to go through the introductory material again. The prayer group members offer support and benefit from the review.

### ***Materials***

Suggestions for materials and resources are included here, which includes names of specific materials, electronic links, and tips for use.

- **Video Resources:** Each video program can be used in a series of weekly meetings, or if more convenient, in one or more weekend gatherings.
- **Books:** In situations where access to videos is not possible or desired, another option is using a book related to Centering Prayer.

- **Retreat Options:** Where distance and logistics make it difficult if not impossible for participants to meet weekly, the continuing sessions can be provided in a weekend retreat or in a one or two-day retreat in person or on Zoom.

## Option 1: Video Resources

### ***Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice***

The six "Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice" (thirty-minute sessions) are designed to deepen the conceptual understanding of contemplation and Centering Prayer. The DVDs featuring Fr. Thomas Keating offer an explanation of Centering Prayer which serves to support an emerging daily practice of Centering Prayer. Transcripts of the DVDs are also available and include a study guide after each session.

**Where to get it:** [Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice](#).

### ***Centering Prayer: A Training Course for Opening to the Presence of God***

This complete home study course includes six DVDs, two audio CDs, in-depth workbook and prayer cards. With more than nine hours of guidance and teachings from Fr. Thomas Keating, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler and Fr. Carl Arico.

This program provides formation in contemplative practice as well as a treasury of wisdom from Fr. Keating himself. This is a great resource for chapters because it may be used as an option for the Continuing Sessions.

**Tips for Use:** Show one of the talks listed below at each of the six Continuing Sessions. The first four suggested talks are presented by Fr. Carl Arico and follow, in the course, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler's four talks from the Introduction to Centering Prayer. All six talks reinforce and expand on ideas presented in the Centering Prayer Introductory Program.

NOTE: You may advise the participants that a total of 95 minutes of conferences have been selected from a course containing nine hours of conferences. At times, the speakers will be referring to earlier events/conferences in the course, or using diagrams with markings from previous conferences. The messages they share are clear and meaningful used in this context.

#### **Location in the DVD Training Course**

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| 1 <sup>st</sup> | Session 2, #2 <i>The Rest of the Story</i> , Carl Arico (15 min)                   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Session 3, Part One, #2 <i>It all begins by saying "yes"</i> , Carl Arico (17 min) |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Session 3, Part Two, #3 <i>Finding Freedom</i> , Carl Arico (11 min)               |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> | Session 5, #2 <i>The two-armed Embrace</i> , Carl Arico (14 min)                   |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> | Session 6, #2 <i>Consent is the only response</i> , Carl Arico (14 min)            |
| 6 <sup>th</sup> | Session 6, #3 <i>An Interview</i> , Thomas Keating (26 min)                        |

**Where to get the selected videos on YouTube:** [Centering Prayer Introductory Program Resource](#)

**Where to purchase the DVD set:** [Centering Prayer: A Training Course](#). When the DVD is shipped from the CO Bookstore, it includes the document [How Chapters Use the Centering Prayer DVD Program](#).

## ***Invitation from God***

A wonderful introduction to the subject of contemplation and a beautiful film. Danish film director, Marie Louise Lefèvre, interviewed Fr. Thomas Keating in 2006. The conversation between the director and Fr. Thomas and the beauty of the silent images serve to express what the contemplative life is about. The DVD includes a booklet with background information and a summary of each section which includes diagrams.

**Tips for Use:** The DVD contains a four-minute “Introduction” by Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, “Invitation from God” (29 minutes) and eight “Additional Conversations” which cover foundational topics in short, focused segments. The following format is a good option for groups that meet for a one-hour session. In six Continuing Sessions, a suggested format could be:

- “Invitation from God” play from the beginning through the first three parts which include “The False Self and the Monk,” “Silence,” and “Centering Prayer.” (14 minutes)
- “Additional Conversations” section I – “The Five Levels of Consciousness” (8 minutes)
- “Additional Conversations” section III – “Centering Prayer” (14 minutes)
- “Additional Conversations” section IV – “Prayer in Secret” (8 minutes)
- “Invitation to God” starting with part four “Divine Therapy” (*Select play for “Invitation from God” then fast-forward the DVD counter to 18:45 minutes and starting playing the section on “Divine Therapy.”*)
  - **Option A:** End viewing at 27:45 minutes after the part on “Divine Therapy”. (9 minutes)
  - **Option B:** End viewing at 32 minutes after the parts on “Divine Therapy” and “The Body of Christ”. (14 minutes)
- “Additional Conversations” section VI – “The Spiral Staircase and the Pascal Mystery” (14 minutes)

**Where to get it:** [Invitation from God](#)

## **Option 2: Retreats**

In some locations, distance and other logistics make it difficult or impossible for groups to meet on an ongoing basis. If this applies to your situation, consider convening a retreat for the continuing sessions in person or on Zoom. Find a format that will work to meet the needs of your particular group. Some examples to consider are a Weekend Retreat or a One-Day Retreat.

### **○ A Weekend Retreat**

Adapt the Weekend Intensive Centering Prayer retreat schedule provided in [CO Retreats Guidelines & Schedules](#) to create a retreat for Continuing Sessions to the Centering Prayer Introductory Program in a weekend retreat setting. Show two of the talks on Saturday morning, another two on Saturday afternoon and the last two on Sunday morning. Make time in the schedule for the afternoon videos on Saturday by offering one, instead of two, twenty-minute Centering Prayer periods. You may also eliminate or make the third Centering Prayer period of the day optional.

### **○ A One-Day Retreat**

Create two or three days over the next month or so for Continuing Sessions to the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. The day should include time for Centering Prayer, watching videos, questions and answers, discussion and sharing. A United in Prayer Day Schedule could be used as a guideline and adapted for this retreat.

### **Option 3: Books**

This option is for groups that are able to meet regularly, who would prefer to read a book (or books) as follow-up or where no DVD player is available. Books are also an option for individual study and reflection. All the books listed can be ordered from the Contemplative Outreach Online Store.

**Tips for Using a Book:** Reading can be shared by each person in the group by reading a paragraph or two (optional, of course). Discuss as people feel moved during the reading. Allow fifteen minutes for questions and discussion after the reading. There is no time limit to complete a chapter or the book.

#### ***Open Mind Open Heart***

*Open Mind Open Heart, The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* by Fr. Thomas Keating. Continuum Publishing Company, 2006, 20th Anniversary Edition. (OMOH) Also available in seven CD set and audio digital download.

OMOH is widely regarded as the basic text of Centering Prayer, having been written by one of its principal founders, Abbot Thomas Keating. It is a deep and thorough overview of the Christian contemplative tradition. Fr. Thomas gives step-by-step guidance in the method of Centering Prayer, a movement of divine love designed to renew the Christian contemplative tradition. OMOH is designed to initiate the readers into a living relationship with God. OMOH can be used to guide newcomers during a series of introductory sessions.

The following chapters are suggested for such group reading. Participants should be encouraged to reread or finish the chapters at home. For a 90-minute group meeting, 30-minutes can be allotted for Centering Prayer, reading for 30 minutes, and discussion for 30 minutes.

Most of the chapters have useful frequently asked questions (FAQs) submitted by readers. Assuming a six-week introductory course, consideration should be given to reading these chapters:

- Chapter 2. "First Steps in Centering Prayer." Fr. Keating goes through a practical "how to" approach, and includes beginners' FAQs.
- Chapter 3. "The Sacred Word as Symbol." Fr. Keating discussed the profound ramifications of consenting to God's presence and action within us.
- Chapter 4. "The Wanderings of the Imagination." Fr. Keating answers the typical questions a beginner might ask about cascading thoughts during prayer.
- Chapter 8. "The Intensive Centering Prayer Experience." This chapter contains blurbs from persons who finished three periods of Centering Prayer, which would be of interest to newcomers who want to know what to expect.
- Chapter 1. "Dimensions of Contemplative Prayer." Fr. Keating lays the theological groundwork for interior prayer, releasing the energies of the unconscious, and God as the source of contemplation.
- Chapter 9. "Summary of the Centering Prayer Method." This chapter contains a useful summary of the method, five types of thoughts, and resting in God.

**Where to get it:** [Open Mind, Open Heart](#)

## ***Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God***

*Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God: The Practice of Centering Prayer* by J. David Muyskens. This book can be used in combination with one of the DVD programs reviewed in the previous section. It provides a structure for those new to Centering Prayer which reinforces the DVD conferences. The book includes short daily scripture or meditative readings plus a twenty-minute daily practice of Centering Prayer. The book has been found to be particularly appropriate for participants of various religious backgrounds.

**Tips for Use:** Here is a suggested process for using a DVD and this book in ninety-minute meetings over a six-week period:

- Check in (welcome each participant and ask everyone to give brief update)
- 20 minutes of Centering Prayer
- Comments regarding the content of the book readings
- Sharing of their Centering Prayer practice
- Viewing and discussion of the DVD
- Closing prayer

**Where to get it:** [Forty Days Closer Walk with God](#)

## **Option 4: Twelve Step Option**

### ***Centering Prayer for Beginners***

Introductory Workshops are presented to people in Twelve Step Recovery to offer Centering Prayer as a way to practice the 11th Step. Presenters and facilitators offer the material in Twelve Step language and culture, which basically means that every effort is made to be as inclusive as possible without using traditional religious terminology. The vision of Twelve Step Outreach team is to offer Centering Prayer as an 11th Step Practice and present a method of meditation to facilitate a deepening relationship with God wherever there is a desire for healing. Twelve Step Centering Prayer groups support one another in the process of spiritual transformation through the practice of Centering Prayer.

The following resources have been used successfully as study material for the Continuing Sessions with Twelve Step groups. When facilitating a Twelve Step Introductory Workshop and the Continuing Sessions, it is recommended that the facilitator contact the Twelve Step Outreach team to obtain suggestions for offering the Continuing Sessions.

- **Twelve Step Outreach website:** [www.cp12stepoutreach.org](http://www.cp12stepoutreach.org)
- **Open Mind, Open Heart** by Fr. Thomas Keating

**Where to get it:** [Open Mind, Open Heart](#)

- **Divine Therapy and Addiction** by Fr. Thomas Keating

Where to get it: [Divine Therapy and Addiction](#)

- **The Contemplative Dimension of the 12-Steps** video Series:

Where to get it: <https://cp12stepoutreach.org/contemplative-dimension-of-the-12-steps/>

The series is recommended that one video be played per session to allow time for Centering Prayer and discussion. It may be helpful to the facilitator to review the video in advance to determine which video will be most helpful for their group. This is an excellent in-depth

teaching of Centering Prayer and the Spiritual Journey designed specifically for people in recovery.

- Session 1: The Inner Room
- Session 2: Prayer in Secret
- Session 3: The Method of Centering Prayer
- Session 4: Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word
- Session 5: Thoughts are Integral
- Session 6: Prayer as Relationship
- Session 7: Where Are You?
- Session 8: Who Are You?
- Session 9: Our Lives Had Become Unmanageable
- Session 10: The 11<sup>th</sup> Step and Centering Prayer
- Session 11L Unloading of the Unconscious
- Session 12: Practice for Daily Life: The Welcoming Prayer
- Session 13: The 12 Step and Centering Prayer
- Session 14: The Active Prayer Sentence and the Attention/Intention Practice
- Session 15: What is Contemplation?
- Session 16: A Case for Introducing Centering Prayer Earlier than Step 11