

SILENCE • SOLITUDE



SOLIDARITY • SERVICE

Contemplative Outreach

Facilitator Handbook

*Serving Others on
the Spiritual Journey
in Community*

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Preface

The purpose of this handbook is to provide structure, resources, and tools that a facilitator for a Centering Prayer group can use while supporting and empowering others on the spiritual journey.

Typically, a Centering Prayer group is formed by persons who have an established prayer practice (or wish to establish one), often as a result of attending a Centering Prayer Introductory Program.

Father Thomas Keating shares the following reasons for a Centering Prayer group:

“If people go to the trouble of coming to an introductory workshop, they must have been inspired by something. Sometimes it is curiosity or the hope of finding a suitable group to pray or talk with.” (*Intimacy with God*, p. 151)

“A weekly support group that practices some form of contemplative prayer has the advantage of pooling silence, which is a kind of liturgy, as well as providing encouragement to each other. Such a group helps to renew our resolution to persevere in prayer if we have slipped for a good or not-so-good reason. Sharing prayer together, especially silent prayer, increases faith.” (*Invitation to Love*, 20th Anniversary Ed., p. 161)

Father Thomas also says in *Open Mind, Open Heart* that service to others is the outgoing movement of the heart, prompted by compassion and concern for others, as a result of dedication to God and one’s commitment to spiritual practice. It is, therefore, in the spirit of utmost charity that facilitators of Centering Prayer groups provide an environment of mutual growth as participants and facilitators share in the same faith journey.

It is our hope that group facilitators will find the information shared in this handbook supportive and adaptable, in the most fruitful way, to the particular and differing situations of the many Centering Prayer groups.

With gratitude for your service,

Centering Prayer Group Facilitator Support Service Team

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Contemplative Outreach

Section 1: Introduction

Welcome to the Facilitator Handbook

You have this book in your hands because you have offered, or are considering offering, your service to the Contemplative Outreach community as a facilitator of a Centering Prayer group. We are truly grateful for your generosity.

The *Facilitator Handbook* has been developed to help facilitators assist others on the spiritual journey, particularly by leading a Centering Prayer group. Inside this book are many guidelines that will help you become a good facilitator and will make you feel part of the community of other facilitators who follow these same guidelines with their own Centering Prayer groups.

The *Facilitator Handbook* has been designed to be used in one of three ways:

- As the foundation materials for the Basic Facilitator Skills I Workshop, offered in a region or local area upon request by a chapter or coordinator. The Handbook is available for download at this link: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/facilitator-handbook/>.

NOTE: A chapter or local area can present a workshop using a series of videos that can be viewed and downloaded at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/vlp/facilitator-formation-training-level-i-workshop-video-access/>. A PDF document that contains suggestions for offering a Level I workshop and provides handouts, and exercises is available at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/how-to-use-facilitator-training-level-1-workshop/>.

- As information shared with new facilitators when a Centering Prayer group is first started after the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. The *Facilitator Handbook* is shared with the volunteers who have agreed to lead, or assist in leading, the Continuing Sessions and potentially lead the subsequent Centering Prayer group that is established.
- As a welcoming packet to new facilitators who join the leadership team, once the Centering Prayer group has been established. Often, multiple facilitators are needed in an area where there is a large Centering Prayer group, or there are multiple groups, or facilitators retire from their role in the group and new volunteers fulfill their role.

We hope you find the *Facilitator Handbook* useful in your service to the community. If you have any questions about the information contained in this handbook, feel free to contact your local coordinator.

Thank you again for your faithfulness to the practice of Centering Prayer, and for your generous offer to assist others in their spiritual journey. The Contemplative Outreach community is grateful that God has called you to this service.

In This Handbook...

Along with the *Facilitator Handbook* are several brochures that have been developed for the Contemplative Outreach community that beautifully explain the major components of our purpose and our programs. These brochures can be obtained from the Contemplative Outreach website or through your local coordinator. These brochures include:

- The Vision of Contemplative Outreach, brochure by Thomas Keating
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-vision-of-contemplative-outreach-brochure-by-thomas-keating/>. Read the Vision, Theological Principles with Commentary, and Guidelines for Contemplative Outreach Service with Commentary by clicking on this link: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/vision>.
- The Method of Centering Prayer brochure (2016)
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-method-of-centering-prayer-brochure/> (to purchase)
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/method-of-centering-prayer-brochure/> (to download and print)
- Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-centering-prayer-introductory-program-brochure-packet-of-25/> (to purchase)
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/the-centering-prayer-introductory-program-brochure-bw/> (to download and print. Note that this is in black and white.)
- *Lectio Divina: Listening to the Word of God in Scripture* brochure (2018)
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/lectio-divina-brochure-listening-to-the-word-of-god-in-scripture/> (to purchase) or https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/lectiodivinabrochure_2018.pdf (to download).
- Welcoming Prayer brochure
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/welcoming-prayer-brochure/> (to purchase)
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/welcoming-prayer-brochure-tri-fold-letter-size/> (to download and print)

Working with Coordinators

Always work through your local coordinator whenever possible. If you do not know who your coordinator is, refer to the Contemplative Outreach website for additional contact information: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/us-contacts/> (USA contacts) or <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/international-contacts-main-page/> (international contacts). Or contact Marie Howard – MRHfamlife@aol.com.

Preliminary Comments

The basic structure upon which the Centering Prayer Introductory Program rests is the Centering Prayer group. Regular meetings of a Centering Prayer group always include at least one period of Centering Prayer of 20 to 30 minutes. Regular meetings may also include one or two of the following:

- Faith sharing
- Reading and discussing books by Fr. Thomas Keating
- Group *Lectio Divina* experience
- Spiritual Journey Series (videos and transcripts)

The Spiritual Journey Series is a foundational work that recorded many of the lectures taught by Fr. Thomas Keating in the early years of Contemplative Outreach. The Spiritual Journey Series is based on experience and knowledge, rather than years of practice alone. Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the Spiritual Journey Series present the basics and essentials of the contemplative journey. Parts 4 and 5 contain more in-depth teaching on additional aspects of the spiritual journey. Enrichment programs for Contemplative Outreach provide further understanding. Each part can flow at a pace congenial to the local group.

Individual videos from the Spiritual Journey Series can be repeated as desired by the group. Several meetings may be required to complete the discussion of certain videos. Between viewing of videos from the Spiritual Journey Series, there may be breaks to allow a session or two for in-depth faith sharing, further discussion of the material, or the practice of *Lectio Divina*.

The workshops and retreats sponsored by Contemplative Outreach are assigned to the various parts of the program as suggestions or as ideal scenarios, recognizing that attending workshops and retreats are often governed by time, availability of the workshop, and cost.

For more information about the various workshops and retreats, contact your local coordinator.

Reflecting on the Vision and Theological Principles

Centering Prayer groups have found inspiration in reflecting on the Vision and Theological Principles in a group setting, reading each principle and allowing for silent reflection for a few minutes. This can happen in the *Lectio Divina* style, reading each principle over several prayer sessions, allowing silence, and then inviting members to share insights with the group if desired.

The Vision of Contemplative Outreach

by Thomas Keating

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and with all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself.*
Luke 10:27

**We embrace the process of transformation in Christ,
both in ourselves and in others,
through the practice of Centering Prayer.**

Theological Principles with Commentary

1. Contemplative Outreach is a network of communities and individuals seeking the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit and to contribute to the renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition through the practice of Centering Prayer.

The fundamental purpose of Centering Prayer and of Contemplative Outreach is to further the knowledge and experience of God's love in the consciousness of the human family. Contemplative Outreach provides basic instruction in Centering Prayer and additional programs to sustain the development in contemplation and the process of transformation.

2. A commitment to the practice of Centering Prayer is the primary expression of belonging.

The daily practice of Centering Prayer is the essence of belonging to the community.

3. The theological foundation of Centering Prayer is the Divine Presence in every member of the human family.

The presence of the Divine in us is the permanent self-giving of God to every human person. The Word of God and Source of all creation sustains everything that exists and relates to each human being in a personal way. The primary call of the Spirit is to consent to this intimate relationship.

4. Consenting to the Divine presence and action within us is the heart and soul of Centering Prayer.

To respond to the call of the Spirit is to consent to God's presence and action within us and to the transformative process initiated by the Spirit, which enables us to participate in the divine nature and to become one family in Christ.

5. The indwelling Divine Presence affirms our innate core of goodness and is expressed fully in the theology of the Most Holy Trinity.

The Divine Indwelling communicates with us in two ways. First, it reminds us of our creation out of nothing in the image and likeness of God. This belief affirms our basic core of goodness that flows from the gift of life. Second, it heals the wounds of our human nature springing from primitive stages of consciousness. Our instinctual needs have not yet been fully integrated into our evolving state of rational consciousness with its capacity for abstract thinking, free choice, and compassion for others. Spiritual evolution is the healing process of divine transformation through the intimacy established in prayer and in following the example and teaching of Jesus in our daily life.

6. The Divine action is the healing process of transformation in Christ, enabling us to experience an ever-deepening intimacy with God and the practical caring for others that flows from this relationship.

The healing process of transformation involves the purification of our false-self and egoic motivation based on the instinctual needs of early childhood and the influence of cultural

conditioning. Purification is the progressive liberation from the dominance of the conscious and unconscious motives of the ego and the false self. It takes place through the infusion of divine love, which is essential to the healing process. Purification leads to the interior freedom to love, through genuine self-knowledge and the activation of the Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit.

7. The conceptual background of Centering Prayer grounds and supports the growing silence and stillness of contemplation.

In order to be well grounded in the conceptual background of Centering Prayer, we urge beginners to view the Spiritual Journey videos and to study Open Mind, Open Heart, Invitation to Love, and Intimacy with God. These are a summary of the Christian contemplative tradition in dialogue with contemporary psychology and the wisdom teachings of other religions. The method of Centering Prayer is drawn from The Cloud of Unknowing by an anonymous fourteenth century English writer.

8. Listening to the word of God in Scripture through the practice of *Lectio Divina* is encouraged, particularly its movement into contemplative prayer, which a daily practice of Centering Prayer facilitates.

The classical term for reflection on scripture and other sacred texts is Lectio Divina. Practicing Lectio Divina through the exercise of the faculties—reading, reflecting, and responding that leads to resting in God—serves to balance the letting go of deliberate thinking during the periods of Centering Prayer.

9. We believe that the Christian contemplative tradition and its expression in service is the common ground for Christian unity.

Christian contemplation is rooted in scripture and the principal mystics of the Christian tradition. Our contemplative heritage unites the members of the Christian denominations who share the same Baptism, faith in the living Christ, and trust in God.

10. While formed by our respective denominations, we are bonded through the experience of Christ in Centering Prayer and in daily life.

Centering Prayer transcends denominational differences, bonding us in silence through our growing experience of union with Christ.

11. We affirm our solidarity with the contemplative dimension of other religions and sacred traditions.

United in our common search for God, we respect and honor other religions and sacred traditions and those committed to them. We engage in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and work together in areas of social justice, ecological concerns, and contemplative initiatives.

12. The practice of Centering Prayer deepens our awareness of the oneness of all creation and our compassion for the whole human family.

Centering Prayer inspires ever-increasing regard for others, especially for the poor and those abandoned or exploited in the various throw-away cultures of our time. We are invited to make available the gift of Centering Prayer to everyone, particularly to the

needy and the marginalized. Centering Prayer also enables us to respond to the Divine presence in the whole human family, and in all of creation.

13. Following the teachings of Jesus, we endeavor to exercise leadership in a spirit of service, utmost charity, and unity.

Leadership is a necessary function of the human condition and of society. Following Jesus' example and teaching, we aspire to exercise leadership as a way of serving, of taking the lowest place, and of living ordinary life with extraordinary love. Utmost charity is more than ordinary charity. It is to love one another as Jesus has loved us, that is, with all our faults, limitations, and at times outrageous behavior. It is to forgive completely and from the heart everything and everyone, including ourselves. This is the path to unity.

14. The good accomplished through Contemplative Outreach is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

To cooperate with grace is to co-create and co-redeem the world with Christ from its beginning to its consummation. At the same time, divine transformation is the gratuitous gift of the Holy Spirit and the Source of all the good that God may accomplish through us.

Guidelines for Contemplative Outreach Service with Commentary

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;
there are different forms of service but the same Lord;
there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.*

I Corinthians 12:4-6

1. Contemplative Outreach is an evolving community with an expanding vision and deepening practice of Centering Prayer that serves the changing needs of Christian contemplatives.

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.

2. The integrity of the teaching of the method of Centering Prayer is contained in the Four Guidelines and their conceptual background as described in the Method of Centering Prayer brochure.

Additional practices offered by Contemplative Outreach are skillful means to bring the fruits of Centering Prayer into daily life, but are not part of the integrity of the teaching of the method. Similarly, resources such as books, videos, and articles are not part of the integrity of the teaching of the method, but provide vital support for the ongoing practice of Centering Prayer.

3. We share Centering Prayer by appealing to interior attraction rather than proselytizing.

The practice of Centering Prayer enables us to bring dispositions of humility and attentive listening into our service. We offer the method of Centering Prayer and its

conceptual background in a pastoral way and avoid emphasizing strict policies, rigid rules or proselytizing.

4. Those who serve in leadership ordinarily do so in a voluntary capacity. We employ staff and contractors as needed.

We depend on the enormous generosity of those serving Contemplative Outreach and performing innumerable tasks without remuneration. We invite members of the community to serve in ways best suited to their call and special qualifications. All who serve seek to be attuned to the needs and concerns of the whole community, whether individuals, small prayer groups, or local chapters. We may employ staff and contractors with special or necessary skills as needed.

5. All who provide Contemplative Outreach services do so in consideration of, and in balance with their personal, family, and professional responsibilities, which come first.

Those in leadership carry out their service by first taking into consideration their own personal, family, and professional responsibilities.

6. Contemplative Outreach avoids indebtedness and owning real estate in order to be free to devote all its resources to sharing the gift of Centering Prayer.

Contemplative Outreach avoids indebtedness and owning real estate, which can burden persons in leadership who want to devote as much of their time and energy as possible to the spiritual welfare and changing needs of the community.

7. We reach decisions through prayerful discernment, aiming toward consensus especially in matters of major importance.

In view of the prayerful discernment process, consensus for us does not require unanimity, but all members in the group need to have a voice in the discussion. If consensus cannot be reached after adequate consultation in the group as well as with those who will be directly affected, a simple majority can decide. When time is of the essence a person or small team may be entrusted to resolve the impasse. Once decided, all honor the decision in the spirit of unity. For ordinary matters, those to whom a particular responsibility has been delegated do what is necessary to fulfill their appointed task.

8. We collaborate with our respective church authorities, but do not seek to become a religious or lay institute.

Contemplative Outreach is designed to make available to Christian communities the method of Centering Prayer as a means of furthering the renewal of our common contemplative tradition.

9. To remain accessible to everyone, Contemplative Outreach does not endorse particular causes or take part in public controversies, whether religious, political, or social. As private individuals, we act according to our conscience.

We avoid taking part in particular causes or engaging in public controversies because these might alienate from Contemplative Outreach persons committed to one side or the

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other. Our purpose is to make Centering Prayer available to everyone without taking sides. As private individuals, we act according to our conscience.

10. We maintain a spiritual relationship with St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado.

Saint Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado is our spiritual home and a place of retreat and renewal where new insights for our spiritual journey may be revealed.

Contemplative Outreach Symbol



Job's Redeemer – Patient Waiting

- Alpha and Omega – the Symbol of God – the beginning and the end
- The cross – the symbol of our salvation
- Flowers – symbol of the abundance of life – the resurrection
- Circle – sign of on-going progress

The heart and soul of Centering Prayer is consenting to God's presence and action in our lives. The Alpha and Omega acknowledges that our God is at the center of our consent and being. The cross is a symbol of our dying to our thoughts and commentaries. In the letting go our false self gives way to the flowering of the new self. This is an ongoing process bringing us deeper into divine intimacy.

Like Job, our patient waiting and consenting will be our gift of gratitude.

This symbol has been seen in three different locations:

- On an ancient church in the land of Uz. Uz is a place in south Edom, east of Palestine. Scripture references to Uz are found in Job 1:1, the residence of Job, and in Jeremiah 15:20 and Lamentations 4:21.
- In excavations in Jerusalem at the southern wall of the Old City near the Huldah Gates and the original stairs to the temple.
- On the church of “Multiplication of the Loaves” in Galilee area. The church was completed in 1984 and this symbol was over the main door entrance. The Monastery and Basilica are run by German Benedictines.

The Weekly Centering Prayer Support Group

While Centering Prayer is done privately most of the time, a weekly or bi-weekly sharing of the experience in a small group (up to fifteen) has proven to be very supportive, as well as a means of continuing education. The weekly meeting also serves as a means of accountability. Just knowing that one's support group is meeting together each week is an enormous encouragement to keep praying, and an invitation to return to the practice of Centering Prayer if circumstances such as illness, business, family problems, or urgent duties have prevented one from carrying out one's commitment to daily practice for a time.

By sharing the experience of Centering Prayer with others, one's own discernment of the ups and downs of the practice is sharpened. The group not only serves as a source of encouragement but also can normally solve problems that might arise regarding the method. The collective discernment of the group tends to be well balanced. . . .

The purpose of the meeting is spiritual refreshment and mutual encouragement in the practice.

Open Mind, Open Heart, 20th Anniversary Ed., pp. 173-174.

Facilitating a Centering Prayer Support Group

by Mary Mrozowski

Facilitating is a ministry that empowers people and enables group process. As a ministry it helps group members to become more aware and more loving. Empowering others in this way is the heart of Christian ministry.

Good facilitating enables the growth of a Centering Prayer support group, empowering the group to feel capable and strengthened for the spiritual journey. Support group growth begins with the facilitator's attitude. A successful facilitator should be on the same faith journey as other group members. No one wants to feel divided into classes or levels because of a "leader" who has all the answers. Humility before God and one another creates mutuality in relationship.

A good facilitator needs to be a prayerful person. Prayerfulness is basic to this ministry. It is foundational for the ministry of hospitality – the most important part of facilitating. A facilitator who genuinely offers hospitality creates a warm, welcoming experience and provides the group with an island of safety. This includes the physical setting: temperature, lighting and chairs arranged comfortably.

A support group is generally composed of people who desire to journey together and are oriented toward contemplative prayer and practice Centering Prayer for two 20-minute periods daily. Their values and practice of silence and solitude are integrated into their ordinary daily life experience. They meet regularly (once a week is ideal) to share in the practice of Centering Prayer.

When the Centering Prayer support group has settled in and there is a commitment to Centering Prayer, deep sharing usually begins. Some ground rules are important at this point in the process. Be careful to share time equally. Keep sharing confidential. Don't try to solve problems. With the proper environment members will listen with empathy and affirm one another, each acknowledging the other's contributions. From this mutual affirmation comes growth and success of the Centering Prayer group.

NOTE: Mary Mrozowski was a founding member of Contemplative Outreach and was instrumental in the early days of the community. She is often remembered for her extensive work with Centering Prayer groups in the New York area, and also for her work with what has come to be known as the Welcoming Prayer. Mary died in 1993.

Regarding the Integrity of the Teaching of the Centering Prayer Method

The integrity of the teaching of the Centering Prayer method is presented in the Four Guidelines and its conceptual background as described in the Method of Centering Prayer brochure.

Additional practices offered by Contemplative Outreach are skillful means to bring the fruits of Centering Prayer into daily life, but are not part of the integrity of the teaching. Similarly, resources such as books, tapes, and articles are not part of the integrity, but provide vital support for the ongoing practice of Centering Prayer.

Guidelines for particular programs are most helpful when they are seen not as rules but simply as guides. They are designed to work well in most situations, but leave room for exceptions which particular circumstances may require.

Servant-leaders may notice that a certain spiritual transmission takes place during presentations of the introductory and formation workshops, and especially during retreats. The depth of one's personal commitment to God, is the basis of this transmission. It is not so much the letter of the teaching, as the being of the one who teaches that is most important.

Fr. Thomas Keating
December 7, 2016



Contemplative Outreach

Section 2: Centering Prayer Groups

General Information

- Centering Prayer groups are most often formed from participants of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. Occasionally, others join the group as they hear about Centering Prayer and the group becomes their first experience of Centering Prayer and in sharing the Christian contemplative journey.
- Members meet on a regular basis, normally weekly or every other week, to support one another in the practice of Centering Prayer.
- The primary purpose of the Centering Prayer group is to help sustain the commitment to a regular practice of Centering Prayer.
- Centering Prayer group meetings always consist of one or more periods of Centering Prayer and as time and the needs of the group evolve should include:
 - Sharing with others of experiences with Centering Prayer and its effects in daily life.
 - Ongoing education in the conceptual background of Centering Prayer.
 - The experience of *Lectio Divina*.

Such small groups have the potential to grow into contemplative communities to support the members' growth in the contemplative dimension of the gospel.

A Common Concern of Facilitators — Open / Closed Centering Prayer Groups

When Centering Prayer groups are formed an invitation to join the group is usually extended to anyone interested in meeting with others to practice Centering Prayer in community and to share their common experience. The Centering Prayer group lends support to members and inspires one another to practice fidelity to their personal practice of Centering Prayer throughout the week.

As group members are bonded and faith sharing deepens over the years, group members may discern that it is not beneficial to open the prayer group to new members for a period of time. In some circumstances, groups start as closed groups after an Introductory Program as they are building deep connections and vulnerability and wish these to grow before becoming open to others.

The group may want to focus on the study of a particular book, video program, or other conceptual information that may not be appropriate or interesting to persons newly introduced to Centering Prayer. Or, faith sharing in the group may have reached a level of intimacy that would be uncomfortable for new members or for long-term members.

It is always up to the discretion of the Centering Prayer group members to make the choice to remain an open prayer group for as long as the group continues to meet, or to have a closed group at some point in time.

What Facilitators Do

The role of facilitator in service to the Centering Prayer group consists of the following:

- Establish and/or guide regular Centering Prayer group meetings, following the suggested format and guidelines for the Centering Prayer group.
- Introduce the method of Centering Prayer privately to new group members, encouraging them to attend a Centering Prayer Introductory Program when it is available. The “Method of Centering Prayer” brochure is very helpful when introducing people to Centering Prayer for the first time one-on-one.
- If there are questions on the method of Centering Prayer and its conceptual background, offer the appropriate answers based on your own readings and experience. Adhere to the principles of the method of Centering Prayer and avoid a role of interpreting personal experiences.
- Assist commissioned presenters and the local chapter or contact person by conducting, when possible, the Continuing Sessions of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program.
- Maintain contact and collaboration with the local chapter coordinator or contact person.
- Encourage the Centering Prayer group members to support the necessary expenses of their group, their chapter (if applicable), and the Contemplative Outreach national organization.

What is Required to Serve as a Facilitator

Facilitators are asked to consider these guidelines when discerning whether to serve a Centering Prayer group as a facilitator.

- Maintain a regular practice of Centering Prayer.
- Be available to facilitate regular meetings of a Centering Prayer group.
- Be familiar with the Vision of Contemplative Outreach, Theological Principles with Commentary and Guidelines for Contemplative Outreach Service with Commentary.
- Be available and willing to serve at least one year as a servant-leader.
- Attend a Centering Prayer Introductory Program when possible.
- Be familiar with the three foundational books by Fr. Thomas Keating: *Open Mind, Open Heart*; *Invitation to Love*, and *Intimacy with God*.
- Be familiar with the “Spiritual Journey Series” (DVDs and CDs) by Fr. Thomas Keating.
- Highly Recommended: Attend a Contemplative Outreach Intensive Retreat.
- Highly Recommended: Attend a Facilitator Basic Skills I Workshop. This online program is available to view at: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/vlp/facilitator-formation-training-level-i-workshop-video-access/> You can also download the videos by right clicking on one of the videos and clicking Save As”. Instructions for using the videos in a workshop, and sample exercises and handouts are available for download here: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/how-to-use-facilitator-training-level-1-workshop/>. The Facilitator Handbook is available here: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/facilitator-handbook/>
- Attend a Presenter Formation for Centering Prayer, or take part in other enrichment opportunities.

Centering Prayer Groups

It is important for a group to have a clearly defined purpose and agreements for both the group members and facilitators. The following can be used as a starting point for discussion.

Purpose: To support the Centering Prayer practice in the context of a small community that prays together, and participates in faith sharing.

More information on faith sharing is in Section 3.

The group agrees:

- To come together to pray and support each other with a regular weekly or bi-weekly meeting.
- To establish norms for the group experience, i.e., time frame, prayer time, topics for exploration and introduction of new members into the group.
- To gently encourage the essence of faith sharing which involves one's own personal experiences in one's own words, not abstract ideas (using the pronouns "I" and "me," instead of "you" or "we").
- To gently discourage irrelevant sharing.
- That if anyone tends to monopolize the faith-sharing experience, the group can remind itself that time for sharing is for everyone.
- That the atmosphere during faith sharing be non-judgmental and whatever a person shares be received with acceptance and support.
- To regard everything that is said as confidential and not for outside use.
- To love each other as Christ loves each of us.

The facilitator agrees:

- To prepare the room for prayer, making it a hospitable environment with materials and equipment ready.
- To monitor the time for the group and help maintain its commitment to begin and end on time.
- To lead the prayer.



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Section 3: Faith Sharing

To help the facilitation of group discussions, Section 2 recommended that Centering Prayer groups reach consensus on a clear statement of purpose. This section further recommends reaching consensus on clear guidelines for sharing. Both refer to the method of faith sharing. This section outlines the essence of faith sharing, suggests topics for faith sharing in groups, includes guidelines for faith sharing in Centering Prayer groups, and gives a sample Group Covenant that a Centering Prayer group can discuss and modify to give clarity to its own intentions.

The Essence of Faith Sharing

FAITH SHARING **is** my experience of God in my personal history or journey of life. It is a mystery model.

FAITH SHARING **is** living in the messiness and vulnerability of life; sharing the joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears of the human journey and God's faithfulness in that journey.

FAITH SHARING **requires** reverential listening in prayerful silence; *my experience* is the content and *my experience* is not discussable or debatable.

FAITH SHARING **is not** a theological discussion—no speeches, homilies, or dissertations are required. It is not an information model.

FAITH SHARING **is not** an answer to anyone's problems; nor is it a place to vent frustration. It is not a therapeutic model.

Guidelines for Faith Sharing in Centering Prayer Groups

These guidelines are important to the community as they come together to share.

- We accept one another as we are.
- We do not give advice.
- We do not criticize what others share.
- We listen attentively and without interruption when someone else is speaking.
- We keep the sharing in the group absolutely confidential.
- We share experiences from our own lives, not abstract ideas.

- We gather to care, not to cure or remove the crisis or pain. God does the healing.
- We decide among ourselves how much time we will devote to sharing, making sure that each person who wants to share will have a chance to speak.
- We are always free to remain silent if we wish.
- We will love each other as Christ loves us.
- The facilitator (or group members) has permission to remind the group when straying from these guidelines.

These guidelines should be discussed by the group and modified if desired, to fit the particular needs of the group. When the guidelines are agreed upon they should be returned to from time to time to renew the group agreement.

It is helpful to print copies of the agreement for each member and to have on hand some copies to give to new members.

The guidelines are suitable for personal sharing about the effects of Centering Prayer, *Lectio Divina* reflections, as well as discussions of the Spiritual Journey Series and books by Thomas Keating.

Suggested Topics for Group Discussion

It is suggested that members of the Centering Prayer group purchase the book or transcripts that will be studied and read at home in preparation for the group discussion. Books and transcripts may be purchased at the Contemplative Outreach online store:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/store>. The facilitator may select questions at the end of each chapter or transcript for the group to discuss.

Selections from the following are appropriate for all levels:

- *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th Anniversary Ed., Chapter 12: “Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth, and Transformation” is designed to provide a conceptual background for the practice of Centering Prayer. These guidelines offer in-depth reflection on the contemplative journey through a series of thought-provoking statements.
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/open-mind-open-heart-paperback>
- *The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living*:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-daily-reader-for-contemplative-living-paperback/>
- The Contemplative Life Program (CLP) Praxis Series:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/contemplative-life-program-year-1-practice>

Resources for Getting Started and Establishing a Centering Prayer Practice or a Newly Formed Group

- Spiritual Journey Series, Part 1: Developing Centering Prayer and the Spiritual Journey, CDs or DVDs:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iA3saijLWU&list=PLBE6fmRmYU8jBXwPJnp9fXnAP5PcQBqQ->
- Spiritual Journey Series Transcript Handbooks, Volume 1 (Note: The actual title on the physical book will be Spiritual Journey Series Part 1.)
- *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th Anniversary Ed.
- Spiritual Journey Series video 13 (in Part 3) is also appropriate for beginning groups:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iITNM_VnP9s&list=PLBE6fmRmYU8g6CAOwq4-IEvpSnbBxKfRO&index=33.
- These videos and other resources for getting started are listed in this PDF file:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guide-to-the-contemplative-outreach-store-resources/>.
- This link takes you to a PDF file discussing appropriate materials to use for the Continuing Sessions after the Centering Prayer Introductory Program:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/a-resource-guide-options-for-the-continuing-sessions-of-the-centering-prayer-introductory-program/>. This file may also be viewed online here: https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/resource_guide_for_continuing_sessions_for_cp_intro_rev_nov-2020.pdf.
- The Continuing Sessions videos that are one option for part of the Introduction to Centering Prayer workshop can be viewed on YouTube here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4w52bsLGrw&list=PLBE6fmRmYU8gixv_x4EF49P8bcl-e3LTj

Resources for Continuing and those Faithful to the Practice of Centering Prayer or Groups Together for One to Three Years

- Spiritual Journey Series, Part 2: Models of the Human Condition, CD or DVDs or streaming or downloading from YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Su9plUI86gU&list=PLBE6fmRmYU8h4B4fj-HcrvUdDKAltIgUb>
- Spiritual Journey Series Transcript Handbooks, Volume 2 (Note: The actual title on the physical book will be Spiritual Journey Series Part 2.)
- Spiritual Journey Series, Part 3: Paradigms of the Spiritual Journey, CD or DVDs or streaming or downloading from YouTube:
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBE6fmRmYU8iuYR5RbJ-KtqVjo2wXK8Qt>.

- Spiritual Journey Series Transcript Handbooks, Volume 3 (Note: The actual title on the physical book will be Spiritual Journey Series Part 3.)
- *Invitation to Love*, 20th Anniversary Ed., chapters 1 through 14
- These and other resources are listed here and are available from the Store:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guide-to-the-contemplative-outreach-store-resources/>

Resources for a Well Established Practice of Centering Prayer or Groups Together for Three or More Years

- Spiritual Journey Series, Part 4: Contemplation: The Divine Therapy, CD or DVDs, or streaming or downloading from YouTube:
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBE6fmRmYU8iRCv8S7315V8qYrWUKv6us>.
- Spiritual Journey Series Transcript Handbooks, Volume 4 (Note: The actual title on the physical book will be Spiritual Journey Series Part 4.)
- Spiritual Journey Series, Part 5: Divine Love: The Heart of the Christian Spiritual Journey, CD or DVDs, or streaming or downloading from YouTube:
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBE6fmRmYU8hVfpjxoMm5eMVC1Mm9gTml>.
- Spiritual Journey Series Transcript Handbooks, Volume 5 (Note: The actual title on the physical book will be Spiritual Journey Series Part 5.)
- *Invitation to Love*, 20th Anniversary Ed., chapters 15 through 24
- *Intimacy with God: an Introduction to Centering Prayer*, 2009
- *The Mystery of Christ: the Liturgy as Spiritual Experience*
- These and other resources may be purchased here:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guide-to-the-contemplative-outreach-store-resources/>. Here is the link that will take you directly to the Contemplative Outreach Store: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/store/>

Resources for Enrichment Possibilities are listed in the Resource Guide:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guide-to-the-contemplative-outreach-store-resources/>.

Group Covenant

As a member of this community:

I listen to others from my heart.

Within each person is a core of goodness, of strength, and of love.
I put aside superficial feelings for other persons and their opinions.
I try to understand the heart of what others are sharing.

I listen to others with a non-judgmental attitude.

I try to hear the other's perception of reality. I may not agree with it,
but I can affirm that person's right to a different point of view.

I listen to others with love.

With the grace of God, people have within themselves all they need to discover truth and life.
My loving concern can assist that discovery for both of us.

I listen to others with respect for their freedom.

This group does not exist to give advice, but to encourage growth and insight.
We do not have to be of one voice or of one mind.

I listen to others with shared trust.

A basic level of trust encourages conversation to extend beyond the superficial
knowing that personal thoughts will be kept confidential.

I speak from my own unique experience.

I will use the pronoun "I" when I share my point of view.
I will learn to trust that what I have experienced is important and worth sharing with the group.

Together we seek understanding, not agreement.

We will help one another use and act on what we have come to understand.
No one can act for another, but as we share from our experience, we can discern creative possibilities.

Holy Listening Circle Guidelines

Here are another set of guidelines for faith sharing. These guidelines are modified from the Contemplative Living Experience nine-month course. Julie Saad discusses these guidelines in chapter five of her book, *Contemplative Life: Discovering our Path into the Heart of God*.

What we each bring to the Circle:

- A shared desire for God
- A reverence for the uniqueness of the Spirit working in each person
- A willingness to be prayerfully present for one another
- A deep respect for the differences we bring to the Circle
- Prayerful preparation

What draws people to the group is a reciprocity of desire: God's desire and their desire. Having been touched by God's desire, they want to make their desire for God the determining factor of all of their choices, and they recognize that they need some help to do this. This shared desire gives the group its coherence as well as a shared commitment to be there for one another in that desire. The group's primary task is to make the shared desire explicit and to hold one another in it.

- Start with a short prayer followed by shared silence (1 minute or gong)
 1. Sharing by one person (2-5 minutes)
 2. Silence (1 minute)
 3. Response by group (2-5 minutes)
 4. Silence (1 minute)
 5. Gentle gong before next person shares
 6. Repeat 1-5 for each person. (time is modified to suit size of group and agreed upon length of meeting time.
- Group reflection on time together—optional part of closing (3 minutes)

Shared silence is a time for people to gather their hearts into a common desire for God and to dedicate the time together for our world.

While individuals are sharing, the group listens prayerfully through to the end without interruption.

Note: The group may decide to begin with 20-30 minutes of Centering Prayer. A gentle gong may be used between shares instead of timing. Guidelines may be modified to suit the needs and consensus of the group.

Notes:



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Section 4: Growing as a Facilitator

Because facilitators act in a volunteer capacity, the services listed below should be offered only in proportion to and in balance with personal, family, professional, business, and other responsibilities.

PRAYER. Your personal practice of Centering Prayer will help you conduct the group *lovingly* and in a *flexible* manner. Your sharing the gift of Centering Prayer arises from your personal practice.

PLANNING AND REVIEWING is essential. Prepare the room for prayer, making it a hospitable environment, with equipment and materials ready. If possible, set up the chairs in a circle. Prepare yourself by reviewing the material briefly before the meeting. Don't try to "wing it." Your meeting will not be as effective.

START AND END ON TIME. Respect other people's time. If participants know that you start on time and end on time, they tend to respond in kind. Be flexible to circumstances.

BE SILENT yourself so as to allow others the opportunity to talk. Avoid the temptation to teach, lecture, or talk too much yourself.

DIFFERENCES OF OPINION are usually very good. They often expand the sharing. However, they should not be allowed to get out of hand.

COMMUNICATION is the essence of faith sharing. Remember this is a complex and sometimes delicate process, particularly in spiritual matters. It includes *careful listening* and *judicious comments* on your part as facilitator. If you provide the example of listening, others will notice and hopefully follow.

MANY QUESTIONS WILL GO UNANSWERED. That's normal. Sharing does not mean finding answers. Growing is having more, not fewer questions. Be comfortable with the situation of not having all the answers, but challenge people to begin to search elsewhere for the answers. Being present with them in their questioning and searching is the most helpful service you can offer.

DON'T FEEL YOU HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT. St. John of the Cross said that "we are all beginners." We are not responsible for representing the whole 2,000 years of the Christian contemplative experience. However, if you think you know where to find an answer to someone's question, offer a reference or CALL SOMEONE ELSE in Contemplative Outreach to see if they can help.

AVOID DOGMATISM. Be careful not to encourage theologizing, philosophizing, or a conversation of what “my Church says.” Everyone is entitled to respect as a child of God. Remember, Contemplative Outreach is ecumenical in origin, character, and scope. Centering Prayer is a common ground of Christian unity. One person’s dogmatism can be another’s discomfort.

USE THE NATURAL LEADERSHIP OF THE GROUP. Many leadership functions take place naturally as people offer to help. Encourage this. One goal for you is to give control of the group to the group, while keeping the goals, purpose, and process in mind. Encouraging people to participate is a vital form of service.

ENCOURAGE VOLUNTEERISM. This allows members to begin to develop the habit of service. The practice encourages commitment. It’s often easier for a facilitator just to do the task oneself. It takes more time to plan tasks and ask for volunteers. However, it is much more rewarding to see others participating. It also eases a facilitator’s task list after volunteers have learned a task.

SHARING THE DUTIES/ROLES. As a Centering Prayer group grows, it is possible to share the leadership duties and roles. Offer others the opportunity to lead the Centering Prayer period and the discussion, showing and discussing the video and providing hospitality needs. Develop *group consensus* and shared responsibility for the growth of the group.

KEEP THE PRAYER GROUP LEAD PERSON INFORMED. In a developed chapter with a Centering Prayer group lead person, each facilitator is responsible for keeping the lead person informed about the Centering Prayer group schedule, members, location, activities, needs, changes, and updates.

INTRODUCE THE METHOD OF CENTERING PRAYER privately to new group members, encouraging them to participate in a Centering Prayer Introductory Program.

MAINTAIN CONTACT and collaboration with the chapter coordinator or contact person.

The Spirituality of the Servant-Leader

The Essence of the Spirituality of Contemplative Outreach

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you are serving the Lord. Ephesians 6:7 NIV

- The primary intention of the servant-leader is to live ordinary life with extraordinary love.
- The basic commitment of the servant-leader is to a regular, consistent practice of Centering Prayer (communing with God).
- The primary task of the servant-leader is to share the prayer!
- Servant-leaders of Contemplative Outreach maintain the integrity of the Centering Prayer method and its conceptual background; they are the primary keepers of the Vision.
- The Spirit provides the corresponding grace in your role as servant-leader; the Spirit leads you to service.
- Contemplative service is the **God in me** serving the **God in others** and the transmission of the heart of the message to others.
- Servant-leaders give freely without expectation or return.
- Our deep appreciation for Centering Prayer, Contemplative Outreach, and its Vision sustain our commitment.
- We place our intention to serve before God and simply consent.
- Servant-leaders are open and willing to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in order to grow in charity, flexibility, and accountability.
- Servant-leaders strive to be collaborative and seek win-win solutions; to be resilient and recover quickly from change.
- Servant-leaders are encouraged to use the Theological Principles that support the Vision.
- Servant-leaders, in the spirit of humility, remain teachable. We are always beginners on the spiritual journey. The journey continues into eternity.

Spiritual Preparation for the Facilitator

In addition to reviewing the material ahead of time, the most important element in preparing for a meeting is your attitude toward service. Your attitude is what participants respond to and remember. Prior to a meeting, it may be helpful to consider the following questions to remind yourself of your commitment to contemplative service.

- Have I placed my intention to serve before God and simply consented?
- Is it my intent to serve with the utmost charity?
- Am I respectful of what can be accomplished through faith sharing?
- Am I patient in achieving these benefits?
- Am I respectful of the ideas and opinions of others with a different point of view?
- Do I have a genuine interest in what people say and their reasons for saying it?
- Do I respect personal feelings?
- What motivates me to offer contemplative service as a facilitator?
- Am I personally willing to grow closer to God through the practice of Centering Prayer?

A few practical points to keep in mind as you prepare for the Centering Prayer group:

- Set up the room with chairs in a circle if possible.
- Many Centering Prayer groups like to set up a small table in the center of the circle with candles, cross, Bible, plants, or flowers as a focal point.
- Invite others in the group to participate in leading the group, such as reading the opening prayer or spiritual reading, ringing the gong and keeping time for the prayer session, closing the prayer period with a gong, or a short prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer, etc.

Facilitating the Centering Prayer Group Meeting

These guidelines are presented to assist facilitators in guiding the Centering Prayer group consistently for each meeting. Most Centering Prayer groups meet for one hour, but many meet for up to two hours. The group can decide by consensus what formats to use and how long they want to meet.

- Enter the prayer period in silence (optional).
- Opening prayer, chant, scripture, spiritual reading, contemplative walk, or an excerpt from *Open Mind, Open Heart* as vestibule time.
- Begin the 20-minute Centering Prayer period by lightly ringing a bell/gong.
 - NOTE: May introduce two 20-minute periods of Centering Prayer, with contemplative walk in between.
- End the prayer period by lightly ringing a bell/gong and/or reciting a short prayer, or the Lord's Prayer while others listen.
- Allow one or two minutes of silence before standing or opening the eyes.
- In addition to the prayer period, groups may choose one of the following alternate formats:
 - Read from Thomas Keating's books.OR
 - View a video from the Spiritual Journey Series.OR
 - Video titles listed in *A Resource Guide: Options for the Continuing Sessions of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program* https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/resource_guide_for_continuing_sessions_for_cp_intro_rev_nov-2020.pdf or *Guide to the Contemplative Outreach Store Resources* <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guide-to-the-contemplative-outreach-store-resources/> (same material, different formats).OR
 - *Lectio Divina* experience. (See Section 5 for more information about leading a *Lectio Divina* experience.)
- It is recommended that if one of the alternate formats is used, the Centering Prayer group return to the basic format from time to time so the group has time for extended faith sharing of their experiences and concerns about their Centering Prayer practice.

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- Faith sharing: Invite group members to relate the material to everyday life, or to their experiences in Centering Prayer.
- Closing prayer. Make sure everyone knows the time and location of the next meeting.

Recommended Reading

Open Mind, Open Heart – Keating

An excellent resource. Answers many questions about Centering Prayer.

Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation – Keating

The spiritual journey is covered in detail, including the emotional programs for happiness, false self, afflictive emotions, Night of Sense, and Night of Spirit.

Intimacy with God – Keating

Transformation through contemplation leads to deeper intimacy with God.

The Mystery of Christ: The Liturgy as Spiritual Experience – Keating

Fr. Keating recovers the deeper sense of the liturgical year and shares a theological and mystical perspective of the annual cycle.

The Human Condition – Keating

Lectures delivered at Harvard Divinity School discussing how Christ calls on people to repent and reclaim their true selves.

Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God – Muyskens

A simple 20-minute daily practice of contemplative prayer over the course of 40 days can lead you to a closer relationship with God.

A Deeper Love – Smith and Chalmers

This introduction to Centering Prayer is based on the teachings and writings of Thomas Keating, most notably his books *Open Mind, Open Heart*; *Invitation to Love*; and *Intimacy with God*.

Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures – Pennington

Lectio Divina is described as the art of letting God speak to us through his inspired Word and then our response to the Word received.

Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina with 500 Scripture Texts for Prayer – Hall

Leads the reader to discover a way to intimacy with God in childlike simplicity.

A Taste of Silence: Centering Prayer and the Contemplative Journey – Arico

Fr. Arico's spirituality and warmth are profound; his guide has been well received.

The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living – Compiled by Iachetta.

Excerpts from the works of Thomas Keating with related scriptures.

The Contemplative Life Program: CLP Praxis Series. Year 1 has seven booklets covering the following topics: Centering Prayer, Welcoming Prayer (newly updated), *Lectio Divina*, Discernment, Forgiveness, Active Prayer, and Attention/Intention. The complete set of booklets (or PDF files) can be purchased at:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/contemplative-life-program-year-1-practice>.

Individual titles may be purchased at the Contemplative Outreach store:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product-category/books/>. There is a box on the left side

of the screen with three boxes. Click on “Topics”, then scroll down and click on The Contemplative Life Program.

Year 2 has seven booklets on the following topics: Spirituality of Money, Contemplative Service, Silence and Solitude, Simplicity, Discipline of Prayer, Hospitality, and Faith: An Advent Companion. The complete set of Year 2 booklets (scroll down for digital download in PDF format) can be purchased at:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/contemplative-life-program-year-2-dispositions/>. Individual titles can be purchased at the Contemplative Outreach Online Store listed above for Year 1.

The Guide to the Contemplative Outreach Resource Materials is meant to assist beginning and experienced practitioners in navigating the published teachings and resources available in the [Contemplative Outreach Online Store](#). For access to this guide go to:

https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/resource_guide_for_continuing_sessions_for_cp_intro_rev_nov-2020.pdf or <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guide-to-the-contemplative-outreach-store-resources/> [same material, different formats]).

There is an overview of Contemplative Outreach programs supported by Contemplative Outreach at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/programs/>. Scroll down to see the different categories. As facilitators grow, and Centering Prayer groups mature, many will want to take advantage of other opportunities beyond their own Centering Prayer groups to enrich their spiritual journey and better equip them to serve as servant-leaders within the community.



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Section 5: *Lectio Divina*

Lectio Divina is an ancient practice that teaches a way of listening to the texts of scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and Christ was suggesting the topics of conversation. It is listening with the “ear” of the heart, but learning how to use the four moments of *Lectio Divina*: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*.

This section refers to the instructional resources available to the facilitator when considering sharing the method of *Lectio Divina* with a group. The resources listed here are shared by Contemplative Outreach for instruction in the dynamic process of this method and its relationship to the spiritual journey and to Centering Prayer. These resources and more can be found on the Contemplative Outreach website: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/lectio-divina-contemplation/>

- “*Lectio Divina*: Listening to the Word of God in Scripture” brochure, 2018:
https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/lectiodivinabrochure_2018.pdf (to download/print)
- Fr. Thomas Keating, *Four Approaches to the Practice of Lectio Divina*:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/thomas-keating-four-approaches-to-the-practice-of-lectio-divina/> (to download)
- Maria Tasto, *The Transforming Power of Lectio Divina*, Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT, 2013
- Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina with 500 Scripture Texts for Prayer*, Paulist Press, 1988.
- Spiritual
- The history
 - Fr. Thomas Keating’s “*Lectio Divina* Series – Centering Prayer & *Lectio Divina*”
 - “An Impromptu Conversation with Sr. Maria Tasto”
 - Leslee Terpay, audio “Deepening *Lectio Divina* and the Sense of Scripture”
 - Reading List

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- *Thomas Keating—on the classical monastic practice of Lectio Divina:*
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/thomas-keating-on-the-classical-monastic-practice-of-lectio-divina/>
- The Contemplative Life Program, 40-day practice, *Lectio Divina* (can be purchased separately as an individual booklet of The Contemplative Life Program: CLP Praxis Series)
- “Frequently Asked Questions” helpful to a group facilitator

Notes:



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Section 6: The Centering Prayer Introductory Program

Intentions of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program

*“Contemplative Outreach aims to transmit
the experience of Divine Love to the global community.”*
Father Thomas Keating

Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ.
(John 17:3)

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program is a resource for starting a Centering Prayer group from scratch, for forming new group members in the method of Centering Prayer, and for inviting people in our faith communities to join our Centering Prayer group.

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program presents the method of Centering Prayer which is a receptive method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, in which we experience God’s presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. The Program is composed of two parts: The Introductory Workshop and The Continuing Sessions.

The Introductory Workshop

The Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop familiarizes participants with the method of Centering Prayer and its conceptual background and offers two opportunities to experience the prayer. The workshop consists of four presentations led by Contemplative Outreach commissioned presenters:

- Prayer as Relationship with God
- The Method of Centering Prayer
- Thoughts and the Use of the Sacred Word
- Deepening Our Relationship with God

More detail about the method and its background which are expanded upon in the four presentations is found in the Method of Centering Prayer brochure:

https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/method_cp_eng-2016-06_0.pdf

The Continuing Sessions

Following the Introductory Workshop, participants are invited to attend four to six Continuing Sessions which provide support, more background, and the time needed to establish a personal Centering Prayer practice. The Sessions also include the opportunity to share the initial Centering Prayer experience with others who have made a similar commitment. Each Continuing Session is led by an experienced facilitator and includes a period of Centering Prayer and group discussion. Details regarding the Continuing Sessions will be offered by the Workshop presenter. Scheduling of the Continuing Sessions is flexible and can be arranged to fit the convenience of group members. Sessions can be convened on a weekly basis, on a weekend or in one or two day retreats when distance and logistics make it difficult to meet weekly.

In addition to Suggested Topics for Discussion, found in Section 3, suggestions for topics of group discussion can be found in the article, *A Resource Guide: Options for the Continuing Sessions of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program*, written by the Centering Prayer Introductory Program Service Team. The resource guide can be downloaded here: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/a-resource-guide-options-for-the-continuing-sessions-of-the-centering-prayer-introductory-program/>. Here is the link to the same material you can view online: https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/resource_guide_for_continuing_sessions_for_cp_intro_rev_nov-2020.pdf. The six continuing session videos that are one option for the continuing session of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program can be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4w52bsLGrw&list=PLBE6fmRmYU8gixv_x4EF49P8bcl-e3LTj.

Understanding the Process

COORDINATORS COORDINATE

- Contact your chapter coordinator or contact person when you want to set up the Centering Prayer Introductory Program.
- Coordinator and contact persons act as your resource for and beyond the Continuing Sessions.

PRESENTERS PRESENT — an important distinction

- Contemplative Outreach forms and commissions presenters to present the Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop.

FACILITATORS FACILITATE — facilitate means “to make easier”

- Facilitators may work with their coordinator or contact person to learn more about hosting the Centering Prayer Introductory Program, or facilitating a Centering Prayer group. Or they may download the Facilitator Formation Online Level 1 Workshop videos (<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/vlp/facilitator-formation-training-level-i-workshop-video-access/>) to aid in developing skills to effectively facilitate a Centering Prayer group and learn more about the Contemplative Outreach community. A guide to

using the Level 1 Facilitator Workshop videos can be downloaded from <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/how-to-use-facilitator-training-level-1-workshop/>. Your participation in helping set up The Centering Prayer Introductory Program is vital to the success of the program. Ways you can help:

- Form a temporary support group of at least five to six people who will commit to the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. Ask this core group to help with publicity, hospitality, set-up, and clean-up.
- Work with the coordinator or contact person to choose a place, date, and time for the Continuing Sessions. Coordinators and contact persons also welcome your involvement in the administrative details.
- Prepare publicity flyers, parish bulletin announcements, and pulpit announcements.
- The following Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure may be useful when promoting this program to your church or organization:
https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/centering_prayer_intro_bw_2018_.pdf
- To purchase color copies of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure go here: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-centering-prayer-introductory-program-brochure-packet-of-25/>
- Follow this link to purchase copies of the Method of Centering Prayer brochure: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-method-of-centering-prayer-brochure/>
- Invite neighboring communities.
- Help ensure attendance at the Continuing Sessions. Plan to attend the Continuing Sessions yourself and encourage others to attend the Continuing Sessions as well.

A few things to keep in mind as you consider hosting the Centering Prayer Introductory Program:

First, it is usually the parish/organization that contacts you to inquire about conducting the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. Or, you may express your interest in scheduling this and ask permission to plan it.

Second, after you have received permission to host the Centering Prayer Introductory Program, work with the coordinator or contact person of your local area to select a commissioned presenter and determine the dates for the one-day workshop and the Continuing Sessions.

Finally, after the Continuing Sessions, ask the participants about their interest in forming or joining a Centering Prayer group.

In addition, the article, *Guidelines for Hosting a Centering Prayer Introductory Program*, written by the Centering Prayer Introductory Program Service Team, outlines in detail how to host an Introductory program. The article's guidelines are found here:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/guidelines-for-hosting-a-centering-prayer-introductory-program/>



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Appendix A: Other Experiences for Centering Prayer Groups

While the primary purpose of the Centering Prayer group and the single most important responsibility of the facilitator is to share the Centering Prayer practice with others, there are several other group experiences and individual practices that can help people along their journey.

GROUP EXPERIENCES

Besides the regular Centering Prayer group meetings that typically occur each week or biweekly, Contemplative Outreach has developed other group experiences that add to the community building and faith sharing opportunities.

- Day of Renewal
- Day of Silence
- United in Prayer Day

Day of Renewal

A Day of Renewal can be held on a Saturday, often for three to six hours, or whatever timing best suits the needs of the group. Note that the Day of Renewal includes faith sharing; the Day of Silence does not. The format is typically:

- Opening prayer/orientation
- One or two 20-minute Centering Prayer periods, with contemplative walk
- Review method of Centering Prayer (e.g., posture, sacred word, thoughts, contemplative walk)
- Faith sharing
- Lunch in silence (optional, with or without spiritual reading from one of Keating's books)
- One 20-minute Centering Prayer period
- View video from the Spiritual Journey Series (optional) OR *Lectio Divina* (optional)
- Closing prayer/departure

Day of Silence

A Day of Silence can be held on a Saturday (“Silent Saturday”), often for three to six hours, or whatever timing best suits the needs of the group. This day focuses on a time apart, with emphasis on silence and simple readings and prayers. The format is similar to the Day of Renewal:

- Opening prayer/orientation
- Morning and afternoon periods of Centering Prayer with contemplative walk
- Optional morning and/or afternoon conference*
- Lunch (in silence optional – with or without spiritual reading)
- Optional *Lectio Divina* experience
- Closing prayer/departure

*Conferences may be videos from Contemplative Outreach or guest speakers.

Suggested videos:

- “Invitation from God”
- “Heartfulness Series”

United in Prayer Day

Contemplative Outreach has been joining together for a United in Prayer Day for many years. It is an international gathering of many in the community on that day. The intention of the day is to form a network of Contemplative Outreach communities and individuals in silent prayer across the globe.

Each year Contemplative Outreach distributes a new DVD presentation, which includes a complete kit with suggested format for the day, discussion guides, and other helpful materials. The United in Prayer Day happens annually on the third Saturday of March.

The United in Prayer Day has two elements:

- Formation – Local communities are enriched by connecting with members of other Centering Prayer groups in the area for personal and community growth.
- Information – The carefully selected material prepared by Contemplative Outreach opens communities to a deeper awareness of the contemplative dimension of the gospel.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICES

There are many contemplative practices that can be offered to members of the Centering Prayer group that will assist in their own personal development. In this appendix, we briefly mention each practice and give a simple explanation. It is suggested that facilitators read more thoroughly and practice these in their own personal lives before sharing with their Centering Prayer group. Just a few of these practices, as explained by Thomas Keating in several of his books, are mentioned here.

Video – The Practices that Bring the Fruits of Centering Prayer into Daily Life

This online video can be used in your Centering Prayer groups to assist members in learning more about other practices that bring the fruits of the prayer into daily life. Topics on this DVD are presented by various servant-leaders of our community and include the following topics:

- Practice of Attention/Intention
- *Lectio Divina*
- Prayer of Forgiveness
- The Human Condition
- Welcoming Prayer

This video collection can be purchased as an online video at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-practices-that-bring-the-fruits-of-centering-prayer-into-daily-life-online-video/>.

Practice of Attention/Intention

The Practice of Attention/Intention is a practice that focuses on two components of attention (focusing on a particular object, such as the breath, an image, or a concept) and intention (the choice of the will in regard to some goal or purpose). The video mentioned here includes a presentation on this practice and is available to be viewed by facilitators and Centering Prayer groups to understand this practice. The video includes topics such as:

- Practice in the routine of daily life
- Practice of purity and intention
- Transmitting the Divine Presence in daily life

An additional resource is the booklet “Attention / Intention: A CLP Practice” (part of The Contemplative Life Program 40 Day Practice) which can be purchased at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/attention-intention-a-clp-praxis/>.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is one of the most important companion practices to go along with Centering Prayer. Most members of Centering Prayer groups would benefit from early exposure to this practice once they have established a sound practice of Centering Prayer. Topics include:

- Brief history of *Lectio Divina*
- Monastic and scholastic *Lectio Divina*
- Application for practices in daily life

NOTE: A brief overview of the *Lectio Divina* Introductory Program is in Section 5 of this handbook.

Prayer of Forgiveness

The Prayer of Forgiveness is a practice that involves learning to forgive and be at peace with everyone, and be willing to share everyone's pain and joy as if it were one's own. Since forgiveness is a vital part of the contemplative journey, but is often difficult and complex, this DVD provides an overview of a simple method that helps with this process.

There is also an online introduction available to study this practice more in-depth. The DVD mentioned here is available to facilitators to get a brief introduction to the practice, and can be shared with the Centering Prayer group to determine if they would like to further study this practice as a group. Topics in the video include:

- Power of forgiveness
- Process for forgiving oneself and others

Additional resources available on the Prayer of Forgiveness include:

- The Contemplative Life Program 40 Day Practice booklet and mp3 *Forgiveness: A Growth in Love* can be purchased at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/forgiveness-a-growth-in-love-booklet-and-mp3-clp-praxis-digital-download/>
- *The Process of Forgiveness* by William A. Meninger is out of print. You can find used copies at amazon.com or abebooks.com
- An on-line course called Forgiveness: A Growth in Love is available at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/live-and-self-guided-online-courses/> (scroll down to find it). There is a link you can click to register, or you can follow this link: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/course/view/170/forgiveness-a-growth-in-love>

Welcoming Prayer

The Welcoming Prayer is a method of consenting to God’s presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen our relationship with God through consenting in the ordinary activities of our day. The Welcoming Prayer helps to dismantle the emotional programs of the false-self system and to heal the wounds of a lifetime by addressing them where they are stored — in the body. It contributes to the process of transformation in Christ initiated in Centering Prayer. Practicing the Welcoming Prayer offers the opportunity to make choices free of the false-self system — responding instead of reacting to the present moment. In this practice, we learn to actively let go of thoughts and feelings that support the false-self system and embrace painful emotions experienced in the body rather than avoiding them or trying to suppress them.

Topics in the Welcoming Prayer part of the DVD include:

- The Human Condition
- Welcoming Prayer
- Practice and Discussion
- Fruits and Extending the Practice of the Welcoming Prayer into Daily Life

Additional resources available on the Welcoming Prayer include:

- The Welcoming Prayer printable brochure, available for download:
https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/welcomingprayer_trifold_2016.pdf
- Contemplative Life Program 40 Day Practice booklet, “The Welcoming Prayer: Consent on the Go”: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-welcoming-prayer-consent-on-the-go-a-40-day-praxis/>
- *The Practice of Welcoming Prayer* written by Cherry Haisten
https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/practiceofthewelcomingprayer_0.pdf.
- The Welcoming Prayer brochure available for purchase:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/welcoming-prayer-brochure/>
- An on-line course called Embracing Living: The Welcoming Prayer is located at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/live-and-self-guided-online-courses/> (scroll down to find it). There is a link to register on this webpage, or you can follow this link to register:
<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/course/view/10165/embracing-living-the-welcoming-prayer>

NOTE: An online video series Introduction to Welcoming Prayer is also available on the Contemplative Outreach YouTube channel starting at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I50Sda4jRgY>. Also, a full-day workshop entitled the “Welcoming Prayer Introductory Program” is available by contacting your coordinator, a contact person, or the Welcoming Prayer Service Team for more information.

OTHER INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES

Guard of the Heart

Ref: *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th Anniversary Ed., p. 169

Guard of the Heart is a practice of releasing upsetting emotions into the present moment as they arise. In other words, the ordinary events of daily life become our practice.

The following are three ways to keep yourself on course in everyday affairs:

- Place disturbing thoughts into God’s lap as soon as they arise, or give them to Him as a gift.
- Apply your attention to whatever you are actually doing, concentrating on the activity or duty of the moment.
- If you find you are unoccupied when disturbing thoughts arise, pick up a book or take up some prearranged project.

All three methods can help to avoid the commentaries that reinforce interior turmoil.

The fruit of Guard of the Heart is a habitual willingness to change our plans at a moment’s notice. It disposes us to accept painful situations as they arise.

An additional resource for this practice is in the June 2020 Contemplative Outreach News. The article on Guard of the Heart is on page 6. Here is the link to the Newsletter:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/newsletter/2020-june-twilight-of-the-self/>. The download link is at the bottom.

Active Prayer Sentence

Ref: *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th Anniversary Ed., p. 171

The Active Prayer sentence, an aspiration often drawn from Scripture, has to be repeated again and again at free moments in order to work itself into the heart. It may take a year or more to establish an Active Prayer Sentence that arises spontaneously. One should go about this practice without anxiety, haste, or excessive effort.

The advantage of this practice is that it eventually becomes a tape, similar to the tapes that accompany one’s upsetting emotions, and erases old tapes, thus providing a neutral zone in which the spirit of God can rush in and suggest what to do.

Some examples are:

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Serving Others on the Spiritual Journey in Community

- “God come to my assistance, O Lord make haste to help me.”
- “Holy Mary, Mother of God, open my heart to your love.”
- “Lord, I give myself to you.”
- “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Additional resources for this practice are:

- Contemplative Life Program 40-Day Practice booklet, “Active Prayer”:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/active-prayer-pray-without-ceasing/>
- *The Better Part: Stages of Contemplative Living*, by Thomas Keating:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-better-part-stages-of-contemplative-living/>
- Active Prayer Teleconference, MP3 download:
<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/teleconference-on-the-active-prayer-mp3/>



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Appendix B: “Spiritual Journey Series”

The “Spiritual Journey Series” is divided into parts that are appropriate for various levels of experience. It is suggested that one begin with videos in Part One, and work through all parts in succession, based on the interest of the individual Centering Prayer group.

Also available is a two-DVD set entitled “Prologue to the Spiritual Journey Series” including “DVD 1: The Method of Centering Prayer” and “DVD 2: The Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer,” which gives Thomas Keating’s explanation of the human condition, the archeological dig, and the spiral staircase.

It is also recommended that at least one set of the Spiritual Journey DVDs and transcripts be purchased by the Chapter for use by the facilitator(s) and can be loaned to Centering Prayer groups or individual members. Many chapters and Centering Prayer groups develop a lending library of books, videos and transcripts by Thomas Keating and other authors to share with members of the group. The Spiritual Journey series also is available free of charge through YouTube.

Prologue to the Spiritual Journey Series	
1	The Method of Centering Prayer
2	The Psychological Experience of Centering Prayer

Spiritual Journey Series	
Part I: Developing Centering Prayer and the Spiritual Journey https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-spiritual-journey-series-part-i-developing-centering-prayer-and-the-spiritual-journey-dvd/	Part II: Model of the Human Condition https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-spiritual-journey-series-part-ii-model-of-the-human-condition-dvd/
0 Introduction – Attitudes Toward God 1 Prayer as Relationship – Relating to God 2 Four Levels of Spiritual Experience 3 Toward Resting in God 4 Centering Prayer as Method 5 Progress in Centering Prayer	6 The Human Condition – Evolutionary Model 7 Formation of Home-Made Self – Existential Model 8 Pre-Rational Energy Centers 9 Frustrations Caused by Emotional Programs 10 Dismantling the Emotional Programs 11 The False Self in Action

Spiritual Journey Series	
Part III: Paradigms of the Spiritual Journey https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-spiritual-journey-series-part-iii-paradigms-of-the-spiritual-journey-online-video-2/	Part IV: Contemplation: The Divine Therapy https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-spiritual-journey-series-part-iv-contemplation-the-divine-therapy-online-video/
12 The Four Consents 13 Human Condition – Philosophical Model*** 14 Anthony as Paradigm of Spiritual Journey 15 Liberation from the False Self System 16 Liberation from Cultural Conditioning 17 Spirituality in Everyday Life	18 Night of Sense – The Biblical Desert 19 Night of Spirit – Towards Transformation 20 Beatitudes – Healing Emotional Programs 21 The Spiritual Senses 22 What Contemplation is Not 23 From Contemplation to Action
Part V: Divine Love: The Heart of the Christian Spiritual Journey https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/product/the-spiritual-journey-series-part-v-divine-love-the-heart-of-the-christian-spiritual-journey-online-video/	
24 The Most Excellent Path 25 The Divine Banquet and Dance 26 Prayer in Secret: Matthew 6:6 27 What is the Divine Therapy? 28 A Response to the Divine Invitation	

***NOTE: Video No. 13 “Human Condition – Philosophical Model” is applicable for all levels and can be viewed at any time.



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Appendix C: Facilitator Formations

Basic Skills I Formation

The Facilitator Basic Skills I Formation is offered to anyone who has volunteered to be a facilitator of a Centering Prayer group. The format can be adapted from a one-day to weekend workshop, based on the chapter's needs. For more information contact your chapter coordinator.

Elements of the workshop include:

- The conceptual background of Centering Prayer and how to share it with individuals and small groups. Practice in answering the common questions that accompany a beginning practice is also shared.
- Education in, and the use of, the resources of Contemplative Outreach. Learning how a community works, especially as it relates to small groups.
- What a beginning facilitator needs to know and some tools facilitators can use to facilitate the deepening of the group.
- The dynamics of small groups, guidelines for sharing, empowerment (sharing skills you have learned), and spiritual growth in the Centering Prayer group.

This program is also offered as a digital, online, self-guided training program for local Contemplative Outreach chapters and persons interested in facilitating Centering Prayer support groups. This workshop consists of 10 sessions organized around three topics. The topics address the fundamentals of facilitating a Centering Prayer group:

- The spirituality of facilitating a Centering Prayer group
- The basics of facilitating a Centering Prayer group
- How to use the Facilitator Handbook

This online program is available to view at:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/vlp/facilitator-formation-training-level-i-workshop-video-access/> You can also download the videos by right clicking on one of the videos and clicking Save As". Instructions for using the videos in a workshop, and sample exercises and

handouts are available for download here:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/how-to-use-facilitator-training-level-1-workshop/>. The Facilitator Handbook is available here:

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/download/facilitator-handbook/>

Facilitator Formation II

The Facilitator Formation II workshop is designed to build on the Basic Skills I Formation and is most helpful for those who have been facilitating a Centering Prayer group for more than two years. This formation includes presentations and interactive experience on the following topics:

- Spirituality of Service; the Role of the Servant-Leader
- Stages of Groups to Maturity
- Four Levels of Listening
- Soul-Friending (in the context of the Centering Prayer Group)
- Open Forum addressing Facilitator & Centering Prayer Group Issues

Other topics will be added at a later time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact your chapter coordinator or contact person about when the next workshop is available or how to provide this workshop in your area.