



## **Cooperating with Grace**

### **Contemplative Outreach (Un)Limited, Highlight and Intentions, 2020-2021**

*We should begin a new world with one that actually exists.*

- Thomas Keating, 12 Oct. 2018

*You carry all the ingredients to turn your existence into joy, Mix them, mix Them!*

- Hafiz, 1300s

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.*

1 John 3:2, written around 100 AD

#### **Introduction:**

I am pleased to offer you this report on the highlights and intentions of Contemplative Outreach (CO) Ltd. for the period January 2020 to June 2021. The report is structured around six themes: Trust & Accountability; Supporting Volunteers; Communications & Programming; Outreach to Diverse Populations; Global Initiatives; Dialogue and Partnering. These themes are based loosely on the intentions identified by the Governing Board in 2016 which continue to guide the work of the Board at least until the end of 2021 (see: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/governing-board-intentions/> )

#### **Trust & Accountability**

*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. - CO Theological Principle #13*

The past eighteen months have seen numerous changes for both board and staff members, including the hiring of Mary Jane Yates as Administrator in February, 2020; the retirement of Mary Anne Best in December, 2020; the hiring of Mark Dannenfelser as Program Coordinator in March of 2021; and the hiring of two part-time contractors, Emily Carroll and Matt Scrimgeour, to support our social media and technical support functions. 2020 also saw the departure of Nick Cole and Adal Henriquez from the Board after six and four years of service, respectively. Volunteers joining the Governing Board in 2020 included Carol Quest and Phil Jackson. Underlying these changes has been a growing sense of unity amongst staff and board members as each has committed in a deeper way to interactive, interconnected and non-hierarchical ways of being ([See CO Guideline for Service #1](#)).

## **Supporting Volunteers**

Since the onset of the pandemic in March of 2020, the generosity and passion of our volunteers has been more evident than ever. The first community-wide Zoom CP Introductory workshop was offered by the Introductory Program service team in July, 2020, with 302 registered, representing 10 countries. The Welcoming Prayer (WP) service team provided an online WP course in October which attracted over 500 participants. The CP Facilitator Support team offered an on-line session in February and a CP Presenter Enrichment session was also co-hosted by the CP Introductory Program and the Presenter Formation service teams in April, 2021. Both these events attracted several hundred participants who for the first time were able to connect with other presenters and facilitators from around the world to receive encouragement and resources for sharing the prayer and supporting weekly prayer groups both in person and online. Financial donations also continued to be strong in 2020 with the Circle of Friends contributing over \$250,000 and other donations (including chapter, newsletter, direct mail, tithing, etc.) totalling over \$340,000. This represents 83% of our expense coverage, with the remaining 17% handled by bequests, grants, royalties (including online courses offered via our partnership with Spirituality & Practice) and website product sales. For further details on our income and expenses for 2020 please see the charts at the end of this report or visit on our website (the balance sheet is [here](#) and the P&L is [here](#)). Truly the divine economy has expressed itself even in the midst of a global pandemic and its related effects of isolation and distress for so many.

## **Communications and Programming**

The CO website continues to be the central hub for sharing information, resources, programs and products. During 2020, over 220,000 users visited the site from 186 countries. The top ten countries represented are US, UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland, South Africa, India, New Zealand, Germany, Philippines. In 2020, there were over 54,000 new downloads of our The Centering Prayer mobile app and even more importantly, over 4 million sessions using the app. A French-language version is planned for 2021. Three online courses were offered in partnership with Spirituality & Practice (S&P) and [The Word of the Week email program](#) has continued as a donation-based offering, which also includes two weekly Zoom prayer groups. This program continues to grow in subscribers, now with over 2400 global participants. About 75-90 people attend the two prayer groups each week. Social media postings are now done regularly and, in some cases, daily. Our Facebook group presence continues to grow with now with over 16,600 global members; our Facebook page has 5656 followers; the Centering Prayer Twitter feed reaches over 9614 followers; Instagram has 1311 followers and YouTube 13,300 subscribers. An Insight Meditation Contemplative Outreach group was added and has 169 members.

## **Outreach to Diverse Populations**

In addition to several 12 Step groups on the Meditation chapel, there are a number of daily online 11th Step meditation meetings which are listed on [cp12stepoutreach.org](http://cp12stepoutreach.org) webpage. Two global online events were also hosted: a weekend fall retreat last September with Father Bill Sheehan and a Spring series of Father Thomas's teaching in 12 Step language with more than 600 people registered for each. Outreach to our "under 40's" community also received a boost in 2020. After advertising a new online group for younger contemplatives in four monthly CO newsletters, there are now three online prayer groups serving this demographic in three different US time zones.

The past 18 months have also brought renewed interest in outreach to our contemplative friends living behind prison walls. A mailing list has been developed and CO newsletters are now being sent to over 775 incarcerated individuals with another 750 copies sent to prison volunteers for their use. A survey of prison outreach volunteers was also implemented early in 2021 which resulted in the formation of the Prison Outreach Service Team comprised of eight dedicated volunteers.

### **Global Initiatives**

It is an understatement to say that paradigms shifted in the CO community during 2020. Our online Zoom event with Cynthia Bourgeault in May 2020 in many ways was the spark that ignited this global embrace. Initiated by our South African community, this event attracted over 4000 registrants, immediately becoming the largest event of its kind hosted by the CO community. United in Prayer day on March 6, 2021 was a miraculous and continuous 28 hours of prayer in community, hosted by 15 countries representing over 15 different languages. Since October of 2020, an informal network of volunteers has also been forming to further the work of translating CO resources into multiple languages. This group consists of about 12 active members representing 17 languages, including several members from [Extension Contemplativa Internacional \(ECI\)](#) who are now into their second generation of translators serving this effort!

### **Dialogue and partnering.**

In 2020, within three months of the pandemic's beginning, [Meditation Chapel](#) doubled in size and now has more than 6000 people registered and over 150 groups. The partnership is growing and it is estimated that more than 2/3 of the growth comes from Centering Prayer practitioners joining the chapel. There are now groups offered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian and the 12-step tradition. Other partners with whom CO has been in dialogue over the past year include the [Trust for the Meditation Process](#), the [Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation](#), the [Center for Christogenesis](#), the [Center for Action and Contemplation](#) and the [Contemplative Society](#) based in Victoria, Canada.

### **And the story goes on!**

As I finish writing this report, I am seeing evidence already of how CO will continue to emerge and transform in 2021 and beyond. To support this ongoing learning and transformation, a small team of dedicated volunteers is working with the stories that were submitted earlier this summer as part of [CO's community conversation project](#). The results of this project will in turn help to spark further conversation and emergence during our upcoming [Global Conference](#), September 16-19, in Denver and around the world by Zoom. A Lectio Divina workshop planned for August 14 already has more than 900 participants registered while countless Centering Prayer groups and retreats continue to hold an almost daily vigil of silence. As these past eighteen months have shown us, a new world for CO is indeed possible. I look forward to continuing to live into this vision with you!

*All is possible for the Creator of all,*

*Who loves to manifest the impossible*

*In endless configurations.*

(Thomas Keating, the Secret Embrace, "Out of a Stone", 2018)

