

Contemplative Outreach Ireland

Silence Solitude Simplicity Service



Entrance to St. Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado

Annual Newsletter

2016

www.coi.ie

Dear Friends of Contemplative Outreach Ireland,

In our Core Team message last year we asked the question, *'Is this our work or the work of the Holy Spirit'?*

Our Annual Newsletter is taking on a life of its own. The reflections sent to us recently from individuals, about praying Centering Prayer and the effects that their practice has on their daily lives, show how the Holy Spirit is working so powerfully in our world. This gentle growth of praying Centering Prayer continues.....

In April this year our Core Team had the privilege of attending a 10 day post intensive retreat in St Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado. It was a very sacred time of prayer and reflection for each of us and for us as a team. While we were on retreat, Fr Thomas Keating talked about the importance of retreats, emphasising learning through the experience of the prayer.



Taking Fr Thomas's words to our heart we have invited Pat Johnson from Snowmass Monastery, to return to Ireland in November 2017 to facilitate our 8 Day Post Intensive Retreat at Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford. Pat has been involved with Contemplative Outreach Ireland from the beginning, being a constant support and mentor over the years. Pat, along with her husband Bob, will also facilitate a Day of Reflection in Manresa Spirituality Centre, Dublin.

We have now confirmed our retreat dates for 2017 and you will find a copy of them on the back of our Newsletter.

From all of us on the Core Team, wishing you every blessing.

John, Kathleen, Rev Alan, Niamh, Fr Tom and Eileen.

The Core Team of Contemplative Outreach Ireland.

A Message from Pat Johnson

Pat Johnson & Eileen Foley

Beloved Irish,

As I head toward my 80th birthday, I am reflecting on the honour and privilege of having served all of you both in Ireland and in Snowmass for a 12 year period. What an amazing journey those 12 years have been; years of growth, years of intimacy, years of joys and sorrows, years of struggles and successes, years of being both student and teacher, but most of all years of loving a whole new family of humans that carry the Celtic traditions of hundreds of years into the centre of their own beings by a practice of centering prayer and then back out to the world at large through work and teaching and practice. You all have taught us much about hospitality, depth of practice, and beingness. And we love you.

Pat Johnson



Colorado Spring, 2016

In April I went with the Core Team of Contemplative Outreach (Ireland) to a 10 day Post-Intensive Retreat at St Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado, the home of Father Thomas Keating. The retreat was facilitated by our old friend, Pat Johnston, Pat's daughter, Jan and Brother Charlie from the Monastery. These amazing people also cooked the most wonderful food for us and they fed us every day, in body, soul and spirit with what looked like effortless ease. Just slipping off an apron, laying down a knife and moving from kitchen to prayer room without a miss of a beat. One enduring image I have is of Pat sitting one afternoon zesting limes, there was something very holy yet earthy about her activity. Pat is a person who appears to have lost all vestige of her false self and is at ease as a loved and loving child of God. She is a joy to be in Grand Silence with.



How does one begin to speak of an experience where the language of silence was the only one spoken? For ten days almost the only words I spoke aloud were the words of the liturgy. The only contact I had with other people was through a heightened awareness of their presence with me in prayer, no words and barely a glance passed between us. Yet I emerged from that Grand Silence with a deep sense of relationship in God with the others in the group. How can that happen where no words are spoken and we make no physical or eye contact? How much do we normally miss of knowing people when we focus so much on speech and sight?

The Grand Silence is not an empty space, it is full of God who is lovingly drawing us ever deeper into the divine presence. I was very aware of God welcoming and holding me. The womb like nature of the valley in which the Monastery is set held me safe and all I needed was given to me by the nurturing Mother God. It really is hard to find words to describe so intense and holy an experience. All I had to do was to turn up and be present to God in prayer, but there was nothing else to do and I really did not want to be distracted. Of course I was distracted at times, I got attached to thoughts and travelled a long way with them some days before returning to the sacred word and consenting to God. It didn't matter, God was still there waiting to welcome me back.

The group I shared this experience with will always be special to me, especially the group from Ireland: Eileen, Father Tom, Alan, Niamh, Maeve, Kathleen and John. During the retreat friendship grew, nurtured by the deep sharing of silence. Out of the retreat we laughed and shared stories like we'd all been friends all our lives and we continued to pray together in deep, deep silence. I was glad to return home to an empty house so that I could hold on to the silence and slowly pick up life away from the mountain. It is not the same as before but I still cannot really find the words to describe how life is different. It just is.



**The Revd Diane Clutterbuck
Belfast.**

Silence, Prayer and Sustenance at St. Benedict's Monastery

It was my great pleasure to serve the Post Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat this past April in Snowmass, Colorado. Everyone arrived jet-lagged and/or road-weary, having all travelled from afar but eager to settle in and begin this inner journey. The breathtaking views of Mount Sopris looming above us were soon obscured by huge flakes as a snow storm passed through the valley, and then, just as quickly the sun came out and I expected to see my first ever snowbow. I didn't see one, but I thought that with so much snow falling at the same time the sun was shining, if it could happen anywhere St. Benedict's would be the fitting place! The ever changing weather and views outside the massive windows overlooking the monastery valley continued throughout the 10 days. It seemed a gentle fluctuation between a vast glorying in God's creation and then a soft blanket descending, urging us all to focus inward.

As this was my first time serving a retreat, I had approached it with a little anxiety. My anxiousness was slightly allayed by the fact that one third of the retreatants were from Ireland, several of whom I had met on a trip to Ireland three years previously. There was a large contingency from the Dominican Republic and the rest were from various parts of the United States. I soon discovered that serving a retreat is very different from sitting one. I was aware of a two-fold process; the first one was the normal inner prayer process while the other was focused on the outer monitoring of the group, albeit in a quiet, contemplative way.



My specific responsibilities were to lead the morning prayer and to prepare and serve the evening meal. This suited me perfectly. I loved entering the prayer room in the dark and having the dawn slowly break while we were praying. It was wonderful to open one's eyes and see the light softly illuminating Mt. Sopris through the prayer room windows. The other part of my duties (cooking) was equally satisfying. I come from a family of exceptional cooks and the practice of nurturing others through food is deeply rooted in my being. Taking the gifts of the earth and, with love, transforming those gifts into sustenance for the body and spirit speaks to me.

About three days into the retreat, I felt a grounding happen and I was "at home." Being there in the retreat centre and monastery space while serving the group through prayer, food and a myriad of other needs, suddenly felt totally familiar to me in a way that took me by surprise. I was overcome with gratitude for the path that had led me there and, particularly, for my mother, Pat Johnson. Getting to know the participants during grand silence was also a nice experience for me. One doesn't know their stories but one does bond and get a sense for the unique individuality of each person. In addition, there was also the cultural overlay with three different nationalities spending this time eating and praying together in silence, bonding as a group but each displaying their cultural imprinting. I realized how intimate eating and praying together is!

The image that I took away from the retreat is an image which gives me great hope. I experienced a group of diverse people from different parts of the world, all deeply committed to God and bringing that commitment into their daily lives on earth. I hold that image of the retreat centre as a microcosm of what is possible on our planet. As Father Thomas said to one of the retreatants (and I paraphrase), "We are all centering together no matter our geographical location."

In peace, prayer and love,

Jan Schubert

What are you doing here?

A Centering Prayer Reflection by Neil Foley

The LORD said, "What are you doing here, Elijah? Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." (1 Kings 19:9,11)

The Contemplative Outreach email arrived as usual and provided a welcome reminder to book my next retreat. However, this email was different, being a request for personal reflections on Centering Prayer and its effects on life. I'll look forward to reading those; I thought to myself and moved on to printing off my retreat booking form. An eager but all too infrequent practitioner like me doesn't fit the bill for open personal reflections and life lessons.

Along came our local first-Saturday Centering Prayer meeting and during the interval, when we watch one of Thomas Keating's DVDs, our group facilitator asked me if I would write a personal reflection for the May meeting. It's much easier to decline an email than a face-to-face request. A bit like Elijah, I was being asked what am I doing here and soon realised I would have to leave the cave and stand on the mountain!

When the Spirit so compellingly prompts, who am I to refuse? But as Henri Nouwen, the great spiritual writer and teacher, once put it: *"Writing about the spiritual life is like making prints from negatives."* Thus, I do not intend to try to relay or reflect on the deep spiritual experience and nourishment I attain through Centering Prayer. Rather, I will try to describe how I got to where I am, in parallel with Elijah's journey in the First Book of Kings. This passage of Scripture has greatly influenced me on my own contemplative journey and has revealed itself in unexpected ways. Such as when a priest friend, who knew nothing of my Centering Prayer practice, was moving parish and asked if my wife and I would like a few unused items he was not bringing with him, amongst which was a mounted print of Sieger Köder's wonderful painting titled "Unexpected – The Closeness of God" depicting Elijah on Horeb.

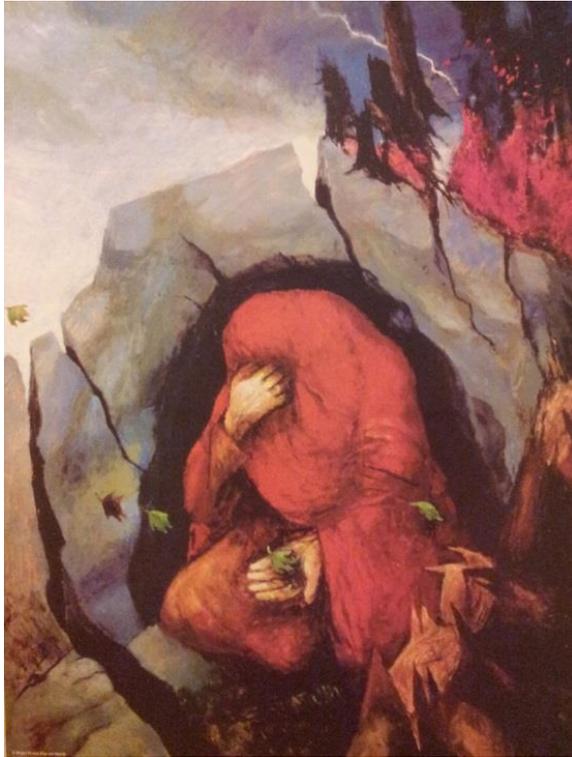
Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; (1 Kings 19:11-12)

Like so many before, I started by first seeking *happiness* – that allusive entity which is so physical and sensory when young. Happiness seemed to equate to pleasure, but pleasure is a fickle and fleeting ally. No sooner was I satisfied when I would desire again. Like the wind, it could be felt but not grasped. God was not in such pleasure.

Then, with a little growth comes a little maturity. So I sought *fulfilment* – my place in the world, achievements, a career, the recognition of others. Isn't this what I was taught by caring parents, teachers and institutions? Isn't this the way of the world? Is this not the bedrock of society for the earthquake to tremble through? But God was not in the ego.

Eventually, I tried to seek *God* – through reading, prayer, ritual. Surely this is my ultimate goal, my full realisation? *“Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord”* says the Prophet Hosea (6:3). Zeal for the Lord was like a fire burning within me. But God was not in *my* efforts.

And after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (1 Kings 19:13)

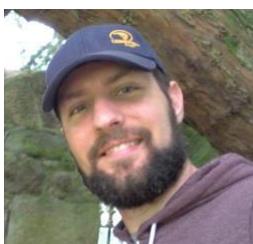


Unexpected- The Closeness of God (Elijah on Horeb)
by Sieger Koder.

By seeking God through my own will I was missing the point and missing God. As St. Augustine declares: *“If you understood [God], it would not be God.”* But then I stumbled upon Centering Prayer; although whether I stumbled or the Spirit led me is open to interpretation. It immediately seemed to make sense from the point of view of laying aside the ego and rationalisation, while retaining the true-self and reason. While I struggled with my stream of consciousness and the internal dialogue during those early days, and still do each time I practice, I have gradually learned that there is no “good” or “bad” practice. While the struggle is real it is at the same time illusory. As our Centering Prayer priest guide explained: *“Even if you have to return to your sacred word a thousand times, it is a thousand times you have said yes to God.”* For me, overcoming this type of dualistic judgement has greatly helped my progress with Centering Prayer. Similarly, I would always question how my practice is reflected in action, not realising that it is something that gently filters into my day-to-day living and is not something to be measured off a chart.

Even as a relative beginner I have noticed how I am much more willing to let situations and relationships develop as they may, without feeling the need to control them; I am becoming a much better listener and do not fear silence within conversations; and I feel much more aware of the divine in all things and all moments, and the call to service that this consequently requires. All of these effects are not mere personal improvements but involve all those I meet and interact with. Hence, they are also benefits to those around me and, hopefully, to the humble building of God’s Kingdom here and now. In echoing the philosophy of the great theologian Karl Rahner; *“In the days ahead, [to be a Christian] you will either be a mystic (one who has experienced God for real) or nothing at all.”*

And even occasionally, when the din of the world and the mind subsides, like Elijah, I wrap the mantle over my face and encounter the sound of sheer silence...



Neil and his wife, Helen, have been married for almost ten years and are practicing Centering Prayer for around two years. They consider Centering Prayer a great gift to them, both on an individual level and as a married couple, bringing them closer together and closer to God

The Effects of Centering Prayer in my Life

Janet Morris

Having written about the effects of Centering Prayer in my life last year, I had no intention of writing again so soon. But then I realised it might be useful to reflect on what has happened since: has my practice deepened; what has changed or remained the same?

My practice has definitely deepened. Not because I want to get better at centring prayer as such, but because, simply, I want more of God and sense that this prayer is key in fulfilling that desire. It's hard to express exactly what this longing means because it's not that easy to describe spiritual experience and the deeper yearnings of our hearts. Often, the words seem trite, hackneyed or sentimentalised, failing to convey the passion, pain and complexity behind them. For years, my prayer was that I might learn to live out of God as Source - practically, in everyday life. I wasn't sure what that meant or how to do it, but I wanted it.



Now, after two and a half years of Centering Prayer, I'm beginning to understand. Things that I had longed for are coming into experience. When I read scripture, I often feel as if I'm 'inside the text', as if it's alive and active within me. I'm praying a lot more, often without meaning to – eg. praying for folk I see around me. It seems to spill, unbidden, from a Source inside. I feel as if I'm slowly, and with many stumblings, being re-formed in Christ: as if the tectonic plates at the core of my being are shifting. In some measure, I've moved from words into experience. And it's all His doing.

This is wonderful and in many ways beyond my wildest expectations, but this year has also brought something of the cost. Alongside the gifts I've received, has come the call for parts of me to die. And it hurts. More secure now in God's solid and unconditional love, I've become increasingly aware of the old, destructive patterns of thinking and behaviour that have to go. The difference is that I'm able to look at my selfishness and ego more honestly now, without despair. And I know that this process is life-giving. I want to change: partly because I love Him, but also because I know that what He's beckoning me towards is better, even though I'm not sure what it is, or how it will be. I'm being invited to choose His way over mine & accept the call to risk the confusion of trying to understand what needs to change – and how. This keeps forcing me back onto Christ, crying out that He be formed in me and that the Spirit will keep showing me what I need to let go of so that the new may come more fully.

In all of this, I am more grateful to God than I can adequately (or ever) say. He has given me life. I feel as if I'm just beginning – and probably always will be

Janet Morris, Apr 2016

Seeing with God's Eyes and Loving with God's Heart

I keep telling friends that two things have changed my life in the last few years – Centering Prayer and Curves. Body and soul sorted! Over my adult life I've tried many methods of meditation/prayer and none (until Centering Prayer) became part of my life. Centering Prayer is now part of the routine, like brushing my teeth. It's difficult to decide what it is that has made it so but if a session is missed I feel the lack of it. Trying to describe the benefits of Centering Prayer to a friend recently I said "it's as if the soul is a garden, but all around the periphery fireworks (thoughts) are going off all the time. Centering Prayer seems to dampen down these fireworks and then (to my imagination) the Holy Spirit, who as a dove has been perched on a tree nearby, is able to glide down into the garden". And once the Holy Spirit is there, the hope is that our eyes and hearts can be opened and that we can begin to "see with God's eyes and love with God's heart".



Thanks for continuing to bring so many to the peace of Centering Prayer.

Rose Mary Logue

Intimacy with Christ

Thomas Keating

Centering Prayer is sometimes accused of falling short of true intimacy with Christ. What is meant by "true intimacy?"

Ordinarily we think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. Contemplative prayer, the pure gift of God, is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to the Divine Presence within us, beyond thinking, conversing, and even consciousness itself.

Centering Prayer is a method that prepares our faculties to awaken to the gift of contemplation. It leads to an intimate relationship with Christ that is beyond words, and moves into communion with him both in daily prayer and action. Centering Prayer is Christo-centric and consistent with the Christian mystical interpretation of the Gospel. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Centering Prayer leads to a deeper intimacy with Christ.



The source of Centering Prayer is the Divine Indwelling, where one is responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to consent to the Divine Presence and action within oneself.

Jesus invites us to learn this kind of prayer in his Discourse at the Last Supper: “I do not pray for them alone (those at the supper). I also pray for those who through their preaching will believe in me. All are to be one; just as you Father are in me and I am in you, so they too are to become one in us.” And a little later: “The glory you have bestowed on me, I have bestowed on them, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me. Thus their oneness will be perfected ... May the love with which you love me dwell in them as I dwell in them myself (John 17: 20-26).”

This is the teaching that Centering Prayer proposes, following the whole Christian contemplative tradition, and brought into dialogue with contemporary psychological, anthropological, and neurological discoveries, as well as with the wisdom teachings of other religious traditions.

In Catholic theology, Jesus is not just a human being possessing a complete human nature. He is the Word made flesh, the Son of God, who in his divine nature assumed the historical humanity of Jesus. It is through the person of Jesus, the Divine Human Being, that we are drawn to experience the Eternal Word of God, not just through abstract theological formulas, but directly.



At Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, the Father’s voice rang out saying, “This is my beloved Son ... Listen to him.” This listening points to prayer as an intimate relationship with God. As listening deepens, so does the relationship with God, which gradually matures over time until we become one with him. This is the thrust of the practice of Lectio Divina: first to know Jesus in his humanity and historical life, then to know him in his passion, death, and resurrection; then to know Jesus in his resurrection; and finally to know him in his Ascension and risen life in the Trinity.

The practices of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina open us to new levels of responding to the Spirit of God within. This growing relationship may require different responses from us as each level unfolds. In other words, the focus of each level is distinct and produces different results. To grow in divine love, through the earlier stages of relationship is to experience a deeper knowledge and love of Christ. They change one’s perspective not only of God but of all reality.

Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayers, rather it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. Centering Prayer embraces the unitive stage of Lectio Divina, as do all Christian prayer practices that encourage complete surrender to Christ.

The source of Centering Prayer is the Divine Indwelling, where one is responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to consent to the Divine Presence and action within oneself. Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience a deepening commitment to the needs and rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence and oneness of all creation.

As we move from conversation to communion with God's human and divine nature, Christ, we experience the divine intimacy as it was practiced in the first few centuries and preserved in the Christian contemplative tradition both in the West and in the Eastern Orthodoxy. The contemplative life, already present within us through the Divine Indwelling, awaits our consent.



Thomas Keating

Contemplative Outreach Ireland

Centering Prayer Retreat Schedule. Sept 2016-Dec 2017

- **23rd -25th September 2016** **Weekend Retreat.**
Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre , Crossgar, Co Down.
- **9th – 16th November 2016** **8 Day Post-Intensive Retreat.**
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co. Wexford.
- **2nd – 4th December 2016** **Advent Weekend Retreat.**
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co. Wexford
- **2nd – 9th March. 2017** **8 Day Intensive Retreat. 12 Step Friendly.**
Mount St Anne’s Retreat Centre. Killinard, Co Laoise.
- **10th- 12th March 2017** **Weekend Retreat.**
Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre , Crossgar, Co Down.
- **24th -26th March 2017** **Weekend Retreat**
Esker Retreat Centre, Athenry, Co Galway
- **12th- 14th May 2017** **Weekend Retreat.**
Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, Dublin 3
- **14th July 2017. Friday.** **Centering Prayer Retreat Day.**
Mount St Anne’s Retreat Centre. Killinard, Co Laoise.
- **18th -25th July 2017** **8 Day Advanced Retreat.**
Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre , Crossgar, Co Down.
- **22nd -24th September 2017** **Weekend Retreat.**
Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre , Crossgar, Co Down.
- **18th November 2017** **Centering Prayer Retreat Day**
Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, Dublin 3
Retreat facilitators from St Benedict’s Monastery, Snowmass, CO.
- **8th – 15th November 2017** **8 Day Post-Intensive Retreat.**
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co. Wexford.
Retreat facilitators from St Benedict’s Monastery, Snowmass, CO.
- **1st – 3rd December 2017** **Advent Weekend Retreat.**
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co. Wexford

For Bookings /Information please contact Eileen.

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