

Preview

In this midsummer issue, you'll find:

- Alan Krema's thoughts on the experience of practicing Centering Prayer with prisoners at the Cook County Jail
- An invitation to an Introductory to Centering Prayer Workshop at Healing Gardens on Saturday July 27
- An opportunity to learn about an online contemplative community hosted by Old St. Pat's, Chicago
- Information about a weekly online gathering of young contemplatives
- A link to the 2024 Contemplative Events Calendar, which lists online and in-person events through December
- A listing of in-person and online prayer groups you may wish to join
- July *Insights* from Michael Curry, Thérèse of Lisieux, Desmond Tutu, and Hildegard of Bingen

Please get more involved with Contemplative Outreach Chicago by helping to make *Spirit Journal* a lively interactive forum. If you would like to send us something you've written or just explore an idea, please contact the newsletter editor at news@centeringprayerchicago.org.

Centering Prayer Inside the Cook County Jail

by Alan Krema

Last winter Contemplative Outreach Chicago responded to a request from Tom Cook, chaplain at [Kolbe House Jail Ministry](#), to invite more group facilitators for an expansion of Centering Prayer groups within Cook County Jail in Chicago. There were two ongoing weekly groups at that time, and Kolbe House wanted to expand to 10 or more. Kolbe House was



noticing how well-received and needed the Centering Prayer groups seemed to be in the jail, but was in want of more volunteers with Centering Prayer experience to help facilitate these groups.

Our circle of service team (core Contemplative Outreach Chicago volunteers) took on this opportunity and extended an email invitation to anyone interested to join us in a discernment and formation community over nine months. We were all overjoyed and very blessed with the response. About 60 people expressed interest and joined us in this prayer community. We have had monthly online gatherings, monthly in person gatherings, and opportunities to join in the ongoing Centering Prayer groups in the jail.

We have collaborated with the COPOST (Contemplative Outreach Prison Outreach Support Team) and the Prison Contemplative Fellowship for support and materials. Centering Prayer groups within the jail (and our formation community) use the book [Finding God Within](#) by Ray Leonardini as a supporting text to complement the other traditional texts.

Our group includes a variety of people who are discerning their calling with respect to jail ministry. There are those who have served as jail chaplains but desire some support to be a facilitator. There are those who are facilitators and are discerning a calling to go inside the jail to guide a group. There are also those who are in support, as we invited anyone with an interest in this effort to join us. The discernment process has enriched all of us within this new Centering Prayer community.

Our gatherings are unique, reflecting the wide variety of backgrounds. We are formed about a communal intention of opening to transformation within the jail population. Each person has an individual expression of the divine, and in sharing that manifestation, we are all deepened personally into new connection and sense of union.

Personally, I have taken the opportunity to accompany Tom Cook to a weekly Centering Prayer group within the jail. The jail administration is working to offer

programs that provide value and meaning to the lives of the incarcerated. Centering Prayer is one of the core elements of this work. It is inspirational to see the opening of lives to the Holy Spirit within. These individuals know about instinctual energy centers and addictive behaviors as an embedded part of their life history. When they open to the possibility of releasing thoughts as a gesture of consent to the divine presence, they know freedom. That sense of freedom is precious for each.

When I sit in my traditional prayer groups, everyone tends to be similar to me. We are white, resourced, generally elder, and in some way “churched.” When I sit in a group with the incarcerated, I partake in the communion of diversity. Many of these men (women prisoners are held in a separate section of the jail) have impoverished and oppressed backgrounds. I can never know what it is like to open to transformation in Christ from their perspective, yet I feel connected, deepened, and united in new ways as I participate. I like to express to them that as I learn to deepen my relationship to God in Centering Prayer, I always find that relationship expressed and manifested in them, as their divine nature connects with mine and with all of us in the room together. Perceiving the divine presence and action within is truly a communal awakening.

From Healing Gardens in St. Charles

Introduction to Centering Prayer

Saturday, July 27

Do you know someone who would benefit from a concise but thorough half-day introduction to Centering Prayer?

Many people wish we could meditate, but don't know if we're doing it right or get bored after a few sessions. We mean to use meditation, but just don't get around to it. In this



workshop, a method of meditation that can't be done wrong will be explained and practiced. You'll be amazed at how easy it is and find that you CAN meditate on a daily basis.

Presenter - Deborah Marqui, LCSW and owner of Healing Gardens at Stone Hill Farm, will teach the workshop. She is a commissioned presenter of Centering Prayer and has been practicing for more than 25 years. A cancer survivor, Deborah attributes her healing to the restorative power of nature and the simple prayer practice of Centering Prayer that keeps her centered and grounded in the present moment.

[More information and registration](#) for this and other events at Healing Gardens. The introductory workshop will be limited to 10 participants.

A Contemplative Community Online, Hosted by Old St. Patrick's Church, Chicago

Take a moment out of your day for a rendezvous with God in a hospitable and inclusive community. This online program is offered by Old St. Patrick's Church, Chicago, where Centering Prayer has been practiced for decades.

The program offers an opportunity to transform your heart and mind through spiritual practice. From Monday to Saturday, this virtual chapel provides nine different opportunities for prayer and reflection.



Whether you choose to participate occasionally or regularly, have an established meditation practice or are just beginning, are affiliated with a church or are spiritual but not religious, you are welcome.

Each chapel session includes a 20-minute period of silent meditation, a short reading for prayerful reflection, and an opportunity for simple faith sharing. There is no cost or obligation to participate. Simply complete a brief registration form. Once registered, you will receive an email with information on how to join any of the chapel sessions throughout the week. Feel free to come as often or as little as you like.

Throughout this summer, the chapel will focus on deepening our practice of Centering Prayer and the Welcoming Prayer, using both the written and video resources of Contemplative Outreach.

[More information and registration](#)



The Spiritual Journey Series



Join us!

Saturdays | 10:30am/EDT | begins July 13

a weekly online gathering
for young contemplatives (under 50)

For more information use the QR code above or [click here](#).

The 2024 Contemplative Events Calendar

To learn about more upcoming workshops and retreats, download and peruse this recently updated [annual calendar](#). It provides a comprehensive listing of in-person and online programs we're currently aware of - now through

December. *Special note:* The Living Flame 2 program is being offered online starting on September 7.

Book Review

Reflections “The Art of Uncertainty” by Dennis Merritt Jones

by Joan Scheib

(Joan Scheib is a member of the Circle of Service for Contemplative Outreach Chicago and a Spiritual Director.)

The book, *The Art of Uncertainty*, had a huge and positive impact on me and what was embedded into my belief system. It enabled me to unwrap my feelings from childhood, which were un-Truths. I felt stuck and unsure of my course of action on my spiritual journey fulfilling God’s plan for me. The good news to share about this book is that each chapter ends, fourteen in total, with a Mindfulness Practice which author Dennis Jones developed to assist the reader on their journey, accepting the uncertainty of the future and how one’s life is to unfold.



*The Buddha taught that everything is impermanent -
flowers, tables, mountains, political regimes, bodies, feelings,
perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.
We cannot find anything that is not impermanent...
We think that impermanence makes us suffer.
It is not impermanence that makes us suffer.
What makes us suffer is wanting things to be
permanent when they are not.*

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Jones begins to set the tone of the book by sharing with the reader the fact that to embrace change requires deep faith. Reinhold Niebuhr has given us the Serenity Prayer, which has helped me during different periods of my life. “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

During a recent Lectio Divina practice with a group through the Contemplative Outreach Keating Chapel, we read Mark 6:1-6. In this reading, Jesus on a Sabbath went to “his native place accompanied by his disciples” and was teaching in the synagogue. Many who heard him were astonished at his wisdom, but they could not reconcile the fact of his upbringing as a carpenter’s son. Why were they questioning? Because, simply stated, they were resistant to change. They had in their minds how the Savior was to come, and what was occurring did not match that belief. They could not trust in the process, not surrender to what was happening. Jones points out that we must trust with the faith God has given us and surrender “with abandon, to what this moment and every moment brings, knowing ‘this too shall pass.’” (p. 43)

The Universal Law of Cause and Effect fills our life with abundance, the principle of success, deriving from “your deepest thoughts and beliefs about yourself and life” to “help you succeed in proving you are correct.” “Arnold Schwarzenegger is credited with having said, ‘Failure is not an option; everyone has to succeed.’” (p. 93) Our thoughts can be “life-affirming and positive, or self-defeating and negative.” Jesus gave us this teaching in these words, “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.” – Matthew 25:29 (p. 95)

In closing, Jones states the issue as follows, and shows us that we have a choice. “Energy of any kind is neither good nor bad until we direct it in a manner that makes it so. If we are fully conscious of its presence, we can

choose to see habit energy as a friend rather than a foe. Begin by ceasing to see habits as good or bad, but simply energy that is being directed (for the most part unconsciously) in one of two ways: constructively or destructively. Once conscious of this fact, we can make a choice. Metaphorically, we can choose to be dragged through life by the horse of our habit energy, or we can train that same horse and ride it, letting it assist us in moving in the direction of our choosing.” (p.115)

Are you unsure what your calling is from God? Are you hoping and waiting for someone to help you define that calling? Are you feeling stuck, not sure of which direction, options made available to you is the correct choice? Then, I highly recommend this book. Through the entire book, Jones led me, step by step, to where I need to be, able to make a decision on my direction at the beginning of each day, filling the moments with God’s purpose for me, and my life and spiritual journey.

Centering Prayer Groups In-Person and Online

Participants who attend a Centering Prayer introductory workshop often decide to join an existing prayer group or form one of their own. The groups generally meet weekly or every other week to share their experience of Centering Prayer and growing relationship with God.

Many groups decide to view videos or read and discuss books by Fr. Thomas and others to deepen their individual understanding of their spiritual practices. Formats usually include a session of Centering Prayer and discussion and sharing. These small faith communities build trust and unity while encouraging and supporting members on their spiritual journey.

More than 40 Chicago-area prayer groups are listed on our [website](#). If you would like help finding a prayer group, please contact the facilitators’ team leader at: groups@centeringprayerchicago.org.

While more and more prayer groups are returning to meeting in-person, here are ten invitations to gather with Centering Prayer groups via Zoom. Listed below are the groups, times, and contact information:

- New - Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina every Thursday, 9:30-10:15am. Contact Bob Gorman at rbrtgorman@protonmail.com
- Centering Prayer Group every Saturday 9:30-10:30am. Contact Bill Epperly at bill@integralawakenings.com
- St. Katharine Drexel Church every Tuesday 8:30-9:30am. Contact Lori Dressel at lorijdressel@gmail.com
- St. Mary of Emig Centering Prayer Group Tuesday 6:30 – 7:30pm. Contact Rose Magiera for link and phone number – rmmagiera@gmail.com
- North Park Covenant Church, Monday 7:15pm. Contact Sarah Hillabrant, (773) 509-1095, yoopergirl37@gmail.com
- Contemplative Worship, every Wednesday, 5:00pm. Contact Jenny Russel at – jir8546@yahoo.com
- St. Michael's Catholic Church, Schererville, Indiana, Monday, 6:00 PM. Contact Peggy Kolarik, peggy.kolarik@att.net, 219-322-1886
- Northern Illinois Zoom Centering Prayer Group, every Saturday 9:30 – 10:15am. Contact Anne Smith 815-245-4088 or Kathy Putnam 815-568-7641, Katiarel@aol.com
- Contemplative Outreach of NYC & Beyond - Brief prayers, 20 minutes of silent meditation, followed by lectio divina. The full program lasts about 45 minutes. Contact: Jane Coakley at coakley53@gmail.com
- Metanoia Journey (Austin, Texas) - Sunday morning "Centering Prayer/Lectio Divina" online service. Sundays, 8:30-9:30am Central. [Register here](#).

Offerings in the Meditation Chapel

Meditation Chapel is an independent, nonprofit global platform with which Contemplative Outreach Ltd. partners to encourage groups and individuals in a life of contemplative practice. Therefore, the global website of our parent

organization features this Online Meditation Chapel, which is very easy to use and provides the opportunity to see, hear and join in silent prayer with others from all over the world.

Registering for Meditation Chapel – You must first register to attend the meetings in the Chapel. You can do so at this link: <https://meditationchapel.org/getting-started/>. Once registered, you will receive the chapel links and can then check the [calendar](#) to pick one or more groups convenient for your schedule..

Meditation Groups – Groups meet via Zoom at all hours of the day and night and are open to anyone. *There is no cost/fee to attend.* A friend writes: “I have been attending meditation in the virtual Keating Chapel and had a lovely experience. The facilitator was very good!”

Centering Down: Meditations with Howard Thurman for the BIPOC Community – Join Colleen Thomas and Leslie Geer in the virtual Meditation Chapel for a contemplative meeting place for those identifying as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). We will reflect on the various writings and teachings of Howard Thurman. Our time together will include a 20-minute Centering Prayer sit, Lectio Divina, and faith-sharing. Every Monday, 9:30am Central: <https://meditationchapel.org/mary-of-magdala-chapel/>

Healing Together: A Gathering of Consciousness – In silence we focus on an intention for peace and healing. The format is an opening prayer, a short reading, two 25-minute sessions of silent prayer with a short break in-between and closing prayer. These sessions are in the Thomas Keating Chapel with Mary Lapham. You can contact Mary at marylapham2@gmail.com.

(Please let us know about any additional events and resources you're aware of. Write to: news@centeringprayerchicago.org)

Insights

To love, my brothers and sisters, does not mean we have to agree. But maybe agreeing to love is the greatest agreement. And the only one that ultimately matters, because it makes a future possible.

- Michael Curry

May today there be peace within. May you trust that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith in yourself and others. May you use the gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

- Thérèse of Lisieux

Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.

— Desmond Tutu

Dare to declare who you are. It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap.

- Hildegard of Bingen

Your Turn

Please write in to contribute your ideas or to comment on any aspect of *Spirit Journal*. For example, you are most welcome to submit something you've written on a spiritual topic, or to let us know about an upcoming event, or send an inspirational quote you'd like to share, or information about a book, website, podcast, or video you recommend. You can contribute by emailing the newsletter editor at news@centeringprayerchicago.org.

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Contemplative Outreach