



**Special Interest  
Articles:**

- COI Web site
- Fr. Tom Dalton reflects on a Post- Intensive Retreat at St. Benedict's Monastery Snowmass
- Annual Conference Feedback

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**Message from Anne McClean  
Co-ordinator**



Welcome to the first newsletter of the Office of Contemplative Outreach Ireland (COI).

The past year has been a very busy and exciting one for us with our primary focus being on developing our website, as well as continuing to host our annual weekends, intensive and advanced retreats. In July we happily hosted for the first time the Formation for Contemplative Outreach Service Programme under the direction of Sr. Fionnuala Quinn OP of COI and Contemplative Outreach of Dublin (COOD). Both chapters as well as various other corners of Ireland will now

enjoy the talents and fruits of this training, with nine new presenters in training of the method of Centering Prayer. In August Fr. Tom Dalton of the core team travelled to St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass for a post-intensive retreat. Whilst there he was privileged to meet and chat with Fr. Thomas Keating. We were delighted on his return to receive a hand written letter from Fr. Thomas sending us his best wishes in our endeavours at making Centering Prayer available to others and in particular on the launch of our web site.

It was my honour and privilege to attend the Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia in September. Seeing the fruits of Centering Prayer up close and personal, as well as learning that the administrative elements attached to co-ordinating a Contemplative Outreach chapter can also be a contemplative gift, was very encouraging. We have an exciting calendar of events planned for 2011.

We hope you take some time to peruse these on our website and perhaps consider joining us for one or another in the beautiful setting of St. Aidan's Monastery.

As we prepare to say goodbye to 2010 I thank each and every one of you who has joined us at St. Aidan's Monastery over the year. I especially thank you for your encouragement and support to me, through feedback, comments, co-operation and selfless voluntary giving, for which I am truly grateful.

My wish for you in 2011 is that your desire for more intimacy with God increases, as you come to know and love him more deeply as a friend and companion.

In prayer

Anne

## Weekend Centering Prayer Retreats



*Sr. Marie Dolores O'Brien of the Family of Adoration taking some reflective time in the garden of St. Aidan's Monastery during a weekend retreat.*

Once again our weekend retreats proved very popular for those who wanted to take a short period of time away from the hustle and bustle of life to simply rest in the Spirit in silence.

We began 2010 with our first weekend retreat in February. This was attended by over 20 retreatants, most of who made up the residential group.

The intention of the weekend retreats is to allow an opportunity for those who are on the spiritual journey and who find it

difficult to give eight days to a retreat, to share the joy of giving and receiving support to one another, in community and in the transformational work of the Holy Spirit.

Since Contemplative Outreach Ireland began hosting Centering Prayer retreats at St. Aidan's Monastery, we have always placed great emphasis on these three annual weekend short retreats. Not only do they support those who are on the spiritual journey, but they also meet the objective

of serving the needs of those from the local community who are called to the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in everyday life and who join us for single days of the retreat or who decide to drop in and celebrate the Liturgy with us.

As these retreats tend to fill up very quickly it is advisable to book early for 2011.

## Reflection on a Post-Intensive Retreat

Last August I had an opportunity to travel to St. Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass where I made a ten day Post-Intensive Retreat. In what can only be described as a Grace filled experience, it was a sheer gift to be present once again in that Sacred Valley, to share in the life of the Trappist community and to be 'held' in silence and solitude.

Coming as I had from a very busy time in my Parish work, it was a much needed space that allowed me to listen, to hear and to grasp what God was communicating to me, beyond words and without images, to a place of pure Love.

As the days progressed I felt I had arrived at an Oasis, after a long trek across the desert to where I could now draw cool refreshing water from the well, to rest awhile in order to continue on that journey. As I gazed out over the valley and

mountains I was grateful for a sacred space that allowed me to let go of my worries and concerns both about the past and the future and instead to live in the wonder and beauty of the present moment in prayer and silence!

It might seem obvious but one of the things I became aware of as I basked in this silence, was that God is not dependent on my sense of his presence. God is as God is, regardless of what I think or feel. Indeed I might 'feel' or 'think' for example that God is absent. However, I had now come to a new realisation and it was this...that God is always present even when I am not aware of his presence. In fact he is as Fr. Thomas says...closer to us than we are to ourselves!

I returned with a new found freedom and with a sense of gratitude for those who have travelled the road with me...particularly the desert!



*"May God continue to guide and shape us through the challenges that lie ahead and may we continue to take the time to be still and silent".*

Fr. Tom Dalton COI who participated in the Post-Intensive Retreat at St. Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass.



A view of the Retreat House at St. Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, Colorado.

## Intensive Retreat July 2010

The return of Pat and Bob Johnson from St. Benedict's Monastery, Colorado, to lead the Intensive Retreat last July was as always sheer joy for all of us. Pat and Bob have encouraged and supported us since we began facilitating Centering Prayer retreats at St. Aidan's Monastery in 2007.

Retreatants this year came from as far away as County Down to join them, in what was a pure grace filled week of prayer, silence and solitude.

Pat and Bob, always

generous in giving of their ministry and time to those who come to St. Aidan's Monastery also met at the end of the week with the Core group, to reflect on their progress, as well as looking at ways to facilitate community and collaboration with other Centering Prayer groups.

We look forward to Pat and Bob returning in July 2011 to once again lead the Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat. Full details are available on our Calendar for 2011 which you can access at: [www.contemplativeoutreachireland.com](http://www.contemplativeoutreachireland.com)



*Retreatants on the Intensive Retreat in July. L to R: Denis Gleeson, Sr. Christina, Kathleen Murphy, Sr. Marie Dolores, Cecelia Earley, Rita Morgan. Back L to R. Tom Dalton, Pat O'Reilly, Pat & Bob Johnson, Eileen Foley.*

## Formation for Contemplative Outreach Service

The purpose of "Formation for Contemplative Outreach Service" is to help participants move toward greater clarity in their understanding of the essence of Centering Prayer as well as an opportunity to look at their own Centering Prayer practice in light of the essential teachings. It is designed to provide practice in interiorising and communicating the essential elements of Centering Prayer.

It also enables participants to articulate the basic conceptual background of the Centering Prayer method appropriately to

others, thus providing adequate formation for those who want to become commissioned presenters of Centering Prayer within the Contemplative Outreach community.

Sr. Fionnuala Quinn gathered with Sr. Rose Murphy and nine such participants at St. Aidan's Monastery in July for the first ever formation programme in Ireland. One participant described his experience as follows: "I enjoyed and benefited enormously from my days at St. Aidan's Monastery. The group that gathered there was a wonderful group rich in talent and in life experience. Courage, wholeness and sensitive

caring, shone through as the fruits of years of prayer. It was good just to be there and to be part of it all. I ended as I had begun knowing that a daily commitment to Centering Prayer was all that was needed. I am deeply grateful to Sr. Fionnuala, Sr. Rose Murphy and Contemplative Outreach Ireland for the experience".

The nine new presenters will now be mentored over the next year in presenting the method of Centering Prayer to other groups throughout Ireland. We wish each one every grace and blessing in their new ministry.



*Sr. Fionnuala Quinn OP, who lead the Formation training in July. Fionnuala will lead a new group of potential presenters back at St. Aidan's Monastery in 2011. If you are interested in this programme please contact Fionnuala on 086 2342299 or 01 8683041*

## Advanced Centering Prayer Retreat

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*"St Aidan's Monastery, the Hermitage and the people coming to pray together and support one another in faith all reminded me of Monastic life".*  
(Comment from a retreatant)

The Advanced Centering Prayer retreat provides participants with an opportunity to go deeper into the practice of Centering Prayer as well as incorporating even more silence than what is experienced in the Intensive retreat. It is actually mid-way between the Intensive and Post-Intensive Retreat and focuses on ways to carry

the practice of Centering Prayer into our daily lives.

This year's retreat once again was led by Sr. Fionnuala Quinn and Anne McClean from the core team of COI. Similar to last year the retreat was booked out from early in the year. Some familiar faces returned as well as some new participants also. This year as a result of our efforts at spreading the

word about Centering Prayer, we had three participants from Denmark.



*Retreatants on the Advanced Centering Prayer Retreat in Oct. L to R front: Anna Glynn, Blanaid Gallagher, Freda Kenny, Mary Power. Back: L to R, Peggy Glenmon, Peter Francati, Angela Smyth, Claire Walsh, Anne McClean, Elizabeth Woods and Patrick Glynn.*

### New for 2011

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*."To live is to change. To live well is to change often". Cardinal Henry Newman*

Fr. Tom COI and Sr. Fionnuala Quinn COI and COOD will this year put themselves in the role of the lesser-one of servant as they each present Introductory Centering Prayer Workshops at St. Aidan's Monastery. Tom will be first off in early January and Fionnuala in May. This is the first time the Introductory Workshops have been presented by COI at St. Aidan's Monastery, bringing the formal

introductory workshops proper to the Diocese of Ferns for the first time.

The second new programme to be presented in 2011 is the Post-Intensive Retreat in April that will give retreatants an opportunity for even more Centering Prayer solitude and particularly silence. Indeed this retreat has much more silence in that no conferences are held and most days are spent in

what is known as the 'grand silence' when one is asked not only not to speak but also not even make eye contact. Full details are on the web site.

## Annual Conference 2010

### “Awakening to the Contemplative Dimension of life”

Photo and fingerprints taken, baggage checked and body frisked, I finally arrived in Atlanta after a nine hour flight in my roomy exit seat! Adjusting to 28 degrees heat from a cold and wet September in Dublin was easy. With a day to adjust myself to the time difference and acquaint myself with the city of Atlanta I was ready and enthusiastic for the first day of the conference on Sept 23rd.

The opening address by Fr. Carl Arico focused on the title of the conference; “Awakening to the Contemplative Dimension of Life”, in which he spoke about our spiritual journey as a series of awakenings and re-awakenings to a greater awareness of the presence of God in everything.

The following day was made up of various workshops and presentations such as an introduction to the new revised Resource Handbook...an essential item for any co-ordinator, the Role of the Centering Prayer Group Facilitator and Centering Prayer in the Spanish Speaking World, all equally interesting. David Muyskens Co-ordinator for the International Outreach of CO had on this day also, invited many of us from other countries to present and share our own experience of Centering Prayer from our various chapters around the world.

Saturday 25th was probably the highlight for me. This

was a Day of Enrichment in which we watched a video presentation of Fr. Thomas from Snowmass as well as footage of the previous day in which all of Fr. Thomas’ works were presented for archiving to Emory University in Georgia. Seeing boxes full of his materials of books, videos etc being handed over to join other great spiritual masters’ work such as Thomas Merton, Desmond Tutu and the Dali Lama was as beautiful as it was sad. As we all watched, I felt a huge sense of gratitude for the gift of this great man’s generosity and his unselfish love in donating his work for the benefit of others.

David Frenette later spoke of the absence of Fr. Thomas for the first time from the Annual Conference. Fr. Thomas was now however, inviting us in his absence to be present to the real Abba. In the tradition of the spiritual Desert Mothers and Fathers, Fr. Thomas in his great ministry had helped many seekers on their spiritual journey, a journey that frequently can be filled with desolation and a feeling of nothingness. Similar however, when the light goes out at nighttime we develop night-vision and slowly, without even knowing it, we can navigate our way in the darkness.

For me this resonated with what happens often in my

own spiritual journey...when the only thing I know for sure is that what I “think will happen won’t happen”! In that way, Centering Prayer becomes an ongoing invitation for me. It is where my true wisdom comes from sitting in the unknown. This reinforces for me once again that I cannot think my way to God and that I will always just have to trust in the unknowing.

At the end of four grace filled days I returned home with a renewed confidence in the unknowing quality of Centering Prayer and with the knowledge that all one needs to do is rest in the unknown!

Next year’s Annual Conference will be held in San Francisco, the title of which has already been chosen by Fr. Thomas:

“Re-awakening to the Contemplative Dimension of Life”.



Fr. Carl Arico, Anne McClean and Bonnie Schimitzu at the Annual Conference

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*“God may be loved but not thought”! (The Cloud of Unknowing)*



*Anne McClean with Kay Powers of the organising committee and CO Circle of Service*

Contemplative Outreach Ireland Launches Website

[www.contemplativeoutreachireland.com](http://www.contemplativeoutreachireland.com)

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An essential element of any organization in these modern times is the ability to stay connected. Hence, one of our first priorities in 2010 was to establish our own website. Finally launched in October 2010, it provides us with an opportunity not only to make Centering Prayer more widely known and available, but it also sets it in the context of an intrinsically interconnected world as more and more clearly

we can see that people in every corner of every country are linked together. Indeed Fr. Thomas himself places great emphasis on community, staying connected and networking.

Navigating your way round the site is simple as you learn about Contemplative Practices, Centering Prayer and Retreats. You can make an enquiry or book a retreat online through

our secure web page. We hope this website will be an invaluable resource and support to you in your spiritual journey.

*“Contemplative Prayer is the opening of our mind and heart - our whole being to God, who we know by faith is closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. It is a process of interior transformation, a relationship initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union”.*  
Fr Thomas Keating,  
*Intimacy with God:*  
Crossroad Publishing Company.

*“Be still and know that I am God”.*  
(Psalm 46:10)

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.contemplativeoutreachireland.com](http://www.contemplativeoutreachireland.com)

*“To all our beloved Centering Prayers in Ferns and beyond. Please accept my heartfelt appreciation at making Centering Prayer more available in Ireland. Congratulations on completing your new web site which will extend your efforts even further afield. I keep you all in prayer and hope to see more of you in the future, God willing and God providing”.*  
Excerpt from Fr. Thomas' handwritten letter to us in August 2010.

