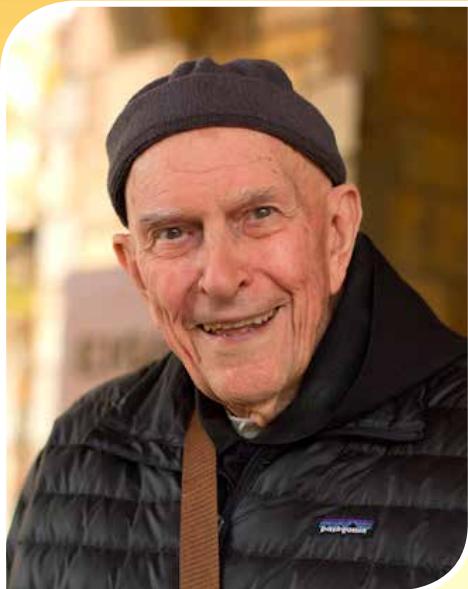


Contemplative Outreach Ireland



Fr. Thomas Keating

7th March 1923 - 25th October 2018

Annual Newsletter 2019 *A Tribute to Thomas Keating*



Silence Solitude Solidarity Service

Dear Friends of Contemplative Outreach Ireland

Welcome to our newsletter for 2019, which is in tribute to our gifted spiritual teacher, mentor and dear friend Fr. Thomas Keating who offered his final and complete letting go on October 25th 2018 at St. Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Massachusetts. We have been saddened by Thomas' passing but are deeply grateful for his long life, his ardent love of God, for the wisdom he shared so graciously, and for the encouragement he gave each of us to open ourselves to the presence and action of God in our lives and to be transformed by His Love in Christ.

We received a wonderful response from all over Ireland to our invitation for your own reflections about Thomas and his teaching and are thankful to those who contributed. This newsletter witnesses to the huge impact his life and work have had on so many of us.

In one of Thomas' last interviews recorded at St. Benedict's, A Life Surrendered to Love, on reflecting on Centering Prayer, Thomas said " I think it's increasing, I think it's burgeoning and I think after my demise it's likely to grow significantly even more. I don't know why, it's just the nature of things. The seed has to fall into the ground and die for its full energies to be....so whatever gift I've received I hope it will be continued through Divine Providence, perhaps in ways we don't foresee."

We will be forever grateful to you Thomas for sharing the gift you received with us. Stay close to us now as we continue your work in sharing that gift with others.

Go in peace and love, dear Thomas, taking with you the sure and certain knowledge that you will be forever remembered for everything that you were and everything that you gave.

*From all of us on the Core Team,
Kathleen, John, Eileen, Fr. Tom, Michelle, Rev. Alan and Niamh*

A Message from Pat Johnson

Beloveds,

Having returned from both islands of Ireland and Iceland just in time for the internment of Thomas Keating at St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, it feels so wonderful to write something for your newsletter honoring this amazing man, our teacher. Thomas' teaching was all about relationship; relationship with our God which, as we go deeper and deeper into the journey we recognize is not at all separate from our self. Having time to do quality visiting with the beloveds of Ireland consistently reminds me of Thomas' greatest teaching...we are all invited to love. Twelve years of coming to Ireland has been a combination of magic and of love. Thanks you Thomas. This year we went north in Iceland to the land where Thomas' nanny Selma was from; the herring capital of Iceland. I got to hear stories of how she went to New York and became the Keating children's nanny and her love of Thomas. Thomas' nephew Peter Jones spoke at the internment about Selma and her influence on the children and love for Thomas. He led the ceremony by reading Thomas'last book; the book of poetry entitled "The Secret Embrace". These poems embody Thomas and his greatest teaching... the invitation to love.

Pat Johnson

“A Great Presence Arises”

Fr. Thomas has graced us with a posthumous gift of another previously unpublished essay to deepen our understanding of the spiritual journey.



For those progressing on the spiritual journey, even when the consoling aspect of the Divine Presence dissipates because of excessive activity or too much thinking, an interior presence arises that becomes more and more permanent. A shift in consciousness begins to take place. Our rational consciousness is transcended by the awakening of intuitive consciousness. The rational level is not rejected; we simply become free of its limitations.

Reason remains available and functional for ordinary daily life, human relationships, and all the needs of embodied activity, but does not overshadow or take away the deeper and abiding awareness of the Divine Presence.

How can we be thinking beings and not think? The Divine Presence beyond all thought is a state that flows from being one with what happens in each nanosecond of time. The divine activity is taking place everywhere all at once. No one owns it or possesses it. It just is without any limit or boundaries. The presence and action of the Spirit embraces perfect unity and infinite diversity.

To seek for enlightenment is to pray for the reward of one's efforts to serve God. It is not yet complete detachment from self. The dissolution of the false self is the opening to true freedom and union with God. It leads to the experience of inner resurrection, which is to be taken over more and more completely by the Spirit.

To know the living God we have to share the sorrow of the Divine Heart. God puts up with endless human error, excess, and sometimes malice, in order to get across to us the most important realities of life, of which God's unconditional forgiveness and love for everyone is the foremost.

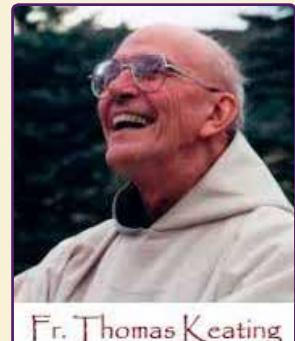
We have to be humbled and ground to dust for this experience of divine love to manifest in us. It also happens with varying degrees of intensity. The stages of consciousness are one way to describe the process of spiritual evolution. This is the experiential conviction of God as a Presence of extraordinary tenderness and exquisite thoughtfulness, beyond any human conception or expectation.

Perhaps the infinite gratuity of God's unconditional love, beyond all love as we know it, is the best way to express it. In any case, there is no end to divine love. As the Psalmist cries out, "His love is everlasting" (Psalm 135).

Thomas Keating

“Everything I ever needed or would ever need was there in that instant”

Throughout my own life and I believe, throughout all our lives, God is constantly saying to us “I am here with you, I know your desperate longing for happiness, but you will only find that happiness in me”. That voice is so gentle and so close to me that most of the time I don’t hear it because I am so preoccupied. Now and again I sense it in the smell of a hawthorn bush or the distant bark of a dog during the night. The first time I met Thomas Keating I heard God’s voice, in silence.



Fr. Thomas Keating

During a short visit to Ireland in 2000 he spoke about Centering Prayer and the Spiritual Journey in a small local convent chapel where I had learned about the prayer a year earlier. My practice was probably only about 2-3 times a week and without the support of the weekly prayer group led by a wonderful nun, I might have abandoned it altogether. I had read a number of Thomas’s books and watched many of the Spiritual Journey videos and I loved the whole concept of the prayer.

After 20 minutes of Centering Prayer Thomas spoke for over an hour, without any notes, and it was a joy to listen to him. The little chapel was packed and there were a number of people standing. I recall Thomas, then aged 77, as a very tall handsome man wearing his familiar white and black robes. He sat on an ordinary chair to the right of the round stone altar and this seemed to put him at a disadvantage as those standing were looking down on him. He answered questions towards the end of the talk and one man, who had a slight intellectual disability, asked what I considered a stupid question. I was sitting there with my robust false self firing on all cylinders. I felt embarrassed but Thomas answered the question as if it had been asked by the Dalai Lama, without a hint of condescension.

After he finished speaking, he remained sitting on the chair and people came up to talk to him. He seemed somehow vulnerable, sitting there, with people walking behind and in front of him. I joined the queue to speak to him and as I waited I was rehearsing in my mind all the impressive things I would say to him. The Pharisee and the poor man at the back of the synagogue come to mind! When I found myself standing in front of Thomas, he turned to look at me and in an instant **I knew I was loved unconditionally and nothing else mattered. Nothing needed to be said or done. Whatever I had done, whatever I was like, how I looked, were of no consequence whatsoever. Everything I ever needed or would ever need was there at that instant.**

I believe Thomas was totally unaware of what was happening to me. I managed to say “Thank you” and he simply answered “You’re very welcome”. What happened was so totally unexpected that as I returned to ‘normal’ it was almost as though I had imagined it. There was tea being served in the convent and I went to help with that so there was no time to absorb what had just happened.

I was privileged to meet Thomas again in Snowmass years later and sat and talked with him. I never mentioned that encounter to him. He was a person you wanted to be close to but I would have been more at ease sitting in silence beside him, without even thinking, just enjoying his presence. But of course I did talk, even though I had nothing worthwhile to say.

During the Snowmass retreats there was Mass each morning in the Monastery. Thomas would slip into the chapel almost unnoticed, dressed in a black anorak, stiff ill-fitting jeans and boots with a cap pulled down over his ears. He was the polar opposite of a VIP.

Looking back now on that first incredible encounter with Thomas, I realise it was God I saw looking at me through Thomas's eyes and it is how He is looking at each of us, every moment of our lives. That is reality – that is how things really are for all of us all the time. Thomas gave his entire life to God and his own false self was out of the way and this allowed God to shine through him. He seemed a rather private man who was thrust onto the world stage. Endless hours in airports and on planes, jet lag, constant travelling, interviews – all to make God known through this simple, gentle prayer. Thomas allowed God to use him and for that we all owe him so much. His death didn't take him from us – he has just moved ahead of us to the next stage of the journey we are all on – to wholeness and unity. And most important of all, the One who lived so clearly in him, is closer to us than we can possibly imagine.

Kathleen Ormond

In Eucharist



When I try to put on paper my pure gratitude to a dear friend and spiritual guide I find myself completely caught up with emotion. This beautiful way of Prayer has brought me on a journey that is beyond words. Thank you my dearest T.K. May the Spirit continue to work in my life and all our lives as powerfully as it did when you were with us. You once said to me "When we pray Centering Prayer we are in Eucharist."

This stays with me always.

Stay close to us as we continue to spread this very gentle and sacred way of going deeper with our Divine.

Eileen Foley

“Be open to the Infinite and hence infinite possibilities”

I celebrate my Silver Jubilee this year. I was ordained on 5th June 1994. My journey with Fr. Thomas Keating began a few months later. My first appointment was to Bride St. Church, a busy spot in the middle of Wexford town. I was young, enthusiastic and full of energy but I found my prayer life was suffering. I was so busy about the work of the Lord that I was neglecting the Lord of the work! Fortunately for me, in September 1994 I stumbled onto a 5 day Centering Prayer Retreat in Ballyvalloo. It was in every way, an answer to prayer! Suddenly, out of the blue, I was given the tools I needed, to pray the way I wanted to pray, in the busy world I found myself in. Centering prayer allowed me to recharge my batteries and my openness to God’s presence and action within me and allowed me to focus on what was important in everyday life and in ministry.



Thomas' Boots

The following May, Bishop Brendan Comiskey, my Bishop, sent me to Snowmass to learn about Centering prayer from “the master”, with the hope that I would, on my return begin teaching Centering Prayer here in Ireland. I jumped at the opportunity but you can imagine my disappointment when I attended the 10 Intensive Retreat at St. Benedict’s Monastery to discover that the teaching was all through videotapes! I said to myself—“I could have done this at home!” But I was soon to discover that it was actually the Lord, through “the prayer” that was the real “Master” and the real “Teacher”! Fr Thomas’ words were only the explanation of what was happening.

I did however get an opportunity to meet Fr. Thomas. My first encounter was on that same retreat. It was the feast of the Ascension and Fr. Thomas was preaching at Mass in the monastery. After the Gospel I watched as this bent-over, stooped old man approached the Ambo. He straightened up and began to preach. Power and energy emanated from him and he blew us away. I have no idea what he said but it was powerful! He was full of the Holy Spirit. As soon as he was finished, he became the stooped old man once more and shuffled back to his seat. We were all in awe!



View of Mt. Sopris from St. Benedict's Retreat House, Snowmass

The second encounter happened about a week later. I had completed my Retreat and was now being put through an intensive Servant Leadership training at the monastery by Fr. Thomas' personal assistant Bonnie Shimisu-it was grueling.

As a treat Bonnie

organized a visit to Fr. Thomas at his hermitage. It was a most wonderful experience. I was in awe in the presence of this wonderful man and he put me right at ease and made me feel that he was insignificant and that I was the most important person in the world. We had a wonderful few hours alone together that I will always treasure.

Over the years I have been very fortunate to have had many more face-to-face encounters with Fr. Thomas; in Snowmass attending Retreats over the years, in 2000 on his visit to Ireland and in 2003 in Rome during the International meeting held at the Domus Carmelitana. Anytime I met him he would always ask "How are things with Centering Prayer in Ireland?" We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to this most humble man. I certainly would not be the person or the priest I am today without his help. Fr. Thomas himself would say, "It's nothing to do with me, it's all the work of the Holy Spirit". That may be so but I will be eternally grateful. I think in his memory, the most fitting tribute we can give him is to keep praying-keep opening our selves to the presence and action of God, within and around us. If we are open to the Infinite, we will be open to infinite possibilities and we will be open to wherever the Holy Spirit wants to lead us...

"Contemplative prayer is the world in which God can do anything.

To move into that realm is the greatest adventure.

It is to be open to the Infinite and hence infinite possibilities."

Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart.

Tom Dalton



*The cross at St. Benedict's
Monastery beside which Thomas'
body is interred*

“God will bring people and events into our lives designed for the evolution of his life in us”

From a young age I have been drawn to deepen my relationship with God through silent prayer which led me to explore religious life in my early twenties. Through my contact with a Franciscan missionary order I began to deepen my prayer practice through a daily commitment to silent prayer and at 23 I lived in their community in Dublin for a year to discern if religious life was what the Lord was calling me to. It turned out not to be my path in life but during that year I had a wonderful experience of living, praying and working in a community of women who dedicated their lives to what God wanted for and from them.

I returned to my teaching job and my prayer life lost the energy it had while living community life. It took me a long time to realise that I falsely equated having a daily prayer practice to the call to religious life. It was only almost ten years later on taking on a new post as a school chaplain, and after years of reading about prayer rather than actually praying, that I knew I must commit myself to a daily practice again. I began to attend spiritual direction at this time also which really supported my prayer and my work in chaplaincy.

Three years later while studying at Milltown Institute I was asked a question by another student at the time Anne Mc Clean during coffee break. That question was “how do you pray?” I began to explain to Anne what my prayer was like to which she responded, “have you ever heard of Centering Prayer?” She explained the method, which to me seemed just like how I had been praying for some years now. We began that day to pray together in the college chapel before or after classes, sometimes at both times. This led to Anne inviting me to attend a Centering Prayer retreat a month later, on the first weekend in Advent at St. Aidan’s Monastery in Ferns.

I took up the invitation and from the first period of Centering Prayer in the convent chapel at that Advent retreat I knew I was home. Everything about it - praying in community, the silence, the stillness, was exactly what I had been searching for. And then I saw and heard Thomas Keating for the first time, albeit on a video tape but I was instantly attracted to his presence, energy, joy and everything he had to share. On that particular video he was comparing the deepening relationship with God with how a human relationship develops - from acquaintanceship, through friendliness and friendship to intimacy. I had never heard anyone speak with such enthusiasm and conviction about this union with God to which each one of us is called. I knew everything he had to say was truth and I wanted to hear more. Reading his books and listening to his tapes after this retreat gave me such a rich background in the prayer and an understanding of how it was working in my life to reduce the obstacles to deepening my relationship with God. And so Centering Prayer gradually became a way of life for me which has brought a richness and depth to my spiritual journey.

In 2009 I attended my first 10 day Centering Prayer retreat at St. Benedict’s in Snowmass and met Thomas for the first time. I saw him first at Eucharist in the Monastery and possibly was a bit in awe of him to be honest! After the Sunday mass it is the custom for the monks to meet up for a few minutes of chat with the retreatants and congregation in the book shop. It was here that Thomas spoke to me first, asking me what I thought about how the connection had been made between Centering Prayer and modern psychology. I think he saw this young woman (young? at 41!) and assumed a young person would be very taken with his work in this area. Anyway this question was a bit beyond me back then, maybe I was a bit overwhelmed standing in front of this imposing but very gentle man - I forget how I replied. On the closing night of our retreat Thomas joined us for a meal and some sharing. I'll never forget that evening sitting in the prayer room under the watchful gaze of Mount Sopris, listening to Thomas' gentle, patient and thoughtful response to each and every question asked of him. I had such sense of the disciples' experience of spending time with Jesus, of listening to him and learning from him. I met Thomas a few more times and each experience brought with it enrichment and encouragement.

I am deeply grateful to Thomas for the central role he has taken in my life in helping me to understand what the spiritual journey is really about and in giving me the gift of Centering Prayer to help me commit to that journey. The community of Contemplative Outreach Ireland I now count as my family and its support helps me to live out my life-long desire to grow into union with God.

Being introduced to Thomas Keating, Centering Prayer and the work of Contemplative Outreach was beyond doubt God present and active in my life. Thomas says "God will bring people and events into our lives....they are designed for the evolution of His life in us." God certainly brought Thomas Keating into my life and that action has I believe allowed God's life to grow within me. May each one of us have the grace to surrender to God's life and love within us just as Thomas did.

Thank you Thomas. May you rest in peace and love.

Niamh Brennan

"A New Dimension of Being"

The following is a short quotation from my book *The Sublime Round Tower: An Iconic Call to Contemplation Prayer* which includes three quotes from the Writings of Fr. Thomas Keating which readers, including myself found very helpful and enlightening: clarifying for us a profound statement of Jesus, re discipleship: as taught by Jesus in the Scriptures: namely "Whoever who wants to save their life will lose it; but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" Matt. Ch16:25. "All Possession" of the 'False Self' has to be surrendered completely [John] Cassian (c.360-435)

Cassian teaches abandonment of all 'self-possession' in absolute trust and dependence on God 'in purity of heart' as the foundation of the spiritual journey. This transforming challenge as presented by Thomas Keating is to negate the 'false self'. Keating gives the meaning of self here as 'sarx' a Greek word meaning the 'false self' which is of our own creating, as opposed to 'soma' the Greek word which means one's 'true self' open to growth and transformation "in Christ". This meaning has been lost to many modern readers due to the limitations in translation.... It is the possession of the 'false self' that has to be completely surrendered, 'given up' or 'cut off' as it is 'the cause of our spiritual retardation' in order to enable our 'true self' to emerge, rise up and follow Christ into a 'new dimension of being," page 48

Thomas presents John Cassian's Teaching on 'The Pure Prayer of Resting in God' in contemporary language to address the problems of our time and adopts Cassian's Teaching into a method of Centring Prayer which is easy to follow and put into practice. It is here that I have to acknowledge my deepest gratitude to Thomas, whom I had the privilege of Meeting during a Retreat in Snowmass in September 2010: namely on the 'How' of negating the 'False self' in order to enter on the path 'True Self' open to 'Transformation in Christ'.

It is through the discipline of endeavouring to deepen my relationship with Christ through this method of Centring Prayer that I have begun to experience its 'Transforming Fruit' in my daily living, in refraining from criticizing or passing judgement on my neighbour and in becoming more compassionate in my lived experience as I gradually awaken to the perennial wisdom of the Scriptures and Unity of all Humankind, hastening the fulfilment of the final prayer of Jesus: 'May they all be One, Father... as You are in Me and I am in You' (Jn. 17. 21). With immense gratitude for this Insight and Gift as well as for his splendid library of Inspirational Work, I pray that Thomas' gentle soul now rests in 'the Peace and Joy of his Lord'!

Kathleen Lynch FMDM

A Wordless Encounter with God

Back in 2004 when I was deepening my familiarity with mindfulness as a way of reducing stress, my friend Joe sent me two boxed sets of CDs titled The Contemplative Journey. They featured a rather elderly Cistercian monk called Fr Thomas Keating. I was a bit unsure about whether I really wanted to listen to any of this stuff at all but I decided to take some of the CDs with me and play them in the car when I was going on long journeys.

Two things impressed me about this man: his understanding of both modern psychology and the scriptures and also his sense of humour. I had observed the same kind of spontaneous humour in Buddhist monks and I took it as a sign of a kind of spirituality that is fully at home in both the body and in the everyday world.

Although I have been meditating for about sixteen years now, I have only been practicing Centering prayer on a regular basis for about eighteen months. I appreciate the gentleness of the method with its orientation towards being receptive to the movement of Spirit. I still make time to say traditional prayers but Centering Prayer allows me to go beyond the chatter of my mind to a wordless encounter with God. It is not always easy practicing in isolation so being able to attend a Centering Prayer retreat or a regular local group has helped me to deepen my practice.

Dominic Cogan

Inner Peace

The first time I encountered Centering Prayer was around four or five years ago. My local church newsletter had a small notice saying that Fr Carl Arrico would be attending Clonard Church to talk about Centering Prayer on the following Saturday. I decided to attend the talk but was an hour late. Fr Arico had already been speaking for an hour when I arrived. The funny thing was he spotted me going towards one of the seats and said to me "you have arrived for the most important part". I thought to myself I must be in the right place so.

Ever since that first introduction I have been going to Centering Prayer meetings once a month in my local church. The meetings last for two hours and comprise of three twenty minute periods of Centering Prayer and one session of contemplative walking. There is a coffee break in the middle so that people have a chance to talk before the next session starts. After the meeting has ended the feeling of peace and tranquillity is wonderful. I have also attended weekend silent retreats in Ballyvaloo House which have given me a better understanding of my Higher Power.

I would recommend Centering Prayer retreats to anyone who is looking for inner peace and a break from the pressures of everyday life.

Colm O'Byrne

“God doesn’t need your leadership, He needs your Love and Humble Service”

These are the Thomas Keating words which challenged me as I considered a “no” to Pat Johnson’s request last year to serve on the Global team. For some reason, now I know why, this quote from Fr. Thomas had occupied my days that week. When Pat’s request arrived I felt compelled to consider it. Did I need another leadership opportunity? Definitely not! “Give me twenty-four hours to think about it, perhaps the Spirit would find my no,” I responded. The Spirit did not find my “no” and the next day I said “yes” and accepted the Global team lead

for English Speaking Practitioners of Centering Prayer outside the United States. The call to love and serve with humility clinched it. This could be my intention and a place to go whenever I felt unable or inadequate for the role and responsibility. These words have served me well over the past months as I have been touched by the loving and humble service of others in the Contemplative Outreach community.



St. Benedict's Retreat House, Snowmass

All of us who met Fr. Thomas have a lasting sense of his presence and wisdom. I was blessed to listen as he spoke with a retreat group in Snowmass a few years ago. I remember one person asked about the future of Contemplative Outreach. It occurred to me that the question could have included “after you have gone”, as it was no secret that Fr. Thomas was ready and willing to move on from this life. So what would happen after our beloved guide departed? Fr. Thomas paused, pondered and then responded, “I don’t know”. Then came the challenging addition, “Perhaps there will be no Contemplative Outreach”.

Is it unfair to take a quote and to bring it to bear in the current context? Perhaps, but these words ring out to me as I move through the first year after Fr Thomas’ death. I recall them as a demonstration of his love and humble service. Fr. Thomas gave of his best but he was also prepared to let go. His words have taught me to hold lightly to my role. I am ever aware of the gifts of others who are willing to respond to the Spirit as new leadership emerges and Contemplative Outreach continues to respond to those who are searching for silence.

Lesley O’Connor



The Precious Gift of Centering Prayer



At this stage of my life my practice of Centering Prayer is reasonably well established but my now daily practice has had a rather stumbling and circuitous route to this point. However looking back over the years, I now believe I was being prompted by the Holy Spirit all the while.

I was motivated by two questions to begin the journey which would eventually lead me to the practice of Centering Prayer. The first question came to me following a church homily. The priest in his homily spoke of a father, on his death bed, asking his son to promise him that every day he would spend at least fifteen minutes in silence. That homily lingered with me and I found myself with the question: 'What would a daily period of silence bring to your life?'

The second question came to me as a result of my growing awareness of 'mindfulness' which was becoming more and more popular in Ireland. My awareness led me to seek out a mindfulness retreat led by a Buddhist congregation. I was delighted to be part of that weekend and I found it interesting but I came away with my second question: 'Where might I find something like this based on my Christian faith?'

These two questions left me open to finding an opportunity for structured Christian meditation. The opportunity arose when I learned of a meditation group meeting in Dublin once a month. I decided to go along to this and see what it was about and this turned out to be my introduction to Centering Prayer and to the writings of Fr. Thomas Keating. I knew I had stumbled on something special and looking back now, I realise that my initial two questions were finding answers. I began to travel to Dublin as often as possible to be part of the Centering Prayer group sessions, however the effort and expense of travelling several hours each month began to drain my commitment. So I began to ask myself another question: 'Could there be a Centering Prayer group for me nearer to home?' Failing to find a group closer to home, I set about introducing the idea to others in my locality and so more than six years ago, a regular monthly meeting for Centering Prayer began in my locality in Co. Galway.

Having a group of people in my locality, who meet regularly for Centering Prayer, has meant that Centering Prayer has become a routine daily practice in my life. If occasionally I let the practice slip I quickly realise I am missing something very valuable and essential. I would liken it to the hunger or thirst you might feel about 4pm in the afternoon if you had gone all day without food or drink. Yes, without the practice of Centering Prayer I become very thirsty and hungry for something essential to live.

So, what is it that the daily practice of Centering Prayer gives me? It is hard to describe but I will try. In my ordinary everyday living I have found a great calmness, a peace and contentment coming from a deep interior anchor. It is a sense of a source and a resource in my life, a depth likened to a well. There is a greater joy and freedom in my daily life, a joy in so many of the ordinary everyday things of life - like going for a walk, the joy of sunshine and rain, of food and friendship and laughter and tears, of family, and of the wonder of life and living.

The daily practice of Centering Prayer gives me tremendous support, care and nurturing in stressful times. In times of crisis and anxiety I find strength and reassurance and I find I can more readily leave things in God's hands, a calmness comes from me realising not everything is up to me to sort, I can more easily let go and let God.

In recent months as I have watched the memorial service of Fr. Thomas Keating I realised that a great fear I have carried for a long time, that is the fear of being dead, is being challenged from within me and is also dissolving. With the daily practice of Centering Prayer there is richness in my life now, not a richness of material but a richness of being held, lead, challenged and loved. Centering Prayer is a gift given to me in my life, a very precious gift that I am very grateful for.

Maria Logue Kennedy

The Centre where God waits for Us

On a warm summer's afternoon a few years ago I sat in my back garden with a copy of Thomas Keating's 'Intimacy with God' on my knee. I was feeling glum and anxious over problems that had arisen in my life. I told myself that I needed to see a counsellor.

The book, however, fell open at the chapter entitled 'Divine Therapy'.

I was practising Centering Prayer for several years at this time but it was only through reading that chapter that I understood how through this practice we are healed layer by layer, as the Spirit digs through all the repressed material of our lives until 'we reach the centre where God actually is waiting for us'. The chapter goes on to show that 'Every time we go down in this process, we also move in the opposite direction by accessing a new level of freedom and growth'.

I am not proposing to discuss all of Thomas Keating's wonderful insights in this section of this wonderful book but simply to say that by reading and reflecting on them my day in the back garden became much sunnier and my understanding of why I hope never to stop practising Centering Prayer became much clearer. Thank you dear Thomas Keating.

Ursula Deane

"Stand at the Crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths"

2009 was the year Centering Prayer found me. I had been ill and had to resign from all committees and organisations that I was involved with (they all survived remarkably well without me!) When energy returned it seemed a great opportunity to review my life. With this in mind, armed with the bible and a book from the "books I really must read some day shelf" (Centered Living by Fr. Basil Pennington) I took myself to a hermitage in Donegal. Fr. Pennington had spoken briefly about Centering Prayer at a mastery Conference some years previously and I bout his book I attempted to sit in silence for ten minutes a day. Not having read the book and with no knowledge of the guidelines, the practice stopped by I knew it held something I wanted to know more about. That week was a revelation. My bible reading for my first morning was from Jeremiah 6:16, "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." I felt Centering Prayer was my ancient path and I wanted to walk it.

By the end of my retreat I was certain Centering Prayer was the way forward for me. After an Introduction course given in Belfast by Contemplative Outreach Dublin and discovering the works of Fr. Keating this was confirmed. I had made it a practice to attend at least one residential Centering Prayer retreat a year since then. They have proved invaluable. I look forward to the silence, the time apart and the opportunity to welcome God' presence and action within.

Each retreat has given me the opportunity to go deeper - a time aside to stand at the crossroads. Every time I feel the Lord gives me a new insight about the spiritual journey which inspires me and encourages me for the year ahead. The last retreat had me puzzled. I was encouraged to consider "transition" not "transformation" which I would have loved. "Transition" has really challenged me. In recent times some things have become clear. However the meaning and applications... I'm still chewing on that.

Norma Dodds

The Divine Dance

Who has had the biggest impact on your life? That was the question that I found being answered as I watched Fr Thomas Keating's memorial service in November 2018.

I met Thomas Keating very briefly at a conference in the UK in 2009, only months after taking up Centering Prayer. Little did I realise, then, how he would turn my life around - through his teachings by DVD, through his many books, and through the practice of the prayer.

I love his teaching on the Divine Dance. He says that as we learn to let go, it is as if we are dancing with the most magnificent dance partner. We learn to rely more and more on this God within, and so, to move gracefully through life with complete synchronicity. If we allow the Divine to be our dance partner, life becomes effortless and we become free. We learn to accept what is, rather than wish things were different. It's not that life's problems disappear, but we begin to see the bigger picture, where we are not the centre of the universe, and we start to view problems through a softer lens.

I also love that Thomas was so up to date with the teachings of modern psychology. While on an intensive retreat in 2013, I watched him explain the growth of our false self, how from very early childhood, we begin to develop compensatory behaviour patterns in order to get our instinctual needs met: needs of safety and security, of affection and esteem, of power and control.

These behaviours become ingrained in us and eventually turn into energy centres - that unconsciously trigger our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. From here, our false self grows and we become the centre of our own universe. Over the following months and years, by daily visiting my inner room, I came to a greater understanding of my insecurities and, until then, the hidden drives, needs, and demands that were driving my actions.

So, thank you Thomas, for introducing me to this wonderful way of prayer, which at times turns my life upside down, but, on other occasions, has me gliding around the dance floor!

Siobhan Semple

"All God wants is to hold you"

Sponsored by Bishop Brendan Comiskey, I had the privilege of going to Snowmass with Fr. Tommy Brennan in the late nineties. I remember feeling anxious about the visit and about meeting Fr. Thomas Keating. Would I come up to expectations?

The very first evening both Fr. Thomas and Fr. Joseph were at the table welcoming the Retreatants and sharing their meal. There was soup, salad and bread already on the table, along with various condiments. I enjoyed what I thought was the first course. Fr. Joseph seeing my empty plate said "Sister Dolores, have some more". I replied that I was waiting to see what was coming next! Peals of laughter from both Thomas and Joseph : But Sister, that's all there is - there is nothing more coming. This is Snowmass, not Ireland!

I must say that the peals of laughter from those holy men was the best introduction to a CP Retreat that I had ever experienced.

When the hour for meeting Fr. Thomas came my main question was about Adoration. I belong to a Congregation that is committed to Perpetual Adoration, and I wanted to be able to explain to those who were doubtful that CP and Adoration were not two different things. I was so spellbound by Fr. Thomas' words that I did not write anything down but the following lines are what I can remember. There is a form of Adoration that uses no words. In it I hold out my whole life to God, in silence, and with it the whole world.

Adoration is to surrender. Adoration means entrusting oneself entirely to God.

As we dwell in Adoration eternity begins - an eternity that does not withdraw from the world but opens to it utterly.

I like to think of Fr. Thomas being in eternity, an eternity that does not withdraw from the world, but opens to it utterly. Fr. Thomas is gone but ever with us.

This is what I can imagine him saying as he did at the Retreat in 1999.



Jesus names the ultimate reality as a Parent = Abba.
The ultimate reality is personal, intimate, close, tender.
The experience of Abba is Christ's experience of God.

All God wants is to hold you.

Dear Fr. Thomas, thank you for making those Holy Realities known to us in such a persuasive way. We want you to continue to hold us now that you are "In Suis Patris".

Sr. M. Dolores.



Contemplative Outreach Ireland

Centering Prayer Retreat Schedule Sept 2019 - December 2020

21st September 2019 Centering Prayer Retreat Day

Esker Retreat Centre, Athenry, Co. Galway.

27th -29th September 2019 Weekend Retreat

Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre, Crossgar, Co Down.

19th October 2019 Northern Gathering

Agape Centre, Lisburn Road, Belfast.

6th – 13th November 2019 8 Day Post-Intensive Retreat

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

29th Nov – 1st December 2019 Advent Weekend Retreat

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

21st- 23rd February 2020 Weekend Retreat

Ards Friary Retreat Centre, Creeslough, Co Donegal.

6th- 8th March 2020 Weekend Retreat

Esker Retreat Centre, Athenry, Co Galway.

18th – 25th March 2020 8 Day Retreat

Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, Dublin 3.

16th May 2020 Northern Gathering

Agape Centre, Lisburn Road, Belfast.

22th- 24th May 2020 Weekend Retreat

Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, Dublin 3.

10th July 2020 Friday Centering Prayer Retreat Day

Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre, Killinard, Co Laois.

21st - 28th July 2020 8 Day Advanced Retreat /Post Intensive

Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre, Crossgar, Co Down.

18th - 20th September 2020 Weekend Retreat

Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre, Crossgar, Co Down.

21st- 28th October 2020 8 Day Post-Intensive Retreat

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

27th- 29th November 2020 Advent Weekend Retreat

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

For Bookings or further Information Please contact Kathleen

Phone: 00353 87 6017709 **Email:** contemplativeoutreachireland@gmail.com

Please note our 8 day retreats in March and July are 12 Step Friendly.