



CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH ONTARIO

SILENCE SOLITUDE SOLIDARITY SERVICE

OUR NEWSLETTER * FALL 2013

A word from the new Editor

Welcome back to the Contemplative Outreach Ontario (COO) Newsletter. This is our first issue after the strokes that Carolyn Gratton suffered in the summer of 2011. I offered to take up the torch so as to try to continue the wonderful work that she did for so many years with the help of her linchpin, Paul Fleming. We offer our sincere thanks to both of them. It won't be easy to fill their shoes but please rest assured that I shall do my very best.

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This is Our Newsletter. So I invite each one of you to contribute to it whenever you have something to share with all the Centering Prayer groups in Ontario, and to email your contribution and/or your comments to me at logos302@sympatico.ca. In the Newsletter, we'll also quote the Theological and Administrative Principles, one or two at a time, just to remind us that they are our guides through our spiritual journey.

We have now three regions in Ontario: South Western Ontario, with Marlene Kelly-Kolotylo; Eastern Ontario, with Gregor Sneddon; and Central Ontario, with myself and with the help of Johnson Ling and Peter Donovan. You'll find the map of the new boundaries on the COO website, as well as a list of all the groups in each region. Although these three regions function independently, it seems to me that we need to stay connected and this is the *raison d'être* of this Newsletter. True, prayer itself is an eminently personal act, but the first Theological Principle says that we are

a "community"; so, if we don't keep the links among us alive, we'll wither.

At this stage, it is hard to predict how frequently the newsletter will be published, but our aim is about three issues a year for now. Paul will email it to his extensive list. The newsletter will also appear on our website, of course.

It seems to me that one way to give reality to the ways in which we are connected would be to visit the groups, if they agree to this – and with Carolyn's blessing on these visits, of course.

I co-facilitate the Toronto West-End group, and since its inception, we have always wanted to ask someone from COO or a member of the National team to help our group develop a sense of the "big picture." We are a network, and this fact must be apparent in what we do. Please send me an email if you would like for me to visit your group. It would be a pleasure to do so.

And, as Yuletide is almost upon us, I would like to wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a Very Happy New Year!

Marie-Noëlle Maillard

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Theological Principles

1. Contemplative Outreach is a community of individuals and Centering Prayer groups committed to living the

contemplative dimension of the Gospel in everyday life.

2. A commitment to the daily practice of Centering Prayer is the primary expression of belonging.

IN THIS ISSUE

Upcoming Events

Regional Spotlights

An Interview with Carolyn Gratton

Contemplative Outreach International

In Memoriam

*2014: Thirtieth Anniversary of
Contemplative Outreach*

Upcoming Events

Workshops at St. Michael's College

Several offerings in the Continuing Education department of the University of St. Michael's College may be of interest.

Nada Conic, who is a retreat leader at Manresa and has offered a workshop at St. Leonard's several years ago, will present a course on Dreams: A History for five Wednesdays, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., 29 January to 26 February, 2014. "Dreams have been understood as the soul's night journeys abroad... We will look at some famous dreams and their interpretations from Homer and the Bible, ancient history, to the dreams of scientists and poets, prophetic and clairvoyant dreams, Jungian 'great dreams' and dreams that changed history."

Nada will give a workshop on Mysticism and the Spanish Inquisition on Saturday 7 June from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. How did the investigations of the Spanish Inquisition impact the lives and even spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of

Avila, and John of the Cross?

Andrew Knight-Messenger will give a workshop on Finding God in Middle-Earth on Saturday, 25 January 2014, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Andrew, who is a doctoral student in early Jewish literature will examine *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. "Through a discussion of the texts above and some of Tolkien's other works, this course will consider the many and diverse ways in which [Tolkien's] theology and spirituality echo throughout the far reaches of Middle-Earth, from the Shire to Mordor."

The fees are \$150 for a 5-week course and \$70 (including lunch) for a Saturday workshop.

Further information is at:

<http://ce.stmikes.utoronto.ca/>

8-Day Intensive Contemplative Prayer Retreat

March 7-15, 2014 (Friday to Saturday)
Bethany Retreat Centre, Frenchville,
Pennsylvania

Theme of "Heartfulness," with Sr. Therese Dush and Fr. Philip Billotte

Bethany Retreat Center is providing an in-depth retreat for those with experience in Centering Prayer who wish to enter into a more profound level of spiritual practice. *Hearfulness: Transformation in Christ* condenses the accumulated wisdom of Fr. Thomas Keating's many years of teaching and practice into nine essential areas for study, reflection, and spiritual growth for our time. Fr. Thomas talks about the importance of silence and contemplative practice as a means of opening the mind and heart and one's whole being to God or the Ultimate Reality.

Arrival: 5:00 p.m. on Friday

\$375 for semi-private room

\$425 for private room (limited availability)

\$475 for private room with bath (limited)

Deposit: \$150

Please go their website at bethanyretreatcenter.org to obtain further information and to make arrangements to take this or any other retreat at the center.

As there is no long retreat in the Central region until the fall of 2014, the above retreat offers an opportunity for those who wish to undertake one. A car-pooling could be organized if several people decide to go, Peter Donovan will act as an information point for possible car-pooling. Please email peterdonovan@rogers.com if you are looking for a ride or if you can provide a car. Bethany is within driving distance of Toronto.

Contemplative Outreach “United in Prayer Day”

Saturday, March 15, 2014
St. Michael’s Cathedral Parish Hall, 66 Bond Street, Toronto
Baguette sandwich lunch and fruit provided. Free will donation accepted. The program for the day will follow the lead of Contemplative Outreach International. Further details will be emailed to the Facilitators.

Contact Information: Johnson Ling at jr.ling@rogers.com or phone 416 302-1824

A Volunteer Coordinator Wanted

To organize a two-day retreat in the fall of 2014 for anyone wishing to attend, we need urgently a coordinator. Contact: Peter Donovan at peterdonovan@rogers.com.

Regional Spotlights

CENTRAL

The Central Region counts 28 groups. We had a Facilitators’ Day on Saturday, September 28, 2013, at Freda Perry’s house, as the previous one. Marg Baker made a very inspiring presentation on “Listening is an Encounter with God.”

As usual, we had the Annual Potluck Dinner in the Summer on August 10, 2013, with over 20 people participating. It was at Marie-Noëlle’s place. We kept the tradition alive and well.

FOCUS ON ONE GROUP

The **Toronto West-End Group** began in September 2007 with three members: Olga Kolisnyk, Marie-Noëlle Maillard, and Olga Tschernow. They met in a tiny room in the basement of All Saints’ Anglican Church on Tuesday evenings and shared a simple Centering Prayer routine. Through the years the group has expanded to include Voula Iascone, Kate Jackson, Izabella Luckiewicz, Ruth Roberts and Lucia Xavier da Silveira. We have been fortunate to find a new home for our weekly gatherings, which is both accessible and comfortable. We now meet at Islington United Church.

This is a very diverse group where eight countries are represented: Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Poland, Russia and Ukraine. More recently, Inge Zwikker – of Dutch origin (one more country) - and Jim Shears, have become members. Due to health issues requiring a restricted environment, Inge and Jim join us for prayer and readings through Skype from their home to someone’s home. This is an innovative way of praying that we have not been able to do at the church yet. As we master the technical challenges of this new computer technology we are pleased to extend our prayer group community beyond our physical space to include members with special needs.

Our schedule is based on a monthly cycle and includes Centering Prayer (sometimes double), book study, Lectio Divina, DVDs and discussions. We have read a number of books together and are currently reading Father Keating’s book: Invitation to Love – The Way of Christian Contemplation.

Voula Iascone
Email: voulaiascone@yahoo.ca

EASTERN

The coordinator of the Eastern Region is Gregor Sneddon who is the Presbyter at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Ottawa, Ontario. He recently published a book "Listen to the Reed" which was endorsed by Fr. Carl Arico in these terms:

"Our spiritual journey is all about relationship - and within each relationship is the presence and action of Christ and the Trinity. Gregor is calling us to the grand dance, each reflection can be looked upon as inviting us to a new dance step, a new experience. We open to new insights which help us celebrate the relationship. Do not be afraid to learn some new steps, admit in certain aspects we are lousy dancers and need help. Be willing to learn and then get lost in the music of the Word."

Holy Manure

Gregor delivered this homily on March 2, 2013, at the Sunday Eucharist concluding a four-day silent retreat on Contemplative Living with Mary Dwyer in Arnprior, Ontario, Canada.

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water...My soul thirsts for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. - Psalm 63:1-3a

Is that not why we are all here? Yearning, this ache for God? Is this not what it means to be human? St Francis says: "What you are looking for is what is looking." This very desire, this burning for God, *is God*; yet, we seek everywhere else.

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Isaiah 55:1-2

Mary shared with us her 'koan,' she received from Fr Thomas: "Consent to

God's presence is God's presence." It is in the very act of consenting to God within our life right now that God is fully realized. Yet how do we come to know this need? To turn toward God suggests that we are turned away from God. I need to know I am lost before I can be found.

This is the 'Way of Tears', the second baptism that St. Symeon speaks about. Our first baptism is our initiation into the divine life, but the second baptism is every time we turn back to God, every time we repent (*metanoia* literally means to turn around). Turning around is the movement of the will, inspired by the tears of realization that we have spent our money "for that which is not bread, [our] labour for that which does not satisfy."
Isaiah 55:2

For many years I belonged to a community inspired by and steeped in the Sufi tradition. In this community we invested much time and effort in spiritual exercises which focused on the nervous system and all kinds of practices which evoked a variety of experience and phenomena. Part of our practice was a way of prayer called "turning". You may be familiar with the "whirling dervishes" or seen pictures of this mode of prayer where a person turns rapidly on one spot with arms raised, head cocked, in a trance-like state - "a still point in a turning world."

With much training and discipline one could learn "to turn." The sacred dance, when dervishes would gather together with their sheikh (shepherd, teacher) is called "Sema." We would turn to chant or music and when the music or the chant stopped, the dervish would stop, and bow to the sheikh. It was beautiful.

On one occasion I was turning in great glory, ecstatically as the music played and the people chanted "Hu Allah! Hu Allah!" The moment came, the music ended. I stopped on a dime, and solemnly bowed...low, with great piety. But all I could hear was laughter. As I rose I discovered that the sheikh was not in front of me, nor to the left, nor to the right. My

sheikh was directly behind me! Far from an honourable deep bow of respect, I had solemnly mooned him.

“Embarrassed” does not capture the depth of humiliation I experienced in that moment. I felt the blood rush from face, and I crawled back to the circle. What a gift.

You see, what was revealed to me was how much I had invested in “being spiritual.” How much of my life was spent on how I appeared to others. I had blindly laboured in my need for affirmation and esteem. If you know anything about Middle Eastern culture, it is rude to show the bottoms of your feet to anyone, let alone your rear end to the elder or master!

It was a dazzling *metanoia*, a powerful “turning around” to the true source of life. All of the spiritual disciplines and feats of experience were just paper tigers compared to this transformative encounter.

But that is just a funny example. In my life, I have self-destructed in many ways, I wrestle with many demons, broken relationships, I have hurt people, I have acted with utmost self-centredness at the expense of others – again and again. And yet, it is the discovery that I am eating the wrong food, the awareness of my brokenness that is the gift of a greater *metanoia*, a turning around, a greater and deeper consent. The tears of my brokenness water the garden of transformation: my stuff is God’s food.

This is not to say that sin is just OK. The fruit of sin is suffering: institutional, cultural, global – the suffering of this world. Ultimately, evil is the result of human beings turning away from God. It is human beings trying to quench their thirst at the wrong well, “spending money for that which is not bread, labouring for that which does not satisfy.”

At the heart of the war against evil, the front line of the battle against the suffering of all creation, where the rubber hits the

road, is where the “denim hits the wood” – when in Centering Prayer, we put our butts on the chair. And we practice. We practice *metanoia*. Every time we say our sacred word, 10 times, 1,000 times, it is a second baptism, it is another return, another consent towards God.

“Consent to God’s Presence is God’s presence.” Whether we are changing our life in a radical way, in how we live, dealing with our addictions, our relationships – repenting, turning away from ‘sin,’ is no different than when we turn away from a thought and say our sacred word... It is the same activity of the will, where we turn to God’s presence and action within. “Consent to God’s presence, is God’s presence.”

In our Gospel (Luke 13:1-9), a man planted a fig tree that bore no fruit and was going to cut it down – but the gardener said: “no, let me dig around it, put some manure on it...and wait and see.” It is our brokenness, the manure of our life that is the food of transformation, the opportunity to turn towards God, again and again in faith. If we were always perfect, loving perfectly, never in need, why would we ever seek God? For God to transform us into his heart, we have one task alone – to consent. We have the “stuff of life,” that helps us choose to turn to God. By turning away we turn toward, our thirst unquenched drives us to true water. It is our thoughts in prayer that are gifts we detach from, gifts because they allow us consent to God’s presence and action within.

I would close with this short prayer that Cynthia Bourgeault often shares that comes from the Nazi Ravensbruck Concentration Camp where some hundred thousand women and children were exterminated. When liberated at the end of the war by the allies, this prayer was found by the body of a child:

O Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they inflicted on us. Remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering—

our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to judgment let all the fruits which we have borne be their forgiveness.¹

Friends, this does not justify suffering, but invites us to keep turning to God, keep consenting, know you are loved, that forgiveness is given – and use every thought, and every fall, every turn down a wrong path, every thought to be an opportunity to return, to let God bare your fruit, to become the person you are being loved into eternity to be. It is our brokenness that God thirsts for, for it is in our brokenness that we turn to him. “It is when I am weak that I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

Our broken body is God’s holy food... just as God’s broken body, is ours.

¹ Cynthia Bourgeault. *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind – A New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. Shambhala (Boston, MA: 2008). [Quoted from Lynn C. Bauman, ed., *A Book of Prayers* (Telephone, Tex.: Praxis Institute Press, 1999), p. 36]. pg. 74.

If you want to get the book, go to www.stlukesottawa.ca

SOUTH WESTERN

Centering Prayer continues to be a very important part of our lives and of the network in this part of the world. The nine groups continue to meet regularly in Windsor, in Essex County and in London.

In the latter part of this year, three of our members attended the Gift of Life Retreat in Garrison, New York on April 19-25, 2013. It was led by Fr. Carl Arico and Mary Anne Best. It was held in a comfortable and beautiful setting and was a very meaningful retreat and experience.

This fall we held two Introductory Workshops: one in Windsor and one in Leamington. They were well attended by people who were new to Centering Prayer

and those who were experienced offered support and hospitality to all present. One of our members, Sr. Yvonne Parent, who is a Presenter-in-training made two of the four presentations at both the workshops and completed the requirements to be a Commissioned Presenter. We are very pleased to have her join the three of us who are Commissioned Presenters in this area.

Two of the Centering Prayer groups began the fall season with a retreat day at Holy Family Retreat Center in Oxley again this year. They found it was a very meaningful way to begin the year and to catch up with each other after the summer break.

Three of our members made the seven-day Retreat in Kalamazoo, Michigan in August. (This is about two hours from Windsor.) It was held at the Congregation of St. Joseph’s Transformations Spirituality Centre. The facility is comfortable with washroom in each room and on spacious and beautiful grounds. The feedback from the retreat was very good. There will be one next year August 10-16, 2014 and several of our members are already planning to make that retreat. We are so happy to have it available and within driving distance.

Three of our members took the opportunity to attend a Retreat Day at the above named facility, on November 2, with Fr. William Meninger, OCSO, who spoke about the mystic Julian of Norwich and her spirituality. It was very good, refreshing and inspiring. The previous evening, he gave a presentation on Forgiveness, which was also excellent.

Our facilitators meet together in Chatham twice a year. Our second meeting was held recently where we prayed together, discussed issues related to facilitating our groups, updated our local and international information, and enjoyed a DVD on aspects of the Spiritual Journey.

Our Service Team of four continues to meet on a regular basis to plan events, and work on any issues we are facing in our region.

We are presently considering ways of supporting our volunteers and to avoid burnout, as well as ways to encourage new members to become volunteers. Attaching terms to each volunteer position is one way we are considering at this time; as well as open invitations.

The coming events we have planned are: Reflection Day in Preparation for Christmas: December 7, 2013; Reflection Day in Preparation for Lent, March 8, 2014; World Day of Prayer: March 29, 2014 and Weekend Centering Prayer Retreat: April 11-13, 2014.

We continue in our practice of Centering Prayer while being nurtured by the people in the network and its resources knowing that *“the transformative process happens to those devoting themselves to be seekers of the Mystery, who are motivated to get to know, serve and do the will of this immense Mystery which becomes more and more intimate and tender.”* (The Gift of Life, p. 89)

Marlene Kelly-Kolotylo, Coordinator
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An Interview with Carolyn Gratton by Judy Wootten

Carolyn Gratton is the person who brought Centering Prayer to Ontario and who was the Coordinator of Contemplative Outreach until strokes two years ago forced her to step down.

We met in her comfortable new living quarters with three questions for her to consider.

Question 1: *How do you picture the future of Contemplative Outreach in Ontario?*

Carolyn: I would like to back up a bit before I answer the question. Over the course of my life, I realized that people were hungry for a deep spirituality and were looking for something they could trust. Long before Centering Prayer, even though I felt inadequate, I knew that I

wanted to serve the faith of others. This has been a lifelong vocation. When I learned about Centering Prayer, I recognized that I wanted to know more about it. The daily practice was very helpful. Through my life experiences with groups – here in Canada and the USA – with Grail groups, my students, mentoring and with Contemplative Outreach – all of these were helpful in growing my understanding of the contemplative path. I decided I would write a book about “soul making” incorporating a lot of these experiences. I saw that all I had done in my life – my University teaching, providing spiritual direction and as the Coordinator of Contemplative Outreach, the books, ideas, talks I’ve given – everything – was coming to a head, was blossoming. Then: big change. Two strokes that cut right into the middle of these efforts. It brought about a “letting go” on many levels.

The whole stroke experience forced me to become new, become different. My plans for the future had to change. I realized I had to let go of the old “me” – it had drifted away. It was time for something new – in the words of a song that runs through my mind – it was time to be “new born again.” The strokes were God’s way of “new borning” me. It was hard to let go of my fixed idea of how things should be done – to accept this transformative change. When I began to come out of the trauma of the strokes, I found myself with an apartment full of tapes, files and books - and me with the same dreams. But much had fallen away – my brain and body were damaged; my spirituality had undergone an enormous change. I needed to trust God was there – not always so simple.

One day, in conversation with a friend about how we saw the future of Contemplative Outreach, she suggested that what we need in Toronto is a “Gathering Place” – a place where we could put all of our files, tapes and books – all that we have collected - so they would be available for people; a place where both the contemplative and the active dimensions of life could find expression.

And it would have to be in terms of our Canadian experience rather than the American. The future of Centering Prayer in Canada has to be a Canadian invention. I wanted to write a book that would show what we have done in Canada – all ten chapters were themes that showed what we have to share. This “Gathering Place” doesn’t have to appear in bricks and mortar right now, but it is something to hold onto – something tangible for the future when we become a more solid “we.”

I trust in God’s wisdom and vision for our future. I am interested in a future direction that serves the faith of others by using the gifts God has given to us. We can build on what we already have – people for whom Centering Prayer is important, resources and experience. Contemplative Outreach has a future because this hunger for a deep spiritual life does exist and will go on for a long time.

Question 2. *Do you have a few words of wisdom to give to the people who are serving now with Contemplative Outreach and to the whole Ontario community?*

Carolyn: My doctoral dissertation comes to mind. It’s about trust in God’s living presence in your life and being open to it, believing that we need to go beyond where we already are. Obviously, I believe in evolution. Life is a gift through which we evolve in the every day. Make use of what we already have – we are surrounded by so much. And think about how we can make everything available to others as they were available to us. I’m optimistic because we have really good people.

Question 3. *You had an impact on so many people. Are you missing something now that you’ve passed on the torch?*

Carolyn: I’m missing some things and some people, but I’m attending to the creation of my life now. I’m in an entirely new situation - new born again is a thematic. It’s a theme of life, but very real to me right now. I’m not really missing things – I’m living the new reality. It’s not

always fun. If you want to build the new, you have to move beyond the old.

Judy Wootten: Thank you Carolyn.

Contemplative Outreach International

*International Conference in Aspen, Colorado
in October 2013, by Lourdes Crabtree*

My dear brothers and sisters in
Contemplative Living,

It is an honour to share with you my experience at the Contemplative Outreach Conference in Snowmass, Colorado. If the entire experience could be considered as being held in the depths of Pure Love, then this brief description will cast one small ray of light.

Snowmass captures a small part of God’s creation. The Rockies, like arms embracing the village, were capped with a dusting of snow. The bronze and gold leaves of the Aspen trees acknowledged the majesty of God’s hand. The green fir trees revealed God’s creative presence. Indeed, “heaven and earth are full of God’s glory.”

Each morning an optional “Prayerful Body Movement” session was held. Using the principles of Centering Prayer, we performed various gentle movements, listening to our bodies for that which we have retained from our life’s journey and honouring our bodies as the temple of the Divine. This was followed directly by a Centering Prayer session. Sitting in the silence and stillness of love with over one hundred people was a very powerful experience.

In his opening presentation, Abbot Joseph reflected on the desert experience, he defined the experience as “*An awareness of our dependence on God and continual need for God.*” God protects and cares for us. His light guides us one step at a time.

Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, reflected on some of the books she has written. Below is a summary of one aspect, from her book "Discernment Matters":

- ✓ The practice of the Holy Spirit.
- ✓ How to find the Holy Spirit.
- ✓ Exploring the obstacles in finding the Holy Spirit.
- ✓ Renouncing:
 - The former way of life
 - The afflictions that enter our thoughts
 - Our self-made thoughts of God
 - Our self-made thoughts of our self.
- ✓ Establishing a "Rule of Life" as a Lay Contemplative.

Fr. Thomas Keating spoke of what seems like an endless journey from zero to infinity, yet we are already at the point we think we are looking for. We will simply grow into that awareness. Our journey is to diminish the false self so that our true self can be realized and we discover who we really are.

Peter Jones, Fr. Thomas's nephew, presented the movie, [A Rising Tide of Silence](#), a film he produced and directed about the life of Fr. Keating. A copy of this movie has been purchased for our resource centre. Please contact me if you would like to see it.

Fr. William Meninger's presentation reflected on the mystics of the 14th century, such as Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich. Humility, he says, is knowing the truth about self,

"I am nothing,
I have nothing,
I desire nothing,
except the love of Christ.
Have this always in your heart and
frequently on your lips."

Yours in contemplative living,

Lourdes Crabtree

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Other Canadians were also attending, including Yvan Cloutier from Quebec, Bernard Dionne from Quebec, Angelo Iascone of Toronto and member of the Canadian National Team, Raymond Sevigny from Edmonton and Elyse Strathy from Toronto.

In Memoriam

Sister **Brenda Duncombe** (Mary de Sales), Daughter of Mary and Joseph died on February 8, 2013 in the 66th year of her religious profession, at the age of 98 years. Brenda was a long time member of the legendary "Monday Group" with Carolyn Gratton, at Carolyn's Apartment. In Toronto, she used to live with Lucia Xavier da Silveira, from Brazil.

Lucia said the memory she will always treasure of her was her response to someone who asked whether or not she wished to be resuscitated should she collapse. Brenda's reply was an emphatic, "Yes, of course: I love life."

2014: Thirtieth Anniversary of Contemplative Outreach

2014 will mark the Thirtieth Anniversary of Contemplative Outreach. The Annual International Conference will be held in Miami, Florida, from September 25 to September 28, 2014 (Thursday to Sunday). It's still too soon to register. However, if you would like to attend, please advise Contemplative Outreach Ontario. We could go as a Canadian delegation.

Do you remember that the International Conference for the Twentieth Anniversary was in Toronto in 2004 and Father Keating was present?