



CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH ONTARIO

SILENCE SOLITUDE SOLIDARITY SERVICE

OUR NEWSLETTER



FALL-WINTER 2014 - N°3

A word from the Editor

Happy Advent, this wonderful period of waiting! Someone is coming and we have to be ready. To be watchful. I think we live in a time when it is recommended that we all be watchful.

This is our third issue under the new format, and I keep receiving emails and phone calls saying how eager you are to receive this newsletter so that you can keep up with what's going on in Ontario at Contemplative Outreach. Thank you so much for your support. But don't forget that it is OUR NEWSLETTER and I need your ideas and contributions.

What has happened since the previous issue?

At the end of September 2014, I attended the American National Conference in Miami Beach, Florida, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Contemplative Outreach. Three Canadians (two from Saskatoon and yours truly) were among the nearly 200 participants. Such an experience is always enriching, and sharing with other Centering Prayer practitioners is highly rewarding. Any occasion for sharing with our peers is worth living. Links were created, new ideas seeded. (My report was published in the latest National Newsletter, which was issued recently. Ask your facilitator to obtain a copy for you if you would like.)

Speaking of new ideas, we're planning a gathering in the Spring of 2016 (date and place still to be set) to celebrate 20 years of Contemplative Outreach in Ontario.

Indeed, it's worth celebrating the work of Carolyn Gratton because, without her, there would have been no seeds sown. Stay tuned.

Two items on the housekeeping front: 1. Our website is still in limbo and we do need a computer-savvy person to help us to revive and update it. I would ask that anyone interested with the requisite skills please contact me. 2. From now on, we'll not insert pictures so the newsletter will not be too big; some of our members in rural Ontario have occasionally had trouble receiving it. Sorry about that.

Last but not least, in this season, it is easy to get caught up in a whirlwind of activities – even shopping, perhaps! – as we prepare for Christmas and the end-of-year celebrations. Let's not forget that Christ comes in the silence of our hearts. As Father Keating puts it: God's first language is silence. How true! It is urgent for us to be silent.

May you have a merry and peaceful Christmas and a wonderful New Year!

Marie-Noëlle Maillard
logos302@sympatico.ca

Theological Principles

The Divine presence affirms our basic core of goodness made in the image of God. (Principle 5)

The Divine action is the process of transformation in Christ, which inspires and deepens our consent. (Principle 6)

The contemplative dimension of the Gospel manifests as an ever-deepening union with Christ and the practical caring for others that flows from this relationship. It reveals the deeper meaning of Christ's life and teaching. (Principle 7)

IN THIS ISSUE

Upcoming Event

Regional Spotlights: Southwestern, Central, Eastern

Thomas Keating on Powerlessness

New Publications / Nouveautés

Upcoming Event

Double Track Servant Leadership Formation Conference

Sunday, July 26-Saturday, August 1, 2015

Marianist Center, Eureka, MO (just southwest of St. Louis)

* Chapter Servant Leader Formation – Learn the nuts and bolts of chapter leadership

* Centering Prayer Group Facilitator Formation – Learn the nuts and bolts of facilitating a Centering Prayer Group

Registration information will be available early in 2015. For further information, contact Susan Komis:
SusanKomis@coutreach.org

Regional Spotlights

SOUTHWESTERN

Greetings from beautiful Southwestern Ontario where Centering Prayer is vibrant and growing, as is evident from some of our activities over the past few months.

Six of our members attended the Centering Prayer Intensive / Post Intensive retreat held in Kalamazoo, MI, in August. They enjoyed the retreat experience, the facility and setting very much.

We sent one person, Debbie Wilson-Safa, to a Servant Leadership Retreat (Facilitators' Session Part 1) in St. Louis, MO. in July. Part 2 will be held this summer. Debbie is gradually settling into her new role as Facilitator Trainer with sessions beginning in January 2015. (Editor's Note: see Upcoming Event on the left)

An Introductory Workshop was held at the Church of the Atonement on September 20, 2014. It was very well attended. The Follow-up sessions are ongoing as this is being written. Several of the attendees will join existing groups in their areas, and there will be 1 or 2 new groups, we expect.

An Advent Reflection/Enrichment Day was scheduled for November 29. It is usually well attended and we look forward to it each year.

Last, but not least, we are happy to report that Rev. Kevin Steeper from London and Rev. Debbie Wilson-Safa from Leamington have joined Marlene Kelly-Kolotylo, Father Joe Quinn, CSB, Sister Therese Ladouceur, SNJM, and Jeannie Garinger as members of the Service Team. We had our first meeting on October 20 and look forward to our working together in our service to Contemplative Outreach in Southwestern Ontario.

Father Joe Quinn
Member of the Service Team

Upcoming Events

Lenten Reflection Day: Saturday, February 21, 2015 at Church of the Ascension, 1385 University Avenue West, Windsor.

World Day of Prayer: March 21, 2015 at Church of the Ascension, as above.

Weekend Centering Prayer Retreat at Oxley: May 1-3, 2015 at Holy Family Retreat Center, Oxley.

The events provide an opportunity for members from all the groups to come together for a day of prayer. They are usually very well attended and a truly grace-filled time of prayer, support and sharing.

CENTRAL

The Central Ontario region continues to be jointly coordinated by Peter Donovan, Johnson Ling and Marie-Noëlle Maillard.

Since the last Newsletter, we had the Annual Summer Potluck Dinner, in August attended by about twenty people. Always nice to see those we won't see otherwise. The tradition will continue next summer.

We also had our Facilitators' Day in September at Freda Perry's house as usual. See right column the report by Marg Baker.

On 15 November there was, for the first time, a Day of Ecumenical Prayer, entitled "Voices of Silence" at St. John's Anglican Church, York Mills, Toronto. Contemplative Fire, Sisters of St. John the Divine and Central Ontario Contemplative Outreach, sponsored the event. Peter Donovan and Peter Catt represented the Central region. Some fifty attendees from the GTA prayed together and participated in prayer practices of different traditions. Representative of the sponsoring organizations made presentations as well as the Toronto coordinator of WCCM (World Community for Christian Meditation) who presented the Christian

Meditation practice. All agreed to try to hold another such day in the spring of 2015.

Peter Donovan

At the end of July 2014, Susan Komis directed the retreat "*Deepening the Contemplative Dimension of Servant Leadership*" at the Marianist Center in Eureka, Missouri (just southwest of St. Louis). Two Canadians attended that retreat: Debbie Wilson-Safa, from Southwestern Ontario (see page 3), and Mary Catherine Doyle, from Central Ontario. Both of them agreed, "It was just a wonderful time." Debbie told me "it worked the way it was supposed to. We learned things about facilitating a group, but it was very much so about our own personal spiritual journey. For me, it was an emotional, grace-filled, faith-filled experience in which personal growth took place. I came away with a clearer vision and focus of what my ministry is. One of the other things I found is that, for the most part, the participants came from different religious background which mirrors the situation within the group I facilitate." Mary Catherine said: "I was rich, rich, rich, rich." (I am just quoting her.) There is a similar retreat at the end of July 2015. See page 2 for details.

Marie-Noëlle Maillard

So why did I attend Facilitators' Day?

After all, the sun is out, it's a beautiful day and I can think of five other things I could do. I felt disjointed from any contemplative group and the group at the Cathedral has ceased to exist. Yet, for me, contemplative prayer has been a life changing experience and I wanted to stay connected. As Luisa said: "I feel like socializing." Off I go.

Well, one of my favourite descriptions of God's providence is, the "God of Surprises". This day, He did not disappoint. Johnson and Marilyn had put together a well pondered, organized, and meaningful agenda. One of the items was

a CD by Cynthia Bourgeault entitled *Encountering the Wisdom of Jesus*. We listened. She spoke of many things but focused on *Metanoia*, and *Kenosis* (repenting but with a view to transformation). She referred to St. Paul's radical *kenosis* (self-emptying) and the mind of Christ where He emptied himself, becoming "one of us;" this being counter culture as we tend to think of God as 'up' and not descending along with constant messages to acquire, climb the corporate ladder, etc. Yet, as we are led also by Thomas Keating, it is in the self-emptying, in the silence we find God (and ourselves). We have a wonderful vehicle to help us in this case – contemplative prayer.

Then came a quote from Rumi where I especially listened. Love is recklessness, not reason. Reason seeks a profit. Love comes on strong, consuming herself unabashed... She risks everything and asks for nothing.

Five years ago, during morning reflection, I read the words "what do you cling to." I was stopped in my tracks and looked around at a house full of "stuff," a lifestyle / an image in the community that defined who I was. God was saying: Can you let go of everything and rely on only me? Items were sold but then we were introduced to a family fleeing Iraq who had nothing. All household items went to them and it felt "right." But I couldn't figure out why it felt comfortable until the Facilitators' Day and listening to the CD. Cynthia goes on to describe other examples of "pointless extravagance" – the woman with expensive oil in the alabaster jar, the boundless generosity of the father with the prodigal son, the aesthetic path of John the Baptist, Jesus on the Cross "into your hands I commend my spirit."

It was all making sense now. It wasn't about me (reason seeks profit). I was a conduit for God's extravagant love and generosity (love risks everything and asks for nothing). Thank you, Facilitators' Day. Thank you Johnson and Marilyn for your zeal in continuing the contemplative

group. It was this "time away" which gave me cause to reflect and put a title to a profound experience that moved me five years ago.
Marg Baker

Upcoming Events

Retreats at Bethany Retreat Center Frenchville, Pennsylvania, USA

Again this year, as COCO will not host any retreats in the foreseeable future, do not hesitate to visit the Bethany Retreat Center website at www.bethanyretreatcenter.org. It provides details of the following upcoming contemplative prayer retreats at its location.

*Formation for Contemplative Outreach Service, including Presenters' Training, January 25-30, 2015 (Sunday to Friday)

The prerequisites for this training include "An Introduction to Contemplative Prayer" and an established Contemplative Prayer practice - minimum of daily two twenty-minute periods - for three years.

Arrival: 5:00 p.m. and Supper at 6:00 p.m.
Departure: 11:00 a.m. on Friday
Offering: \$425 + \$25 for retreat binder & DVD
Deposit: \$150, non-refundable

* Three 8-Day Intensive Contemplative Prayer Retreats

March 6-14, 2015 (Friday to Saturday), May 1-9, 2015 (Friday to Saturday), and June 14-21, 2015 (Sunday to Sunday), with Sr. Therese Dush, Sr. Ruth Ann Madera and Fr. Philip Billotte

These three in-depth retreats are for those who have an experience in Centering Prayer who wish to enter into a more profound level of spiritual practice.

Arrival: 5:00 p.m. and Supper at 6:00 p.m.
\$375 for shared room
\$425 for private room (limited space)
Deposit: \$150, non-refundable

***Holy Week Triduum, April 2-5, 2015.** See Bethany website for details.

Please make arrangements for any retreat at Bethany Retreat Center as directed by their website. A car-pooling could be organized if several people decide to go to the same retreat. Peter Donovan will act as an information point for possible car-pooling. Please contact him by email (peterdonovan@rogers.com) if you are looking for a ride or if you can provide a car lift. Bethany is within driving distance of Toronto (about five hours).

United-in-Prayer Day, 21 March 2015

After such a successful event in March 2014, the region will hold another United-in-Prayer Day on 21 March 2015. Details will follow closer to the time. Please mark your calendars now!

EASTERN

Contemplative Outreach Eastern Ontario is led by a small volunteer steering committee dedicated to making available the contemplative Christian heritage.

We host an annual Lenten Silent Retreat. In 2015, this retreat will be with the Reverend Tom Ward on The Indwelling Trinity, from February 26 to March 1, 2015. The Galilee Centre, Arnprior, ON. Cost: \$385 (meals and accommodation). Non-refundable deposit of \$185 required by January 1, 2015. Contact: Christine Jannasch at jannasch@videotron.ca or 819-684-3480.

The theme for 2014-2015 is Pilgrim's Way. It's a series of four enrichment days exploring the Christian contemplative journey: *Back to the Heart – Centering Prayer*; for those new to Centering Prayer and for the Seasoned – method or relationship? (October 18, 2014). *May Christ Find a Dwelling Place – Lectio Divina*; The practice of Lectio Divina leads us more deeply into

the longing of Advent (December 6, 2014). *Presence – Welcoming Prayer*; "The issues are in the tissues" – this core practice of Centering Prayer is often called "consent on the go." Return and Attend to the present moment, divine moment (January 24, 2015). And *Now and Not Yet – Living in the Gap*; cultivating an open heart in a broken world (April 25, 2015).

Our website (www.coeasternontario.org) is under construction.

Gregor Sneddon
Coordinator

Thomas Keating on Powerlessness

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9)

Powerlessness is our greatest treasure. Don't try to get rid of it. Everything in us wants to get rid of it. "Grace is sufficient for you," but not something you can understand. To be in too big a hurry to get over our difficulties is a mistake because we don't know how valuable they are from God's perspective. Without them we might never be transformed as deeply and as thoroughly. If everything else fails, the dying process is the place where we will have no choice but to go through the transformation process because everything is in fact taken away.

The spiritual journey is the commitment to allow everything we possess to be taken away *before* the dying process begins. This makes us of enormous value to ourselves and to others because we have anticipated death, and death is not the end but the beginning of the fullness of transformation. If we were born, we've already been through a facsimile of death and our body is well prepared for the final translation, or transition as some prefer to call it. We can't see God without going through death because the intensity of his

naked presence would burn us up and turn us into a grease spot.

Jesus Christ in his lifetime had to hide the dignity and power of his divine nature. A constant miracle was required to hide the enormous radiance and power of his inner nature. The one time it appears is at the Transfiguration when his face shone and his clothes became whiter than snow. That was the only occasion the glory of his divine nature was allowed to come through.

Christ is choosing the lowest place all the time, the very lowest place. Why? Because that is what God does. God is not attached to being God. He doesn't care about praise or thanksgiving. What he is interested in is our consent to his love of us.

Saint Paul was transformed by God's communication of Godself to him, and so he writes: "*I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses*" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). That is the disposition of transformation.

Transformation is not about great spiritual experience but coming to terms with our own human weakness as we experience it. Saint Paul then lists his other difficulties, "*insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.*" When we understand that, we don't need any more education.

When we feel that we're suspended on top of nothing and are not grounded anywhere; when we're confused, have no place to go, and feel God is far away; that we are separated from God, or even that we are alienated from God, we have been given the dispositions that arise in the dark nights through God's immense love. These are the ways that our human nature is conditioned little by little and at a pace that is appropriate for each one's needs, vocation, personality, and limitations. It is so well thought out that we can't even put

it in a category: it's the most expert and profound form of psychotherapy.

God knows us through and through and still loves us infinitely. Although we are being sustained on the physiological level, biophysics tells us that the body itself has to evolve in certain ways to sustain intelligence, and then to sustain divine communications. We are not ready to receive the enormous reality of God without preparation in which all the elements of our human nature collaborate. God is working with the obstacles in us with extraordinary gentleness, tenderness, firmness, and patience. If you want to know yourself, talk to God. He knows.

Finally, powerlessness is the greatest power there is because it enables one to simply be more and more a channel of God's power and love.

Thomas Keating, *Reflections on the Unknowable* (Lantern Books, New York, 2014) pp. 156-157-158)



Wherever you are in Ontario, if you want to share something with other members of COO, such as a reading or a book, or contribute to Our Newsletter in any way, please contact the editor. Many thanks. Merci beaucoup.

This newsletter is being sent to all facilitators. Facilitators, please forward this newsletter, in turn, to all members of your groups. Group members, please feel free to forward this newsletter to interested friends. If for any reason you wish to receive future newsletters directly, please contact the editor. Conversely, if you don't want to receive them anymore, please advise the editor.