



Contemplative
Outreach

Presenter Formation Handbook Part 2 2025

Formerly titled
**Additional Resources for Hosting the
Centering Prayer Introductory Program**





Presenter Formation Handbook Part 2 - 2021

Upon completion of the Presenters Formation for Centering Prayer, your Coordinator or Contact Person will provide additional reading materials for you to review while you are completing your Presenter-in-Training period.

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Part A: Conferences – Development of Essentials

For each conference there are additional details you may want to use for your own information, or add as optional details to the essentials, or used in response to questions, or in continuing sessions where applicable. As you become more comfortable and experienced with the essentials, you may want to consider these additional insights.

Logo Description

NOTE TO PRESENTERS: May be used in answer to questions as needed.

The Contemplative Outreach logo is taken from the monogram of Job's Redeemer which is the symbol of patient waiting. It depicts the alpha and omega, a symbol of God, the beginning and the end; a cross as the symbol of our salvation; flowers, a symbol of the abundance of life and the resurrection; and a circle, a sign of ongoing process. This symbol has been seen in several different locations: on an ancient church in the land of Uz – the residence of Job; in the excavations of Old Jerusalem near the original stairs of the Temple; at the Southern Wall of the Old City near the Huldah Gates; and in a church in Galilee.



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

First page of the slides may be explained in this way: “We begin our day with this simple and ancient invitation given to us by God. It is still very much alive today. It is the same invitation you may have received and perhaps is the reason you are here: to learn a simple method – how to ‘be still and know...God.’ ”

NOTE TO PRESENTERS: All scripture quotes are from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) unless referenced otherwise, from the NAB (New American Bible – St. Joseph Edition) if noted.

CONFERENCE ONE—DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESSENTIALS

NOTE TO PRESENTERS: It is highly recommended to read all the details of the “Development of the Essentials” for a better grasp on the Essentials.

Contemplative Prayer Is

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition, contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. Contemplative prayer is the opening of mind and heart—our whole being—to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing—closer than consciousness itself.

Centering Prayer and the Wisdom Sayings of Jesus

“...When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:6)

The ‘inner room’ is always accessible because it is within us.

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to receive this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier times in an updated form. Centering Prayer was developed by Frs. William Meninger, Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating in contemporary times. Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; rather it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. It is at the same time a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. This method of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with him.

Prayer is a Relationship...

Show how prayer mirrors our relationship with Christ.

- **Vocal Prayer** opens us to the acquaintance level, keeping us in frequent contact with Christ. Examples: formal prayer, going to church, Sunday school, etc.
- **Reflective Prayer** opens us to the friendliness level where we allow God to speak to us and impact our lives. Examples: informal conversation with Christ, regular periods of prayer, spiritual reading, listening to scripture and experiencing God in nature.
- **Responsive Prayer** opens us to the friendship level as our hearts, feelings and emotions enter into our prayer. Examples: Self-disclosure, spontaneous prayer, growth of faith, trust and love, sense of wonder.
- **Contemplative Prayer**, a pure gift, opens us to the intimacy of God’s presence beyond thoughts, words and concepts. The practice of Centering Prayer cultivates our deepening relationship with God. Centering Prayer is a way of deepening our friendship with God leading, if we consent, to intimacy where a sense of belonging to God develops. Example: A sense of God’s continuous presence, experience of oneness with God, communing with God in silence, like an infant lying on its mother’s breast (cf. Psalm 131).

Explain from your own experience how the levels of relationship (acquaintanceship, friendliness, friendship and intimacy) can be applied to our relationship with another person and with Christ. The relationship with Christ is expressed at each level of prayer listed in the second column of the chart.

What Is Prayer?

In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, the word for prayer is “shela.” It means “to open oneself,” “to listen to” or “to open oneself to the Divine Presence.” Prayer in that context was not necessarily saying words; “shela” is closer to what we call contemplation. (“Shela” is pronounced sha-lu.)*

* *The Hidden Gospel: Decoding the Spiritual Message of Aramaic Jesus; Healing Breath*, by Neil Douglas-Klotz.

Books and Materials

The following books and materials are by Thomas Keating:

- > *The Better Part*, pages 76–79
- > *Open Mind, Open Heart*
- > *Intimacy with God*
- > *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, Chapter 1, “The Divine Indwelling”
- > “Spiritual Journey Series” Video 1, “Prayer as Relationship”
- > “Spiritual Journey Series” Transcripts, Part 1, pages 11-21 (top)

Presentation Suggestions

Sometime during this conference, it might be helpful to ask people how they view God. The Presenter could use a role-based question, such as “Is God a judge, a policeman?”

The Presenter could also ask the people to place their relationship with God in one of the stages of the Growth in the Relationship Chart.

The Christian Contemplative Tradition

The Christian contemplative tradition was summed up by St. Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century. He described contemplation as “the deep knowledge of God that is impregnated with love.” For Gregory, contemplation was both the fruit of reflecting on the word of God in scripture and the precious gift of God. He called this “resting in God.”

In this “resting” the mind and heart are not so much seeking God as beginning to experience, “to taste,” what they have been seeking. This state is not the suspension of all activity, but the reduction of many acts and reflections to a simple movement of consenting to God’s presence and action within. For the first sixteen hundred years of Christianity, contemplation was the goal of Christian prayer.

Refer to the article on “The Christian Contemplative Tradition” in the document *Resource Information for Presenters-in-Training*.

Quotations from the spiritual masters of the tradition: John Cassian (360-435) wrote about the contemplative tradition. He chose to write about the insights of a desert father, Abba Isaac. In Conference 9 of the *Conferences* of Cassian* Abba Isaac is quoted as saying:

“We need to be especially careful to follow the gospel precept which instructs us to go into our inner room and shut the door so that we may pray to our Father (Matthew 6:6) and this is how we can do it.

We pray in our inner room whenever we withdraw our hearts completely from the tumult and noise of our thoughts and our worries, and when secretly and intimately we offer our prayers to the Lord.

We pray with the door shut when without opening our mouths and in perfect silence, we offer our petitions to the One who pays no attention to words, but looks hard at our hearts.”

* John Cassian, *Conferences*, translated by Colm Luibheid, *Classics of Christian Spirituality*, Paulist Press, 1985. This method of “pure prayer” expressed in Cassian’s Conference No. 9 is further developed in later traditions, especially in *The Cloud of Unknowing* by the anonymous fourteenth-century author, as well as by St. John of the Cross in the sixteenth century (cf. “The Living Flame of Love,” stanza iii, 26-59). The Centering Prayer method is a synthesis of these and other sources drawn from the Christian contemplative tradition.

In Aramaic, the word for reward is “nepreok” and it means “to blossom” or “to flourish.”

CONFERENCE TWO—DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESSENTIALS

Practical points to be made in the course of the day or **in response to questions**:

- Preparation for the Centering Prayer period is the transitional space between our external preoccupation in ordinary life and our period of Centering Prayer.
 - Pick a time when you are most alert.
 - Find a quiet place where you will not normally be interrupted.
 - A short scripture reading and/or relaxation exercise help to dispose the mind for prayer.
 - It also establishes us in the worldwide community of prayer.
- By “sitting comfortably” we mean relatively comfortable, so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer. Our interior disposition during this prayer is one of alert receptivity.
- Should we fall asleep, upon awakening we continue the prayer.
- Physical symptoms:
 - We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of our body or a generalized restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
 - We may notice heaviness or lightness in the extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
 - We pay no attention and return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
- The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer, provided it does not have an audible tick or a loud sound when going off.
 - One may also have a clock or watch nearby and take a glance at it when one senses the end is getting close.
 - One may use a CD of quieting music that tapers off to silence after two or three minutes and comes on again softly after twenty minutes. (CDs are available from the CO website.)
- By returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.

Description of Sacred Glance and Sacred Breath

NOTE: The sacred glance or sacred breath may be introduced during the second period of Centering Prayer as an alternative to the sacred word.

A simple inward glance towards the Divine Presence or noticing one’s breath may be more suitable for some persons than the sacred word.

A simple inward glance is a turning of the will toward the Divine Presence within (an undifferentiated image).

Noticing the breath implies the recognition of our breath as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We do not follow the breath physiologically but simply notice it.

The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.

What Centering Prayer Is and What It Is Not

It is not a technique, but a way of cultivating a relationship with God.

It is not a relaxation exercise, but it may be refreshing.

It is not a form of self-hypnosis, but a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.

It is not a charismatic gift, but a path of transformation.

It is not a para-psychological experience, but an exercise of faith, hope, and selfless love.

It is not limited to the “felt presence” of God, but is rather a deepening of faith in God’s abiding presence.

It is not reflective or spontaneous prayer, but simply resting in God.

CONFERENCE THREE – DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESSENTIALS

Kinds of Thoughts

During the Centering Prayer period various kinds of thoughts may arise (cf. *Open Mind, Open Heart, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, chapters 4-7, 9; chapter 7, “The Unloading of the Unconscious,” page 95, chapter 9 “Summary of Thoughts,” pages 122-126.)

Centering Prayer is a Method not a “Technique”

NOTE TO PRESENTERS: Simply state what is listed on the slide. An example is not necessary here.

The meaning of “technique” is the ability to apply procedures or to follow rules so as to expect a desired result. Centering Prayer is not considered a technique because there is no direct cause and effect relationship. We are developing a relationship of faith and trust, not based on a specific goal or expectation.

In Summary

If you feel comfortable with the marriage metaphor explained in Conference Two, you may return to it again here.

- Intention = Engagement
- Consent = The “I do” in marriage
- Surrender = Day-to-day living out of the marriage experience

When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word without resisting, retaining or reacting emotionally to them.

Guideline 3

Additional references for explaining dealing with thoughts

Taste of Silence, by Carl J. Arico, page 157.

Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit, by Thomas Keating, page 35.

Thoughts

Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.

Thoughts are inevitable because they are unavoidable...they happen. They are integral because they are a part of the process in Centering Prayer, of opening to God. They are normal because they happen to everybody during the Centering Prayer period.

It is also possible to have no thoughts (cf. *Open Mind, Open Heart, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, chapter 4-7, 9). Quote Thomas Keating from the “Spiritual Journey Series: “...it may happen at some point in our period of Centering Prayer, we suddenly realize that for a few moments we haven’t been thinking of anything...there’s been a kind of ‘gap’ in our attention and we know we had no thoughts.” “Spiritual Journey Series,” Video #5; “Spiritual Journey Series” Transcripts, Part 1, page 63. *Open Mind, Open Heart, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*, pages 68-70.

In Summary

Consent to God’s presence and action is the heart and soul of Centering Prayer.

- Intention is a choice of the will.
- Consent is an act of the will.
- Consent presupposes intention.

Discipline in Centering Prayer is indicated by the promptness with which you return to the sacred word when engaged with your thoughts.

NOTE TO PRESENTERS: The River may be used as a metaphor of human consciousness. (This metaphor is used in the: *Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice*, session #5.)

CONFERENCE FOUR – DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESSENTIALS

“The reign of God is close at hand.” (Luke 21:31)

– not distant or absent –

“It is within you and among you.” (Luke 17:21)

Gifts of Centering Prayer

“The Fruits of the Spirit are indications of God’s presence at work in us at varying degrees and forms. Through the Fruits, the Spirit is becoming a reality in our lives.” *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit* by Thomas Keating

*“...The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”
(Galatians 5:22)*

There is no direct cause and effect relationship in Centering Prayer, but as our relationship with God deepens through our fidelity to the Centering Prayer practice, significant transformation will be noticed in our lives.

Refer to *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*, Chapter 2, by Thomas Keating.

- **Love** is a participation in God’s unconditional love.
- **Joy** is an abiding sense of well-being based on the experience of a conscious relationship with God.
- **Peace** is the pervasive sense of contentment that comes from being rooted in God while being more and more aware of one’s nothingness.
- **Patience** (long-suffering) is certitude in God’s unwavering fidelity to God’s promises.
- **Kindness** (meekness) is freedom from the energy of hostility, hatred, or outbursts of anger.
- **Goodness** is the affirmation of creation as good, together with a sense of oneness with the universe and with everything created.
- **Faithfulness** is the daily offering of ourselves and all our actions to God and showing compassion for others, especially in service of their concrete needs.
- **Gentleness** is a participation in God’s way of doing things that is at once gentle and firm, sustaining all creation with its enormous diversity yet without effort.
- **Self-control** as a fruit of the Spirit is not the domination of our will over our emotions, but is the spontaneous fruit of growing in our relationship with God.

Contemplative Values

As we mature in our Centering Prayer practice, our ability to live in the present moment develops and grows.

NOTE TO PRESENTERS: As your relationship with God has deepened through a faithful practice of Centering Prayer, give an example of how one of these contemplative values of silence, solitude, solidarity, and service is experienced in the activities of your daily life.

Silence, solitude, solidarity and service are expressed in the *Rule of St. Benedict* (sixth century).

How to give a short personal example to illustrate Centering Prayer in your daily life.

Points to remember:

- In selecting an example, please have it come from your own experience or an experience of others.
- Each example should be stated briefly and clearly: it is not a witnessing talk but rather a simple statement in faith.
- The example should support the statement that “the principle gifts of Centering Prayer” are experienced in daily life, not in the Centering Prayer period itself.
- For further study and reference for living in the present moment see *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean Pierre de Caussade.



Part B

download the original of this file from the
CO website - Resource>Volunteer Resources

Guidelines for Hosting a Centering Prayer Introductory Program

Thank you for your interest in hosting a Centering Prayer Introductory Program. This document describes how to organize a Centering Prayer Introductory Program which includes presentation of a *Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop* and follow up *Continuing Sessions*. If you decide to host the program, your local Contemplative Outreach chapter will work with you to meet the needs of your group.

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program: An Overview

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program includes two parts:

- 1) An Introductory Workshop (4-5 hours) which is presented by one or more experienced and commissioned presenter(s) from a local Contemplative Outreach chapter and
- 2) A series of four to six 90-minute Continuing Sessions which include a period of Centering Prayer, a video, and discussion.

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program is described in a brochure published by Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. To download a black and white copy of the brochure, click on this link: [Centering Prayer Introduction Brochure](#). Color copies of the brochure may be purchased at this website: [Color Brochure Order Page](#).

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure includes the following:

Centering Prayer is a receptive method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, in which we experience God's presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than consciousness itself. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship.

The Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop familiarizes participants with the method of Centering Prayer and its conceptual background and offers two opportunities to experience the prayer. The workshop consists of four presentations.

1. Prayer as Relationship
2. The Method of Centering Prayer
3. Thoughts and the Use of the Sacred Word
4. Deepening our Relationship with God

Following the Introductory Workshop, Continuing Sessions are offered to workshop participants to provide support during the time when participants are establishing their Centering Prayer practice. Details about the Continuing Sessions will be offered by the workshop presenter.

At the conclusion of the Continuing Sessions, participants are encouraged to start a new group or join an existing one. Centering Prayer groups usually meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis and can provide valuable support to those committed to a daily practice of Centering Prayer.

Guidelines for Hosting an Introductory Program for Your Organization

The following guidelines include ideas from many Contemplative Outreach chapters. They are intended as **suggestions** you might want to consider as you plan a Centering Prayer Introductory Program for your church or other organization. You may adapt these guidelines as needed.

Before You Begin

- Contact the leadership of your church or organization to introduce the Centering Prayer Introductory Program and to express your interest in hosting the program for your community.
- *The Centering Prayer Introductory Program* brochure and these guidelines are helpful to use as a guide to the planning process.

Follow these steps below for organizing all aspects of the program including scheduling, room set-up/hospitality/volunteers, registration and finance, and promotion/publicity.

Four Steps to Hosting the Workshop and Continuing Sessions

1.	<p><u>Scheduling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the local chapter coordinator to select the dates for the Introductory Workshop and the Continuing Sessions. • <u>Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop</u> – Typically, the workshop is scheduled for four to five hours on a Saturday. This includes 30 minutes for registration and breaks. Alternative schedules, such as including lunch or offering the workshop on four evenings, can be arranged. • <u>Continuing Sessions</u> –The recommended format is four to six weekly sessions, with each session being 90 minutes in length. Starting these sessions one week after the workshop is recommended. If the weekly sessions are not feasible, half-day or full-day sessions or retreats may be offered. • A schedule can be adapted to meet your individual needs.
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2.	<p><u>Room Set-up, Hospitality & Volunteers</u></p> <p><u>Room Set-Up</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a meeting space conducive to silence. • Create a prayer circle separated from the presentation space if possible. Create ambience in the center of a circle of chairs by placing a small table with a cloth, candle, Bible, etc. • Check with the presenter regarding equipment needs: podium, television, DVD player, etc. <p><u>Hospitality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name tags, coffee, tea, water, juice and snacks could be available when participants arrive. • Planning for lunch is optional. If the workshop extends into the afternoon, participants may be invited to bring a lunch or it could be provided by the hosting organization. <p><u>Volunteers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers from the host community may be needed for the following tasks: preparing and serving refreshments, setting up chairs and tables, welcoming participants, registration, and clean up following the workshop.
3.	<p><u>Registration and Financial Considerations</u></p> <p><u>Registration</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile a registration list with full name, phone number, e-mail address, and payment amount, along with the number of scholarships provided. Make note of cash and checks. • Keep the local Contemplative Outreach contact person informed of the registrations. • Provide final copies of the registration list for the local Contemplative Outreach contact person and the lead organizer(s) of your program. <p><u>Financial Considerations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A registration fee is suggested for attendance to the program and is determined by the local hosting organization along with consultation with the local chapter. • If possible, plan for a contribution to the local chapter and/or Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. • Contemplative Outreach relies on contributions to help offset administration costs as well as supporting our outreaches and to offer scholarships for many of our programs. • Scholarships to cover the registration fee may be provided by your organization or the local chapter, as available. • The registration fees collected should cover expenses, including: printing, mailing, cost of facility, presenter travel and stipend, refreshments, and lunch (if provided). • Many chapters include the book, <i>Open Mind, Open Heart</i> (the basic text on Centering Prayer) by Thomas Keating.

4.	<p><u>Promotion</u></p> <p>Reaching out to your members and beyond is a vital aspect of getting people to attend your Centering Prayer Introductory Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin advertising the Centering Prayer Introductory Program 6-12 weeks in advance. It is recommended to remind the community several times before the event. • Distribute the Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure to promote the program. This brochure succinctly describes Contemplative Outreach, Centering Prayer, the content of the Introductory Workshop, and options for the Continuing Sessions. • In all advertisements, be sure to include: date, time, location, cost, registration information, and a contact name with e-mail address and phone number for those persons who may have a question about the content of the program or about Centering Prayer. • Use as many resources as possible to advertise within your church or organization (for example, bulletin, bulletin insert, school/church newsletter, bulletin boards, church council meetings, adult education meetings, and webpages). • Contact neighboring churches and ask if they are willing to include the announcement of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program in their Sunday bulletins. • Additional resources for publicity include: newspapers (diocesan or other regional Christian newspapers), free section in community newspapers, library and church bulletin boards, local chapter newsletters, etc. • Below are two examples of bulletin or newsletter announcements that may be adapted by you and used for publicity.
<p><u>Centering Prayer Introductory Program</u></p> <p>Contemplative prayer is God’s personal and unique gift to us and has been a part of our Christian heritage for centuries. If we are open to the gift of contemplation it may profoundly affect our daily life. The Centering Prayer Introductory Program serves to explain the gift of contemplative prayer and deepening of our relationship with God. The method of Centering Prayer will be presented and time will be allowed for practice of the prayer. Discover the meaning of Psalm 46: “Be still and know that I am God.”</p> <p>The program will be presented on (DATE) from (TIME) in the (LOCATION). The registration fee is (\$XX). The program will be presented by experienced practitioners of Centering Prayer who are commissioned to present the program by Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. (www.contemplativeoutreach.org).</p> <p>For more information or to sign up, please contact (NAME/PHONE/EMAIL).</p>	<p><u>Centering Prayer Introductory Program Planned for (DATE)</u></p> <p>Do you seek the still, quiet voice of God? The Centering Prayer Introductory Program will help us to understand the Indwelling Presence of God within each of us and our intimate relationship with that Presence. The method of Centering Prayer will be presented. We will explore the benefits of Centering Prayer in ordinary life and experience two periods of Centering Prayer practice. All are welcome to attend!</p> <p>The program will be presented on (DATE) from (TIME) in the (LOCATION). A donation of (\$XX) per person is requested. The program will be presented by experienced practitioners of Centering Prayer who are commissioned to present the program by Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. (www.contemplativeoutreach.org).</p> <p>For more information or to sign up, please call or e-mail (NAME/PHONE/EMAIL).</p>

For further information about hosting a Centering Prayer Introductory Program, contact your local Contemplative Outreach Coordinator. To find your local coordinator, search under “Community” at <http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/> or call 973-838-3384.

SUGGESTED PREPARATION FOR THE CONTINUING SESSIONS

It is helpful to prepare for the session by previewing the DVD or book to be used in the session and to review some information from the Presenter Formation Handbook, such as,

- Method of Centering Prayer brochure
- Development of Essentials for each conference (Part A)
- Glossary of Terms (Part 3 in *Resource Information for Presenter-in-Training*)
- Scriptures that Allude to Contemplative Prayer (Part 3 in *Resource Information for Presenter-in-Training*)
- The Christian Contemplative Tradition by Thomas Keating (Part 1 in *Resource Information for Presenter-in-Training*)
- CO Vision & Theological Principles (Section 1 of the **Presenter Formation Handbook Part 1 - 2021** or The Vision of Centering Prayer brochure)

VESTIBULE TO CENTERING PRAYER PERIOD

It is helpful to model a variety of vestibule prayers to Centering Prayer in the Continuing Sessions, such as,

- One of the vestibule prayers (see page 52 in the Presenter Formation Handbook)
- A reading from [Psalms for Praying](#) by Nan Merrill available at the Contemplative Outreach Store.
- You may wish to use the Contemplative Outreach [Centering Prayer Mobile App](#) available at which offers many vestibule choices in addition to timing the prayer period.
- A reading from [The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living](#) is available at the Contemplative Outreach Store
- Relaxation exercise—guided process, body prayer or simple stretching.

Part C: Resources for the Continuing Sessions

A RESOURCE GUIDE: OPTIONS FOR THE CONTINUING SESSIONS OF THE CENTERING PRAYER INTRODUCTORY PROGRAM

Note: The original of this section can be found on the CO website in Resources>Volunteer Resources under Type: Centering Prayer Introductory Program.

Traditionally Contemplative Outreach Commissioned Presenters offered the Centering Prayer Introductory Program as four conferences on the basics of Centering Prayer, followed by six Continuing Sessions. Each of the continuing sessions featured a video presentation by Fr. Thomas Keating.

Over the past few years, CO chapters have explored new options for both the content and format of the Continuing Sessions. Chapters have expressed interest in having more updated teachings, making them available to more people and taking advantage of available resources and technology.

In response, the Centering Prayer Introductory Program Service Team conducted a survey of Chapter leadership regarding their use and implementation of the Continuing Sessions. Drawing on the survey responses, the team created this guide that provides complete details. The team also created *The Centering Prayer Introductory Program* brochure, which gives a brief description of the Centering Prayer Introductory Program, including the Workshop and the Continuing Sessions. Other resources are available for the Program.

Where to get it: [The Centering Prayer Introductory Program brochure](#)

Fr. Thomas Keating recommended offering the Continuing Sessions immediately following a Centering Prayer Introductory Program to help participants clarify and deepen their understanding of the content presented in the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. The Continuing Sessions provide support and conceptual background as well as the opportunity to share the initial Centering Prayer experience with others who have made a similar commitment. Ideally, Continuing Sessions are four to six weeks in length so that participants have time to become grounded in their personal Centering Prayer practice. Because individual needs and group circumstances vary, it is necessary to be flexible.

Chapter leaders and commissioned presenters know best the needs of participants in a particular locale. Following is a summary of suggested options for scheduling the Continuing Sessions and for materials that may be used.

Scheduling the Continuing Sessions

- Convene morning, afternoon or evening sessions
- Weekly meetings (four to six weeks is recommended)
- Half-day or full-day weekend meetings
- Retreats
- When it is not feasible to offer distinct Continuing Sessions, some chapters incorporate new people into an appropriate existing Centering Prayer group that is willing to go through the introductory material again. The prayer group members offer support and benefit from the review.

Materials

Suggestions for materials and resources are included here, which includes names of specific materials, electronic links, and tips for use.

- **Video Resources:** Each video program can be used in a series of weekly meetings, or if more convenient, in one or more weekend gatherings.
- **Books:** In situations where access to videos is not possible or desired, another option is using a book related to Centering Prayer.
- **Retreat Options:** Where distance and logistics make it difficult if not impossible for participants to meet weekly, the continuing sessions can be provided in a weekend retreat or in a one or two- day retreat.

Option 1: Video Resources

Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice

The six "Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice" (thirty-minute sessions) are designed to deepen the conceptual understanding of contemplation and Centering Prayer. The DVDs featuring Fr. Thomas Keating offer an explanation of Centering Prayer which serves to support an emerging daily practice of Centering Prayer. Transcripts of the DVDs are also available and include a study guide after each session.

Tips for Use: Refer to the chart on page 22 entitled "Hints for using Centering Prayer, Six Follow Up Sessions DVD's, and transcripts" which nicely outlines suggestions for session formats.

Where to get it: [Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice](#).

Centering Prayer: A Training Course for Opening to the Presence of God

Offered in partnership with Sounds True (a multi-media publishing company), this complete home study course includes six DVDs, two audio CDs, in-depth workbook and prayer cards. With more than nine hours of guidance and teachings from Fr. Thomas Keating, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler and Fr. Carl Arico.

This program provides formation in contemplative practice as well as a treasury of wisdom from Fr. Keating himself. This is a great resource for chapters because it may be used as an option for the Continuing Sessions.

Tips for Use: Show one of the talks listed below at each of the six Continuing Sessions. The first four suggested talks are presented by Fr. Carl Arico and follow, in the course, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler's four talks from the Introduction to Centering Prayer. All six talks reinforce and expand on ideas presented in the Centering Prayer Introductory Program.

NOTE: You may advise the participants that a total of 95 minutes of conferences have been selected from a course containing nine hours of conferences. At times, the speakers will be referring to earlier events/ conferences in the course, or using diagrams with markings from previous conferences. The messages they share are clear and meaningful used in this context.

- Session 2, #2 "The Rest of the Story" Fr. Carl Arico (15 minutes)
- Session 3, Part One, #2 "It All Begins by Saying 'Yes'" Fr. Carl Arico (17 minutes)
- Session 3, Part Two, #3 "Finding Freedom" Fr. Carl Arico (11 minutes)
- Session 5, #2 "The Two-Armed Embrace" Fr. Carl Arico (14 minutes)
- Session 6, #1 "The Basic Core of Goodness" Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler (24 minutes)
- Session 6, #2 "Consent is the Only Response" Fr. Carl Arico (14 minutes)

Where to get it: [Centering Prayer: A Training Course](#). When the DVD is shipped from the CO Bookstore, it includes the document *How Chapters Use the Centering Prayer DVD Program*. This document is also available separately from the Leadership Resources page and a copy can be found in this document on page 24. It outlines the many ways these materials have been used by chapters.

Invitation from God

A wonderful introduction to the subject of contemplation and a beautiful film. Danish film director, Marie Louise Lefèvre, interviewed Fr. Thomas Keating in 2006. The conversation between the director and Fr. Thomas and the beauty of the silent images serve to express what the contemplative life is about. The DVD includes a booklet with background information and a summary of each section which includes diagrams.

Tips for Use: The DVD contains a four-minute "Introduction" by Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, "Invitation from God" (29 minutes) and eight "Additional Conversations" which cover foundational topics in short, focused segments. The following format is a good option for groups that meet for a one-hour session. In six Continuing Sessions, a suggested format could be:

- "Invitation from God" play from the beginning through the first three parts which include "The False Self and the Monk," "Silence," and "Centering Prayer." (14 minutes)
- "Additional Conversations" section I - "The Five Levels of Consciousness" (8 minutes)
- "Additional Conversations" section III - "Centering Prayer" (14 minutes)
- "Additional Conversations" section IV - "Prayer in Secret" (8 minutes)
- "Invitation to God" starting with part four "Divine Therapy" (Select play for "Invitation from God" then fast-forward the DVD counter to 18:45 minutes and starting playing the section on "Divine Therapy."
 - o **Option A:** End viewing at 27:45 minutes after the part on "Divine Therapy". (9 minutes)
 - o **Option B:** End viewing at 32 minutes after the parts on "Divine Therapy" and "The Body of Christ". (14 minutes)
- "Additional Conversations" section VI - "The Spiral Staircase and the Pascal Mystery" (14 minutes)

Where to get it: [Invitation from God](#)

Option 2: Retreats

In some locations, distance and other logistics make it difficult or impossible for groups to meet on an ongoing basis. If this applies to your situation, consider convening a retreat for the continuing sessions. Find a format that will work to meet the needs of your particular group. Some examples to consider are a Weekend Retreat or a One-Day Retreat.

➤ **A Weekend Retreat**

Adapt the Weekend Intensive Centering Prayer retreat schedule provided in the [CO Retreats- Guidelines and Schedules](#) to create a retreat for Continuing Sessions to the Centering Prayer Introductory Program in a weekend retreat setting. Show two of the talks on Saturday morning, another two on Saturday afternoon and the last two on Sunday morning. Make time in the schedule for the afternoon videos on Saturday by offering one, instead of two, twenty-minute Centering Prayer periods. You may also eliminate or make the third Centering Prayer period of the day optional.

➤ **A One-Day Retreat**

Create two or three days over the next month or so for Continuing Sessions to the Centering Prayer Introductory Program. The day should include time for Centering Prayer, watching videos, questions and answers, discussion and sharing. A United in Prayer Day Schedule could be used as a guideline and adapted for this retreat

Option 3: Books

This option is for groups that are able to meet regularly, who would prefer to read a book (or books) as follow-up or where no DVD player is available. Books are also an option for individual study and reflection. All the books listed can be ordered from the Contemplative Outreach Online Store.

Tips for Using a Book: Reading can be shared by each person in the group by reading a paragraph or two (optional, of course). Discuss as people feel moved during the reading. Allow fifteen minutes for questions and discussion after the reading. There is no time limit to complete a chapter or the book.

Open Mind Open Heart

Open Mind Open Heart, The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel by Fr. Thomas Keating. Continuum Publishing Company, 2006, 20th Anniversary Edition. (OMOH) Also available in seven CD set and audio digital download.

OMOH is widely regarded as the basic text of Centering Prayer, having been written by one of its principal founders, Abbot Thomas Keating. It is a deep and thorough overview of the Christian contemplative tradition. Fr. Thomas gives step-by-step guidance in the method of Centering Prayer, a movement of divine love designed to renew the Christian contemplative tradition. OMOH is designed to initiate the readers into a living relationship with God. OMOH can be used to guide newcomers during a series of introductory sessions.

The following chapters are suggested for such group reading. Participants should be encouraged to reread or finish the chapters at home. For a 90-minute group meeting, 30-minutes can be allotted for Centering Prayer, reading for 30 minutes, and discussion for 30 minutes.

Most of the chapters have useful frequently asked questions (FAQs) submitted by readers. Assuming a six-week introductory course, consideration should be given to reading these chapters:

- Chapter 2. "First Steps in Centering Prayer." Fr. Keating goes through a practical "how to" approach, and includes beginners' FAQs.
- Chapter 3. "The Sacred Word as Symbol." Fr. Keating discussed the profound ramifications of consenting to God's presence and action within us.
- Chapter 4. "The Wanderings of the Imagination." Fr. Keating answers the typical questions a beginner might ask about cascading thoughts during prayer.
- Chapter 8. "The Intensive Centering Prayer Experience." This chapter contains blurbs from persons who finished three periods of Centering Prayer, which would be of interest to newcomers who want to know what to expect.
- Chapter 1. "Dimensions of Contemplative Prayer." Fr. Keating lays the theological groundwork for interior prayer, releasing the energies of the unconscious, and God as the source of contemplation.
- Chapter 9. "Summary of the Centering Prayer Method." This chapter contains a useful summary of the method, five types of thoughts, and resting in God.

Where to get it: [Open Mind, Open Heart](#)

Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God

Forty Days to a Closer Walk with God: The Practice of Centering Prayer by J. David Muyskens. This book can be used in combination with one of the DVD programs reviewed in the previous section. It provides a structure for those new to Centering Prayer which reinforces the DVD conferences. The book includes short daily scripture or meditative readings plus a twenty-minute daily practice of Centering Prayer. The book has been found to be particularly appropriate for participants of various religious backgrounds.

Tips for Use: Here is a suggested process for using a DVD and this book in ninety-minute meetings over a six-week period:

- Check in (welcome each participant and ask everyone to give brief update)
- 20 minutes of Centering Prayer
- Comments regarding the content of the book readings
- Sharing of their Centering Prayer practice
- Viewing and discussion of the DVD
- Closing prayer

Where to get it: [Forty Days Closer Walk with God](#)

Option 4: Online Resources

Individuals may be interested in participating in the Continuing Sessions but may be unable to attend because of distance or circumstances. To serve people in these situations, Contemplative Outreach recommends the Centering Prayer for Beginners online resource.

- **Centering Prayer for Beginners**

A free on-line community for beginners in Centering Prayer where information is shared and questions are asked and answered via email. The course begins each year on January 1st, May 1st and September 1st. The four months includes the four conferences of the Introduction to Centering Prayer followed by the transcripts of the "*Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice*" by Thomas Keating. The program is followed by the reading and discussion of Fr. Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer primer, "*Open Mind, Open Heart*," 2006 Edition. This book explains in detail the conceptual background of Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Heritage. Daily guidance, direction and support in establishing this prayer as a twice daily practice is also provided. Admission can take place at any time during the year.

To request a subscription to the Centering Prayer One list, contact the List Owners at Centering Prayer One at goups.yahoo.com/neo/goups/centeringprayer-one/info.

Option 5: Twelve Step Option

Centering Prayer for Beginners

Introductory Workshops are presented to people in Twelve Step Recovery to offer Centering Prayer as a way to practice the 11th Step. Presenters and facilitators offer the material in Twelve Step language and culture, which basically means that every effort is made to be as inclusive as possible without using traditional religious terminology. The vision of Twelve Step Outreach team is to offer Centering Prayer as an 11th Step Practice and present a method of meditation to facilitate a deepening relationship with God wherever there is a desire for healing. Twelve Step Centering Prayer groups support one another in the process of spiritual transformation through the practice of Centering Prayer.

The following resources have been used successfully as study material for the Continuing Sessions with Twelve Step groups. When facilitating a Twelve Step Introductory Workshop and the Continuing Sessions, it is recommended that the facilitator contact the Twelve Step Outreach team to obtain suggestions for offering the Continuing Sessions. Refer to the [CO Service Teams](#) and contact a member of the Twelve Step Outreach Service Team.

- **Twelve Step Outreach website:** www.cp12stepoutreach.org
- **Open Mind, Open Heart** by Fr. Thomas Keating
Where to get it: [Open Mind Open Heart](#)
- **Divine Therapy and Addiction** by Fr. Thomas Keating
Where to get it: [Divine Therapy and Addiction](#)
- **The Contemplative Dimension of the 12-Steps** DVD Series:
Where to get it: Contemplative Dimensions of the 12 Steps, DVD
The series has four main sections with subsections. It is recommended that fifteen minutes of the DVD be played per session to allow time for Centering Prayer and discussion. It may

be helpful to the facilitator to review the DVD in advance to determine which sections will be most helpful for their group. This is an excellent in-depth teaching of Centering Prayer and the Spiritual Journey designed specifically for people in recovery.

- Centering Prayer as an 11th Step Practice
Part 1 (30 minutes)
Part 2 (14 minutes, pause for 20-minute meditation, 25 minutes) Part 3 (29 minutes)
- Human Condition and the First Two Steps Part 1 (28 minutes)
Part 2 (29 minutes)
Part 3 (29 minutes)
- A Daily Practice of Transformation Part 1 (27 minutes)
Part 2 (33 minutes)
Part 3 (26 minutes)
Part 4 (21 minutes)
- Questions & Answers with Fr. Keating (42 minutes)

revised 1/19/2018

Hints for using Six Continuing Sessions of the Introduction to the CP Practice DVD's, and transcripts.

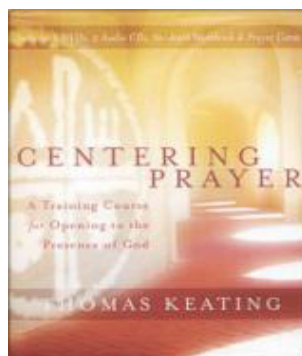
Centering Prayer Introductory Program						
NOTE TO PRESENTER: Need "Centering Prayer, Six Follow Up Sessions" transcripts of the continuing sessions videos.						
	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Session 7
Preparation for session	Review Method Brochure (guidelines detail) Conf 2 – Background Material Glossary of Terms Levels of Awareness chart if not used in Session One - good place to introduce prior to video	Review Method Brochure "Scriptures that Allude to Contemplative Prayer" "The Christian Contemplative Tradition" by Thomas Keating "CO Reaching Out to the World" if not shown in Session One (show after discussion)	Review Method Brochure – "What CP Is and Is Not" Conf 1 – Development of Essentials & Background Material	Review Method Brochure Conf 4 – Background Material Glossary of Terms	Review Method Brochure (guidelines detail) Note that the drawing in transcript p. 37 not the same as the one Thomas uses in the video Review river metaphor transcript p. 37	Review Method Brochure Beginning of Handbook - CO Vision & Theological Principles Ground rules and Centering Prayer group time designs (from Facilitator Handbook) and simplified 3-yr course of study in CP groups
Vestibule to CP period	Hand out three short vestibule prayers and use for sessions 2, 5, 6	<i>Psalms for Praying</i> (part of a Psalm) If appropriate use bell or gong	CD (music, silence, music)	Use one short vestibule prayer Use bell or gong if appropriate	Use one short vestibule prayer Read together + <i>Psalms for Praying</i> (part of a Psalm) by leader	Relaxation exercise – guided process, body prayer or simple stretching
Closing of CP period	Lord's Prayer (p. 40 transcript)	Lord's Prayer (p. 40 transcript)	CD music	Lord's Prayer (p. 40 transcript)	Lord's Prayer (p. 40 transcript)	Lord's Prayer (p. 40 transcript)
DVD number & context before showing video	DVD 1–1 Transcript p. 5 Name the four conferences in Session One + p. 1 – sentence about the anticipated outcomes	DVD 1–2 Transcript p. 7,8 With no analysis or expectation we learn the essence of engaging the divine presence	DVD 2–3 Transcript p.15 Learn what prayer is and is not and the purpose of the sacred word	DVD 2–4 Transcript pp. 24, 25 Listen for three acts of Centering Prayer and three principles that are instruments of transformation	DVD 3–5 Transcript Next two videos are presentations given to Presenter of CP – Third guideline has been refined since these videos were made	DVD 3–6 Transcript p. 39 Listen for practical pointers for doing CP and reflections on healing process of God's purification in CP
Lead in to video discussion	TK talks a lot about how our relationship to God changes in CP - What struck you?	TK talks about the discipline of CP - What struck you?	Read as a group from Method Brochure "What CP Is and Is Not" - What struck you?	Either name the acts and principles or read the review on p. 29 - What struck you?	Review the CP guidelines using Method Brochure - What struck you?	TK gives some practical points - What struck you?
Preview for next session	Preview (p. 6 – Transcript)	Preview (p. 12 – Transcript)	Preview (p. 23 – Transcript)	Preview (p. 30 – Transcript)	Preview (p. 38 – Transcript)	How a CP group functions Ground rules, time design, input outline

Appendix: "The Centering Prayer Introductory Program" DVD Content

HOW CHAPTERS USE THE CENTERING PRAYER

PROGRAM

BY CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH AND SOUNDS TRUE



Centering Prayer: A Training Course for Opening to the Presence of God includes more than nine hours of guidance and teachings on CD and DVD from Fr. Thomas Keating, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler and Fr. Carl Arico. The package contains: 6 DVDs (7 hours, 36 minutes), 2 CDs (1 hour, 45 minutes), 1 Study Guide (91 pages).

This document describes additional ways in which Contemplative Outreach chapters can use the Training Course in groups.

The Centering Prayer Introductory Program

For those new to Centering Prayer, local Contemplative Outreach chapters offer a Centering Prayer Introductory Program that has two parts: An Introductory Workshop and four to six Continuing Sessions. This Training Course may be used as a resource in the Introductory Workshop and the Continuing Sessions.

The Introductory Workshop

The Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop familiarizes participants with the method of Centering Prayer and its conceptual background and offers two opportunities to experience the prayer. *"The teaching of the Introductory Course to groups face to face by Contemplative Outreach commissioned presenters remains the first choice . . . Very important to the integrity of the Method of Centering Prayer are the presenters who have interiorized the teaching and who are growing in intimacy with Christ both in prayer and action."* (Keating, Thomas, *Integrity of the Method of Centering Prayer*, 2011). The Training Course DVD conferences are not meant to replace face to face presentations. They may be used by a facilitator of a workshop when it is not possible to provide a commissioned presenter. Commissioned presenters may use one or two of the DVD conferences if they are presenting alone and find it necessary.

Introductory Workshop Conference Title	Matching Conference in the DVD Training Course
1. Prayer as Relationship	Session 2, #1: <i>Be Still and Know</i> (20 min.)
2. The Method of Centering Prayer	Session 3, Part One, #1: <i>Part One: The Method of Centering Prayer, The Four Basic Guidelines</i> (16 min.)
3. Thoughts and the Use of the Sacred Word	Session 3, Part Two, #1: <i>Part Two: Thoughts and use of the Sacred Word, The Power of Return</i> (15 min.)
4. Deepening our Relationship with God	Session 5, #1: <i>The Fruits of Centering Prayer</i> (15 min.)

The Continuing Sessions

Following the Introductory Workshop, participants are invited to attend four to six Continuing Sessions which provide support, more background and the time needed to establish a personal Centering Prayer practice. The Sessions also include the opportunity to share the initial Centering Prayer experience with others who have made a similar commitment.

Each Continuing Session is led by an experienced facilitator and includes a period of Centering Prayer and group discussion. The first four or all six of the following presentations from the Training Course can be used for the Continuing Sessions.

- 1st Session 2, #2 The Rest of the Story, Carl Arico (15 min)
- 2nd Session 3, Part One, #2 It all begins by saying "yes", Carl Arico (17 min)
- 3rd Session 3, Part Two, #3 Finding Freedom, Carl Arico (11 min)
- 4th Session 5, #2 The two-armed Embrace, Carl Arico (14 min)
- 5th Session 6, #1 The Basic Core of goodness, Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler (24 min)
- 6th Session 6, #2 Consent is the only response, Carl Arico (14 min)

The Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop in a Retreat Setting

A weekend retreat may allow time for viewing additional presentations from the Training Course. For example, at the end of the Opening Session on night one of the retreat, before the four conferences start the next day, DVD Session 6, #3 *An Interview* with Father Thomas Keating and Tami Simon (26 minutes) could be viewed. The interview includes the importance of the practice of Centering Prayer. Fr. Keating closes with a prayer after which you may invite participants to depart in silence.

Following the fourth conference of the Introductory Workshop, DVD Session 5, #3 *The Two-Armed Embrace* by Fr. Carl Arico (14 minutes), could be viewed as encouragement for continuing the practice of Centering Prayer.

Group Enrichment

For experienced Centering Prayer practitioners, the remaining talks in the DVD set can be used for on-going prayer groups or chapter enrichment programs. It is recommended to reserve the talks by Fr. Thomas until group members have established a Centering Prayer practice. Refer to the Appendix for a complete list of the DVD contents.

Contact

For more information, contact Contemplative Outreach Resource Center, 973-838-3384, office@outreach.org

Revised

This document was revised by the Centering Prayer Introductory Program Service Team on December 10, 2015.

Session	Title	Presented by	Time
<i>Session 1</i>	<i>The Ultimate Reality</i>	<i>Father Thomas Keating</i>	<i>79 min.</i>
	1. The Great Mystery		16 min.
	2. The Revelation of God		14 min.
	3. The Inner Room		15 min.
	4. Listening at the Level of Being		15 min.
	5. Service: Unifying Prayer and Action		19 min.
<i>Session 2</i>	<i>Prayer as Relationship</i>		<i>64 min.</i>
	1. Be still and know (Intro Conference 1)	Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler	20 min.
	2. The Rest of the Story	Father Carl Arico	15 min.
	3. The Indwelling Spirit	Father Thomas Keating	30 min.
<i>Session 3</i>	<i>Practicing Centering Prayer</i>		<i>59 min.</i>
	Part One: The Method of Centering Prayer		
	1. The Four Guidelines (Intro Conference 2)	Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler	16 min.
	It All Begins by Saying “Yes”	Father Carl Arico	17 min.
	Part Two: Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word		
	2. The Power of the Return (Intro Conference 3)	Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler	15 min.
	3. Finding Freedom	Father Carl Arico	11 min.
<i>Session 4</i>	<i>The Human Condition</i>	<i>Father Thomas Keating</i>	<i>95 min.</i>
	1. Return to the Source		20 min.
	2. The Human Family is One		17 min.
	3. The Development of the False Self		17 min.
	4. The Seven Moments of Centering Prayer		28 min.
	5. The Evolution Toward Oneness		12 min.
<i>Session 5</i>	<i>Deepening Your Relationship with God</i>		<i>77 min.</i>
	1. The Fruits of Centering Prayer (Intro Conference 4)	Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler	15 min.
	2. The Two-Armed Embrace	Father Carl Arico	14 min.
	3. The Future of Inter-Spiritual Relationship	Father Thomas Keating	48 min.
<i>Session 6</i>	<i>A Lifelong Journey</i>		<i>65 min.</i>
	1. The Basic Core of Goodness	Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler	24 min.
	2. Consent is the Only Response	Father Carl Arico	15 min.
	3. An Interview	Father Thomas Keating	26 min.