

Dear Arizona Centering Prayer Community,

We are happy to reach out to you as summer winds down and we sense that the days are growing shorter. Fall and winter usher in times of more activities and connections, holiday seasons and sacred stories. As you will see in this newsletter, we are thrilled to offer opportunities for our own community to gather.

Coming soon in September and October, you can attend any one of four Introduction to Centering Prayer programs, including one in Tucson. These are for beginners and those established in the practice of Centering Prayer, as all spiritual practices require continual refreshment. Please plan to attend our annual speaker series on Saturday, October 4, 2025 featuring Fr. Bill Sheehan on the wisdom of Cynthia Bourgeault and others.

Most of us couldn't attend last fall's outstanding program on Etty Hillesum but those who did say it was life-changing. This young Dutch woman who resisted and ultimately died in the persecutions of World War II matured quickly into a profound mystic for our time. Robert and Judy Johnson offer a reflection on Etty's life and wisdom. In addition, Dave M. gives a thoughtful review of a 12 Step Intensive Retreat in Auburn, California. An outstanding documentary on Santa Rita Abbey called Final Vows has just been released. You can find a review here by Kathy Kramer-Howe.

Dates for our winter intensive retreats and information on registering are offered. Also, there is a calendar of upcoming events and Save the Date from Saint Barnabas on the Desert Episcopal Church.

Let us meet each other as often as we can in the strength and love of our community.

In Silence, Solidarity and Service,
Your Phoenix Chapter Service Team



12 Step Outreach Silent Retreat, Auburn CA A Reflection by Dave M.

My wife and I arrived at the Sisters of Mercy retreat center in Auburn CA after a 2-day drive from Phoenix AZ. When we pulled into the retreat center, we left the congested highways and semiarid farmlands of north central CA for the green and serene 30 acre grounds of the retreat center.

After checking in and settling into our private rooms, our group of about 25 retreatants had our first 20-minute sit. After dinner we entered into silence that we held for the next 8 days. This retreat observed Grand Silence, where in addition to silence, one avoids eye contact with others. New to me, I was apprehensive at first but found this practice greatly enhanced my retreat experience.

The following 7 days were anchored in 4 hours of Centering Prayer spread across the morning and afternoon. After dinner, for those wishing to attend, Lectio Divina was offered, followed by Eucharist celebrated by Fr. Bill Sheehan, a member of the Contemplative Outreach movement since its formative years and a dear friend to us in the 12 Step ministry. The retreat provided me with many opportunities for Centering Prayer and time to read and reflect on various spiritual writings, as well as to contemplate nature during walks on the beautiful retreat grounds.

After coming out of silence on the 8th day and participating in a service day for 12 Step Outreach, my wife and I departed on a 3-day return trip home, taking the extra day to ease back into our busy and active lives.

In my years of Centering Prayer practice, I have learned not to place expectations for particular outcomes, but instead, to open to a state of deep receptivity during this sacred time and allow God, the

Divine Therapist, to work unseen and unsensed. About a week after we returned home, I realized an unexpected, subtle but fundamental shift in my attitude toward life. Where our 12 Step literature talks about entering the “*World of the Spirit*” it says, “*We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically.*” I realized that, when the world with its demands and distractions

shows up unsolicited in my life, I now responded from a deeper anchoring in the spiritual world brought about by the retreat’s intensive prayer-work and silence. I suddenly realized that the retreat had opened me to healing by the Divine Therapist, giving me deeper appreciation for another passage from our 12th Step literature concerning prayer and meditation: “It works – It really does.”

2025 Contemplative Calendar of Events

Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix

(go to www.contemplativeoutreach-phoenix for more information)

- * September 13 Introduction to Centering Prayer Program 9 am - 1 pm
St. Joseph’s Hospital Chapel, 350 W. Thomas Road, Phoenix 85013
- * October 4 Fall Enrichment Day with guest speaker, Fr. Bill Sheehan, 9 am – 1 pm
Shepherd of the Hills UCC, 5524 E. Lafayette Blvd., Phoenix 85018
- * October 18 Introduction to Centering Prayer Program 9 am - 1 pm
Corpus Christi Catholic Church – 300 N. Tanque Verde Loop Road, Tucson, AZ 85748

12 Step Outreach Ministry of Contemplative Outreach

(go to <https://www.contemplativeoutreach-phoenix.org/12-steps> for more information)

- * October 11 Introduction to Centering Prayer as an 11th Step Practice 9 am to 12:30 pm
St. Stephens Episcopal Church 2310 N. 56 Street, Phoenix
- * Silent Saturdays –9 to 11 am First Saturday of the month (Three 20 minute sits)
First Church UCC 1407 N. 2nd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85004

Saint Barnabas on the Desert Contemplative Life Ministry 6715 N. Mockingbird Lane, Scottsdale, AZ 85253

(for more information, including CP groups,
visit www.saintbarnabas.org/ministries/contemplative-life/)

- * Oct. 18 Introduction to Centering Prayer Program 9:30 am – 1:00 pm
- * Taizé Worship Service – First Tuesday of the month at 7 pm
- * Quiet Day – Second Saturday of the month 9:30 am to 1 pm
- * November 7–10 Fall Silent Retreat at Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson

Final Vows: Behind the Walls of Santa Rita Abbey

A Review by Kathy Kramer-Howe

The documentary Final Vows invites us into Santa Rita Abbey, a cloistered Trappist monastery in Sonoita, Arizona. This community of sisters is especially beloved by Arizona's Centering Prayer community. For over 20 years, we have held our two annual intensive retreats at Santa Rita's beautiful retreat campus, with its private rooms, serene chapel, and kitchen/library space. In turn, the sisters are encouraged and delighted to welcome us and to know that we carry the spirit of lives centered in Christ into the secular world. They pray always for us to persevere and to delight in the Lord.

It is rare to go behind the walls of a cloistered community. Over the four and a half years of filming, the director, Victoria Westover, gradually gained the sisters' trust, allowing for open and candid conversations about faith, perseverance and the challenges of communal life. The scenes are quiet, intimate and respectful as we see the rhythms of work, prayer and daily offices. They walk the paths of their high desert home, contemplate in the rose garden, feed tidbits to the local deer, and even make snow angels in winter. They minister in the kitchen and in their altar bread bakery, clean and oil the great bell, maintain their Facebook page, and sustain the local community in prayer.

A strong sense of this community of women, who live together for a lifetime, emerges. As Mother Vicki states "difficulties of such a life lie in the need to grow in self-knowledge, continually changing in order to open more and more to themselves, other people, and above all, to the living presence of Christ." As all of us know, this is the hard work of centering our lives

in Christ. It is the work of replacing our self-serving motivations with those exemplified in the Beatitudes. Embracing God's gift of free will is essential. When a postulant hesitates at giving up so many freedoms for the vows of stability, poverty, chastity and obedience, the wise Novice Mistress tells her of an old monk who

used to go to bed every night saying, "Tomorrow, I'm outta here." Then each morning he decided to stay, after all.

The movie does not shrink from the threats to this cloistered order. Copper mining in the nearby Santa Rita Mountains is a looming danger as it would shatter the profound silence of the land. More than that is the dwindling number of women drawn to this way of life, especially those under forty. Contemporary life, with its many options for women and men, is draining and closing monasteries and abbeys worldwide.

Give yourselves a treat and watch this gentle and beautiful film. You can rent it on Amazon for \$2.99. These are the sisters who pray always for us and who are strengthened by our commitment to Centering Prayer and to living what Fr. Keating called "ordinary life with extraordinary love."



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Etty Hillesum: Story of a Mystic by Robert and Judy Johnson

On April 5, 2025, Jim McElroy presented *The Life and Gifts of Etty Hillesum*, a day of retreat arranged by Contemplative Outreach, Phoenix, AZ. He described and quoted from Etty Hillesum's insightful and clear writing about her inner life and what it was like as a Jew to live under the Nazi regime in Holland.

Etty was born January 15, 1914, in the Netherlands. By the age of 27, when she started writing her diary, she was a woman of her time: emancipated, educated, urbane, with professional ambitions. She had a degree in law and was enrolled in the faculty of Slavic languages when WWII began. During the war, she was introduced to the psychologist Julius Spier, a disciple of Carl Jung, and began treatment with him. As part of her therapy, she started her journal and began practicing meditation. Although she remained a Jew, she was greatly influenced by the writings of Jung, St. Augustine, the Christian scriptures, Rainer Maria Rilke, and many Russian writers including Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

During the war, Etty kept her personal diary and collected about a hundred letters that she wrote or were written to her in the last months of her life. Published years after her death, these writings are what give us insight into her life and thoughts.

By April of 1942 the Nazis occupying Holland had begun transferring all the Dutch Jews to Westerbork, a transit camp near the German border. This would be a temporary stop before being transported to Auschwitz and other camps from which they would never return. Although she was, at first, allowed a greater level of freedom than other Jews, Etty felt that she must offer her life to her people, so she would not exempt herself from their fate. Eventually, she too, was confined there. Westerbork was a community living in fear. Every week, a long train of freight cars pulled out of the camp packed with more than a thousand men, women, and children headed into Germany. Etty wrote of the mud, misery, barbed wire fences, sickness and overcrowding – a universe of noise and fear crammed into half a square mile. And it was in

this hell that she wrote repeatedly, “Despite everything, life is full of beauty and meaning.”

Etty's longing to be a complete human being was fulfilled by her acceptance of the invitation from God to be transformed. Daily she practiced letting go of fear and judgment, by opening herself to the loving Divinity within and trusting God in the present moment.

On September 15, 1943, Etty Hillesum was deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz where she died on November 30 of the same year.



Some of Etty's writings during this time:

Room Enough for Everything

Early on Etty described her method of prayer: “I'll turn inward for half an hour each morning before work and listen to my inner voice. Lose myself. You could also call it meditation...let this be the aim of meditation: to turn one's innermost being into a vast empty plain...so that something of 'God' can enter you, and something of love, too...the love you can apply to small everyday things.”

Inner Growth

Etty wrote in a letter to a friend, “The Cosmos has moved from my head to my heart...And once God moved inside me to the space in which he still resides, well, I began to heal!”

Spiritual Path

Etty had a profound and dynamic prayer life. “Truly, my life is one long hearkening unto myself and unto others, unto God. And if I say that I hearken, it is really God who hearkens inside me. The most essential and the deepest in my hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other. God to God.”

Suffering

Etty came to see that suffering, when accepted, does not diminish but enhances life. Writing about suffering: “Most of us don’t understand the art of suffering and experience a thousand fears instead. We cease to be alive, being full of fear, bitterness, hatred, and despair.”

Living in the Present Moment

“I live here and now, this minute, this day, to the full, and life is worth living.”

Human Nature

Etty forged a perspective that allowed her to experience her emotions without judgment. She cautions others: “Nazi barbarism evokes the same kind of barbarism in ourselves...we have to reject that barbarism within us; we must not fan the hatred within us, because if we do, the world will not be able to pull itself one inch further out of the mire.”

Accepting the Real World

Despite the ugliness, hatred and suffering that surrounded her, Etty still saw meaning and beauty in life, and by accepting her very limited life Etty transcended it. “It is the Nazis themselves who are pinned in by barbed wire—not their captives. Despite all the suffering and injustice, I cannot hate others.”

The Cost of Integrity

In July 1942, Etty wrote: “We must safeguard that little piece of you, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well.” “Later she added “I know that a new and kinder day will come. I would so much like to live on, if only to express all the love I carry within me.” “Ultimately, we have one moral duty: to reclaim peace in ourselves...and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.”



SILENT RETREATS in 2026

Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix offers silent intensive retreats to those who are interested in renewing and deepening their relationship with God through Centering Prayer in a community setting and wrapped in an atmosphere of profound silence. The retreats take place in Sonoita, AZ at the Santa Rita Abbey Retreat Center (santaritaabbey.org), about an hour south of Tucson. This is a natural setting on high desert terrain. There are seven private rooms and one queen bed apartment that can accommodate two retreatants. Each room has its own bath. The retreat menu is vegetarian.

Intensive Retreat

**Friday evening January 16
through Saturday noon, January 24, 2026.**

(Optional dual track Post Intensive Retreat)

The retreat is open to all who have a 6 month centering prayer practice. There are about six 30 minute Centering Prayer periods daily. The prayer is supported by the viewing of Fr. Thomas Keating's Spiritual Journey DVDs, plus selections from his life's teachings. We will also share in Lectio Divina and soul-friending with staff. Also available is the opportunity to participate daily in Lauds, Liturgy (communion service) and Vespers with the Trappistine Sisters in their nearby sanctuary. There will be talking at the evening meal.

Retreat fee: \$800 per person.

Post-Intensive Retreat

**Friday evening January 30
through Saturday noon February 7, 2026**

Pre-requisite: Must have attended an intensive retreat.

This retreat consists of eight 30 minute Centering Prayer periods daily. There is time for individual quiet time: writing, sketching, walking, etc. We are invited also to share in the sisters' prayers of: Lauds, Liturgy, Vespers and Compline. This is a totally silent retreat. Soul-friending with staff can be scheduled.

Retreat fee: \$800 per person.

Registration

Registration opens September 1, 2025. Partial scholarships are available. If you have a need, please let Jeannie Lashinske know when you register. A non-refundable deposit of \$100 will reserve your place, while space is available. Please mail a check, made out to Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix, to Jeannie Lashinske, 5728 East Orange Blossom Lane, Phoenix, AZ 85018. We expect the remaining balance will be paid in full by January 3, 2026. Questions? Ask Jeannie by calling (480) 423-1645 or emailing her at jmlashinske@gmail.com.



In-Person Fall Enrichment Day with Father Bill Sheehan

The Wisdom Way of Knowing

**October 4, 2025, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ
5524 E. Lafayette Blvd. Phoenix, AZ 85018**



Cynthia Bourgeault reminds us in her writings that within our human condition we have 2 operating systems, that of our egoic operating system and that of heartfulness or heart perception.

During our time together I would like to describe each of these operating systems in some detail. Then I would like to describe how we can upgrade our operating system and choose to live our lives more intentionally on the level of heart perception.

Fee of \$30 and scholarships are available.

Register on-line at:

www.contemplativeoutreach-phoenix.org

**Or mail registration to:
Sister Rachel Torrez
909 E Northern Ave #427
Phoenix AZ 85020**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Make check out to *Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix*

For questions or additional information contact: Sister Rachel at (602) 663-1851

Save the Date: March 14, 2026

The Contemplative Life Ministries Team at Saint Barnabas on the Desert Episcopal Church, Scottsdale, AZ invites you to join us in an **exploration of the intersection of imagination, art and spirituality with our friend the Rev. Dr. Travis Helms.**

After serving with the Peace Corps in Madagascar, Travis attended seminary at Yale Divinity School, then received his PhD in theology and literature from the University of Cambridge. He was ordained to the priesthood in 2017. His poems and essays have been published in Image, Poetry Northwest, North American Review, The Austin American-Statesman, and other journals.

We look forward to creating a loving space to courageously unpack perceptions and preconceptions around what matters most in life. Our time together will incorporate contemplative practice (prayer, meditation, silence) as well as teaching on and robust immersion in, theologically-resonant poems by a variety of authors. Together, we'll explore the ways in which poems perform and embody spiritual truth, and serve as inspiration and instigation for living a life of meaning. Bring your knowing, bring your curiosity, and gather with us.

More information coming soon to the Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix website.



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