

SHORT INTRODUCTION TO CENTERING PRAYER—August 2020

Many of us are familiar with prayer as talking to God but prayer is also listening to God. Centering Prayer is one form of listening or contemplative prayer. This form of prayer was practiced by early Christians but it basically disappeared from our tradition for centuries. It was reintroduced in the 1970's by Father Thomas Keating and other monks and is now practiced widely around the world, including here at Peninsula United Church.

Centering Prayer teacher, Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault describes the goal of this prayer as “a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence.” The aim is not to make yourself empty or still. That's impossible because we have minds that are easily distracted by our many thoughts. It's known as 'monkey mind'.

Centering Prayer teaches us to let go of our thoughts by using a sacred word to help us refocus our intention to being open to God. A sacred word may have a devotional or religious intent: i.e. Jesus, Father, Abba, Spirit, or Come, Lord. The Sacred Word may describe the spiritual attitude you wish to maintain or your basic intention. i.e. open, still, be here, listen, let go. Short is better than long, and simple is better than fancy.

The Sacred word is **not** a mantra. You don't repeat it constantly. You only say it, silently and gently, when you 'notice' that you are being attracted to a thought. The sacred word is the spiritual equivalent of a little piece of red string tied around your finger. As soon as a thought emerges into our consciousness, we say our sacred word to gently let go of our thought and return to our intention to be open to God.

Steps:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you.
2. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. You may wish to rest your hands on your legs either face up or face down.
3. Silently and gently introduce your sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
4. When you notice that you are engaged with your thoughts return ever-so-gently to your sacred word.
5. Allow thoughts to come and go without latching onto them, without judgment.
6. Let go of all expectations or goals during this time. It is not about achieving anything, whether emptying your mind or finding peace or achieving a spiritual experience. You cannot fail at Centering Prayer. It is an ongoing process of returning again and again to our ever-present, loving God.
7. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

For a 30 minute presentation by the Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault which includes a 15 minute session of [Centering Prayer](#)