



# Centering Prayer at Holy Family Church

**Centering Prayer** is a method of silent prayer or meditation which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence. It consists of responding to the Spirit of Christ by consenting to God's presence and action within. Quieting our mental faculties, even for a short period of time, allows us to realize the gift of God's presence.

Founded on the ancient prayer practices of our Christian contemplative heritage and emphasizing a personal relationship with God, Centering Prayer fosters this relationship through the regular, daily practice of silent prayer.

Holy Family's Centering Prayer group meets weekly for 20 minutes of silent prayer, 20 minutes of video instruction from Fr. Thomas Keating, and 20 minutes of group discussion. Consisting of novice, intermediate, and experienced practitioners, our weekly group sessions provide an excellent ongoing opportunity for developing and deepening one's contemplative practice. We welcome practitioners of any form of silent, sitting meditation. Please join us.

## Guidelines for Centering Prayer

- ❖ Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
  - To choose a sacred word sit quietly and ask the Holy Spirit to inspire one especially suitable for us.
    - Examples: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen; Love, Peace, Mercy, Listen, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Yes. One or two syllable words seem best.
    - For some, simply noticing one's breath may serve the same purpose as a sacred word.
  - Do not change your sacred word during the prayer period as that would be to start thinking again.
- ❖ Sit comfortably with your back straight and eyes closed. After a few breaths introduce your sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
  - At Holy Family it is our tradition to have a participant read aloud a brief prayer and then a bell is intoned beginning our prayer period. We sit in silence for about 20 minutes.
- ❖ During Centering Prayer when thoughts arise, simply and ever-so-gently resume your sacred word.
  - "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.
  - *Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.*
  - "Returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word" indicates that a minimum of effort is used. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
  - During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or even disappear.
- ❖ At the end of the prayer period a bell is again intoned and following the facilitator's cue, we pray aloud together the Lord's Prayer.
- ❖ The principal effects of Centering Prayer are experienced in daily life not during Centering Prayer.
- ❖ Daily sessions, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon or early evening are recommended. Each session lasts at least 20 minutes.

For more information please read "The Cloud of Unknowing" and Thomas Keating's book, "Open Mind, Open Heart," especially chapter 5. These and other books on Centering Prayer are available in the Holy Family Bookstore. Online resources include [www.centeringprayer.org](http://www.centeringprayer.org) and [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org).

***"Centering prayer is an exercise in letting go. That is all it is."***  
*-Thomas Keating*