

Cathy McCarthy complete interview April 5, 2014

[Cathy McCarthy] We are at Wahlburgers Monastery in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and today is April 5th, 2014, and it's a pleasure for me to be here.

[Fr. Carl Arico] It's a pleasure to have you. How has Centering Prayer deepened your awareness of the love of God?

[Cathy McCarthy] These questions are so interesting to me because I thought a lot about that, and the one thing that came into my mind was, "I always knew that God loved me." I never doubted that. And when I began to hear people talking that they didn't know, they never felt God's love, I was so surprised because I thought I always knew God's love. So all I can say in response to that is it has changed my love, and the way I experienced God's love was magical in a way. You said this to me one time, "God gives

you everything on a silver platter," and that was always my experience. I only had to ask. People had me praying for them because God always said this. The difference was I rarely ever prayed for myself. I always just thought of myself as praying for other people. And so my love and my experience of God's love has deepened, and it's grounded, and it's more real. It's not, "If I do this, God will love me," or "He won't love me if I don't do that." It's more grounded and real now than it ever was.

[Fr. Carl Arico] You've mentioned that you've experienced it in a different way? How?

[Cathy McCarthy] Well, I'm not as needy. At some point early on in Contemplative Outreach, and working with the false self programs, I became very aware of my need for approval, and how that really affected

and impacted on all my relationships. And then at some point I realized that impacted, most of all, on my relationship with God. So I always thought I had to be something, do something, in order to earn God's love. And what happened when I became involved with Contemplative Outreach and Centering Prayer, all that happened after that. All of that began to change. I would still ask. And even that became ... I didn't even know how to ask anymore, and it seemed like, "Why should I ask? God knows what I want and what I need." So just trust in God in that. So that's how I began experiencing it in my everyday life. I just had to keep trust in God, and I did so.

[Fr. Carl Arico] You mentioned Contemplative Outreach, Cathy. Just to jump to a broader perspective, why do you think it's important that a movement

like Contemplative Outreach be in existence in today's world? What do you see?

[Cathy McCarthy] You know, Carl, I was sitting there thinking about this question, and I got all teary eyed. All of a sudden it's happening again. I started to remember the beginnings for me, the discovering of Contemplative Outreach and Centering Prayer, but also their beginnings, how they began, and all the wonderful courage, and humility, and love that I experienced in everybody, right at the beginning, and the freedom to grow as I needed to grow. And I was like Catholic. I would have died if the Pope said, "Jump off that roof." I would have jumped without a thought. And what began to happen was I began to get clearer through these models of a more normal, practical spirituality that was being offered, the

wisdom of other channels about the false self programs. I knew nothing about any of that, and used to say, "Wow, good to know." I'm not responsible for anything that happened with my mother and father created all this but, but that's why I think it's important in the world to have and, for me, it's always been interesting that when you talk about Centering Prayer, people don't immediately want to do it, and even when they experience it, if there's a workshop with 40 people, maybe 10 will continue. The others don't because of that, knowing and experiencing who we really are in our own programs that we're functioning out of all day long, totally unfree to be who we are. So I think that's why it's important. And they're small, even though the numbers seem small. I truly believe we only need one person can change the world. We've seen it, like with Father Thomas. He's one

person. Look at all that is out there. Mary, you, Gail, all of us. The work that we've done in believing in what God is doing and wanting, first of all, ourselves to be free, when you begin feeling and experiencing that freedom to be a human being, not needing to be divine all the time, it's an incredible experience. And it still goes on after 29 years. It's still changing and growing and deepening. I have my doubts. My doubts are different now at this age, but it's still an incredible journey. It just is an incredible journey. When I was putting together what I wanted to talk about, you'll see where I go to these different places. I have all these programs and no place to put them, and that was a an ongoing pattern in everything. And I was so struck by that. I said, "I never realized that."

So in my whole journey, it was as if I had something and no place to put it.

And then the place would show up and I would put it there and continue

on until the next thing happened, the next upset. And so I find myself now

sitting here thinking, "Wow, I don't have any new programs to put any

place that I'm aware of, or any place I want to get involved in anymore. So

what is this part of the journey about. We never know what the surprise is.

So that's raised its little head for me. I wonder what's going to start

happening now, if anything, or what. It's never what I think. It's always

different. It's kind of exciting, even at this point. So that raised that whole

thing. Now that is another new exciting place, maybe.

[Speaker 1] I remember us chatting once about when the retreat house was no longer available, and I was kidding you, that you had become a retreat house broker. You were lining up places ...

[Speaker 2] Right.

[Speaker 1] ... saying, "This is what I can offer you. Are you willing to help?"

[Speaker 2] Right. Right. Right. Yeah. And all the places which were so astounding, there is only God's will, and God guiding us. And if we follow that, we're always in the right place. So I would show up with these places, with these programs, and they would just have had a meeting or something, that they're going to close because they have no programs. And so they had the place, and I had the programs. We needed to

collaborate. And we did on different occasions. So we'll see how that plays out in the future.

[Speaker 1] At the time that was the P&P project, places, programs, programs, places. You've always been wonderfully gifted with being able to organize.

[Speaker 2] Oh, God. Right. I know that is my gift.

[Speaker 1] And the administrative aspect to you is such that you do have the spirit of that gift of administration, you really do.

[Speaker 2] But I never knew that. Carl, you or Thomas had told me that at some point in the beginning, and when I looked back, I had manifested that all through my working career, but never realized that that was such a gift

and power for me. Why are we so successful? So I was happy to see that, and happy to be offering it, and on a lesser level, still it's there.

[Speaker 1] Ray, before we go into the journey, anything else you would like to ask Kathy? Four questions: the practices, Centering Prayer, what it meant to her, Contemplative Outreach, how it's helped her.

[Speaker 3] Maybe that last one, on why is Contemplative Outreach so important for the world today? Just something brief.

[Speaker 2] I saw it when I thought about that question. It's that individual being out in the world. I used to feel helpless when I'd see Thomas's video on work. The service in the world ... I can't do that. That's just not who I am. But I can be as wholly, as contemplative, as giving a person as I can be, and then I bring that out into all the circles. And I'm also receiving from all the

people that I'm in touch with, that same goodness and love and service of the world. So I think that we can be in groups and do that. But I think it still comes to the individual. The group can offer the ways, but it can't change anybody. The changing has to come from within, the desire to really be present in love, the non-judging, the stopping judging everybody or comparing yourself to everybody or comparing everybody to everybody else. I just realized, before I discovered Centering Prayer, I was going through a rough patch with God. And I remember kneeling at church and saying to the Holy Spirit, "I will follow wherever you lead without question." It was the "without question" that was the big part. And I am still doing that today, and it's still my prayer today. So I think that's what it has to be for everybody. We have to just say, "Yes." It's that consenting. We call

Centering Prayer "consent on the run." I say, "on the run." You always figure it's on the run. But it is about their consent. Without question. It's just saying "Yes" to God, and we do know when God is inviting us to something. We may choose to tell our little stories to ourselves. But we know, so I think that's how the world gets it, and we don't know how many need to get it or for how long. We have no idea. Again, the Spirit is doing the Spirit's work and we just have to follow. Without question.

[Speaker 3] Yeah, very nice.

[Speaker 2] Thank you.

[Speaker 1] How did you hear about Centering Prayer? How did that all come about?

[Speaker 2] I made a retreat weekend in my parish and Father George

Maloney talked about contemplative prayer and it being for lay people.

And I was so shocked by that because I really thought contemplative prayer

was only for old people who were dying, or nuns, or holy people. And I

really connected with that. So shortly after that, someone talked about

Centering Prayer and one of the young men that I knew had told me that

there was a contemplative prayer workshop being given, and the flyer was

there at the church. So I took it home and it was Mary Mrozowski's

telephone number on there, and it was at Saint Bridget's in Westbury. And

the workshop was on July 11, 1985. And one of the things that was very

significant for me in attending that was that when I spoke to Mary on the

phone, I said to her, "What priest is giving this workshop?" You have to

know what that was about, right? Anybody who knew Mary. And she said

"No priest is giving it. I am." And what I said to her then was, "Are you a nun?" And she said, "No, I'm a layperson." And I said to her years later,

"Mary, if you had told me you were divorced, it would have all ended right there." Because I was so rigid in my expectations of who taught prayer and about prayer. So that was a big hurdle for me right at the beginning. But anyway, I went to the workshop, and I met Mary, and I knew in my first experience of the Centering Prayer that this was what I had been looking for all my life, and I was not going to let this go. I was going to pursue this until I got it resolved somehow within me. So, in the middle of the workshop, at the intermission, Mary came over. I was talking with a group of people, and Mary came over and she said to me, "Are you coming back?"

And I said, "Yes, I am." And she said, "Good." And that was the beginning of our relationship and getting involved, and having been inviting in, and following the person who turned out to be the most wonderful gift in my life. You know, I can't imagine what my life would have been without her.

So we met for four weeks. We used to have this Centering Prayer introductory workshops then, four evenings, and then the hope was that a Centering Prayer group would evolve. And that's exactly what happened.

But every week when I went back I would say to Mary, "Who's going to be here next week?" She said, "You come and someone will be here." She never just answered my questions. So I would go and sometimes there were only three or four of us there. But I showed up every week, and then we began to form our Centering Prayer group. And it was wonderful. At the

same time, I became aware of this group of women and men who were already well-situated on Long Island and doing introductory workshops and practicing this Centering Prayer on their own. And, I might add, from the moment I did that practice I was faithfully committed to it. I never struggled with all this stuff that everybody did. I just went right into it and to this day there's never any doubt about the Centering Prayer practice. It's been such a gift in my life.

So I started to meet these people. It wasn't called Contemplative Outreach of Long Island. Nothing was called anything, yet everything was just the lay contemplatives. Everything was called that. So they started having monthly meetings. They used to come in from upstate for that, and they began doing Centering Prayer workshops, and teaching, supporting

each other, and there were a group of facilitators. So July '85 was when I did the introductory with her. In August of '85, she told me that she was going. She was leaving. "I'm moving," she said. "Where are you moving, Mary?" "Well, to a place in Connecticut." "Why? Are you lost?" And as it turned out, she was becoming a part of this newly-forming, contemplative lay community with David Frenette and Bob Bartell. And it was in West Cornwall, Connecticut, and they began there around the middle or end of August. So that was a big upset for Long Island, because all of us adored Mary, and even though everybody was moving and doing things, it still wasn't grounded enough. She was still the head and heart of it all.

[Speaker 1] These groups had already formed, formed for a different reason before they became Centering Prayer groups, right?

[Speaker 2] The separated and divorced Catholics. Mary had been involved

with separated and divorced Catholics in spiritual matters. She had been

teaching them a lot of practices that she had. She taught a releasing

practice, which was letting go of everything, which also got you very in

touch with all the emotions that you were functioning out of all day long.

And also many of the men and women then that she was working with,

with the divorced and separated, she learned Centering Prayer from Sister

Thelma Hall. And so she began teaching it to these groups, to these people,

and everybody did whatever Mary wanted you to do. You always wanted

whatever Mary had. So there was never a question of, "No, we're not going

to do that." It was like, "OK, let's go!" And she was teaching Centering

Prayer on that level.

Speaker 1

Mary wondered, "Who am I to be doing Scripture studies with these people?" Do you remember that story where she was having doubts?

Because for many years she was working with the separated and divorce and led them into scripture studies and the practices.

Speaker 2

She was doing lectio, right? All of that. I do remember one time her telling the story of she was home after one of these meetings and just kind of stopped on the street and stood there and had all these questions about, "What am I doing?" "Who am I to be teaching these people about God and prayer and the scriptures?" And so she did have those doubts. But that story I heard after I had really gotten to know Mary. That was one of the

stories she told us in the groups. I really didn't know her at the time. She had already begun working with Centering Prayer and had come back from Lama and was really teaching. The work was to spread Centering Prayer and see where that went, and Father Carl Arico and Gail Fitzpatrick- Hopley, who had also been at Lama with her, were very much part of that with us, and I used to see them pop in at meetings once in a while and observed what was happening with us. So that was at the beginning. And then Mary made this decision to join the contemplative community, which was very difficult for all of us. We really wanted her. Mary told this story, and Father Carl can probably confirm it, that she had a lot of concerns about what would happen to the Long Island community, if they would still continue growing if she were not there. And so she asked Carl and Gail if they would

help us help our Long Island community to grow. And they graciously said, "Yes." And what they did, which I still would love to do again today, it was so powerful, they called us together, and we had our meeting, and they led us through a process that would help us to come to our own awareness of where our commitment was, if we even had a commitment, to the growth of Long Island. Was our commitment to Mary or was our commitment to the work of Centering Prayer? So there was this big circle on the floor, and in one corner was the contemplative commune. And over in this other corner was Long Island, and in the process we had created these symbols. It was so fascinating, and I had never done work like this. So this was so exciting to me, creating these symbols of who we were. We worked with native clay [in our hands] and we had our eyes closed. We weren't to look

at it. There was soft music playing, and it was silent, and we were just to create in our hands, just play with this dough in our hands and see what developed. And it was fascinating because I was shocked when I saw what I had, because it didn't feel like that at all. And what came for me, this symbol was a round ball, and I was struck by "What is a ball?" and what I realized some time later, that ball was so symbolic of my journey with Contemplative Outreach, because it represented my rolling back and forth between the Long Island group, Contemplative Outreach as it was growing, and the lake community. So at that point I started to become involved in all three of those units that were growing and coming together. And I was very active in all of them. That was really exciting. And Gail with Long Island, Long Island was growing then. We all took responsibility. We had groups,

and Nancy and I were the head of the introductory workshops. So we went out, scouting around for those, and provided the information for them.

Others did some things, and it was a great time. And then Gail went back to Contemplative Outreach, which was another piece of it at that time.

First of all, there was no mailing list. So now that we were doing things, we wanted some kind of a list of people that we should let know, and there was no mailing list. But Mary Mrozowski had bags and bags of little pieces of paper with names and addresses and telephone numbers on them, and I offered to put them together again. My organizational gifts.

And I said I would create a mailing list out of those, and I did. Every night after work, I came home and I sat at this table and with a typewriter -- at that time, no computers -- and created this mailing list. At the same time,

there were also no formats for teaching the prayer. We were all doing our own thing, and interjecting our own little experiences instead of being unified in what we were teaching, or to have something to look at. So Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, who's now the president of Contemplative Outreach, I used to go to her house. I had such a great relationship with Gail and Carl, and moved along with them, and they were always there. And I was always there whenever they were doing anything. It was a great, great time for me. And I would go to Gail's at night a couple of times a week, and we would have dinner. Or in the afternoon, we would work at her table on creating these formats, and then the person who used to type for her used to type them in between times, and it was so much fun. All these things that we were doing we were putting together in a format that is like the handbook

today. We created the first handbook of all the events that go on in Contemplative Outreach that were going on at that time. A lot of those formats are still the same. They haven't changed that much at all. With the work of the Spirit, we just listened. That was great. And then Contemplative Outreach began doing some wonderful things, too. They did a ten-day post intensive at Amarillo, Texas, in September of 1986. It was after I had begun, but I still wasn't at the community. That was an incredible experience for me and was the first time I met Pat Johnson and so many other people who were so involved. This was the first time I was really that involved with Father Thomas, too. I knew him, but I didn't know him that well.

[Speaker 1] And he went to all the retreats.

[Speaker 2] He did everything. He was the master of all the retreats, of the wisdom. He was making sure we got what we needed to get from his teachings, and also he was observing what was happening with all of us. It seemed to me that he had no idea how powerful all of this was for us.

Then there was an Issues Workshop in Snowmass. We were going all over the place, doing these larger events for people, and growing us all.

The leadership was just being grown and developed. It's hard to describe it.

[Speaker 1] Would you like to say a little something about your

involvement with the National Office in Butler, primarily with the format?

What did you learn from the clay experience? Could you explain more of

the setup you said there was? Over here was Long Island, over here was the

National Office, over here was something else. What did the people do after they made these figures? That was a marvelous moment in your life.

[Speaker 2] Yes, it was. And I still remember the symbols that some of the people made, how real they were, they were representing the role they took in Contemplative Outreach on Long Island. It's growth. So we made little symbols, and mine was a ball. As we were sharing what these symbols were with each other, we said what it meant to us, what we thought each person's symbol was saying, and that was where I had the experience of moving around. We were to take the symbol, whatever it was, and go up to this board on the floor, and put our symbol wherever we thought our work was going to be. I remember I wanted to put it by Mary and nobody was putting it by Mary. Everything about me was with Mary. The symbol was the

community, the lake community. I knew that's where my symbol wanted to go. It was this ball that I felt was about my rolling back and forth. In that moment I felt that if I made this commitment, putting this ball at the community, what did that mean about these other segments? Did that remove me from them, which I didn't want to be removed from? But I did. I got up and I still didn't know where I was going to go. I stood up and I went over and I plugged it down in this place. And I remember after the meeting, Carl said to me, "You are a gutsy woman." And I never quite knew what he meant by that, whether it was being part of whatever Mary was part of, or if it was going to that community life which was so unexplored and unknown to any of us. But I knew that that was the right thing for me to do. And also there were two people, Anne Mazza and Joan

Kovacs, both their symbols were a tree. And when they put them on this board, they planted them. I still remember it so well. They planted them so sturdily and firmly on that ground on Long Island, and that's who they really were. They served and were active in Long Island, totally committed to it for all the years that they were involved with it. And there was another person, Lenny. I can't remember her last name. Her symbol was a bird flying around the group, which we were all kind of like.

[Speaker 1] Durante. Wasn't it Durante?

[Speaker 2] Lenny Durante. Yeah. Lenny Durante. She was this bird flying.

Shortly after that, she got cancer and she died quite unexpectedly.

So this was an incredible process, and this process for me was the Holy Spirit working through another person. Their symbol was a coffin, and

that was a shock to all of us. and. I have never. I don't know if that person knew what it meant doing that, but it was death. It was symbolic of death.

And there was a death going on with all of us.

[Speaker 1] So you're planted in the community. So what happened after that for you?

[Speaker 2] So I was still part of the Long Island group. Almost once a month I would go on a weekend and loved being there, loved the life, and loved all the wonderful people I was meeting, and the prayer. I loved all the silence and prayer. At some point I knew it was getting harder and harder for me to leave on a Sunday evening. I really wanted to be there. I had mentioned it once to Mary, and Mary said, "This was Ball Rd., and they still

wanted to do some work and get clear themselves before they admitted any more people."

So it was May of '88. I quit my job without even knowing if they were going to take me or not. Actually I went there for six months and ended up staying til forever. And that was an incredible experience, too, with the community. We began doing retreats and workshops, and we had days of prayer. We did everything. We did all the cleaning, all the cooking, all the retreat work, everything, and the people who came had to do work, also.

When I went there to visit, I used to bring my little bucket with all my cleaning tools, because I like my own cleaning tools, not what they had.

[Speaker 3]

That community that you're talking about, that was Chrysalis House.

[Speaker 2] Yes, it was. So in August of '85, Mary left Long Island and became part of this newly-forming contemplative lay community, which was at West Cornwall, Connecticut, and it was a house that that someone gave us for two years, and actually a lot of work had to be done on it. The house was not in good shape, and Bob Bartell, one of the people who went there with Mary, Bob and Dave Frenette, Bob, especially, was a carpenter, and he did a lot of work and really fixed up that house. It was like a whole new place by the time Bob finished, and after they were there a couple of months, they began having deaths. The first time I went there was in December of 1985. Actually, it was on my birthday weekend, so I felt it was a real gift for me. And they had chickens, and Mary used to take care of the chickens. And you had to hear the stories Mary told about the chickens and

their [stuff], which was her job to clean. And I have this wonderful picture of her and me out by the chicken coop. She was cleaning it. And she had on this slicker and these boots. She was going to be there shortly. And it has such a wonderful energy around it, this wonderful, holy, prayerful energy.

And when we went there, we had to cook, those of us who went there on retreat. We had to clean and cook. And I remember one time I cooked.

Mary said to me, "Well, can't you cook lunch?" And I said, "I wasn't a cook."

I called out for stuff. I never cooked that much. And I said, "Well, I can make scrambled eggs, or an omelette, or something. She said, "OK." And this thing was so filled with butter. It was almost like I had this pan of butter and then just opened these eggs in it. But they were so gracious. They ate it. And I learned how to cook.

[Speaker 1] Who were the community at the time?

[Speaker 2] The community at that time was Mary and David Frenette, who

was rather young. Mary kept saying, "I can't wait for David to be 30." He

was still rather young, and Bob Bartel was probably in his late 20s, early 30s.

But Bob only stayed for a year after, so they had a two year lease that these

people said they could use the house for two years, and they were friends

of Contemplative Outreach. So the wife wanted to go to school. They

moved to another part of Connecticut, but then they wanted the house

back. After a year, they wanted to move back, and so the community had to

then look for another place, and Bob had left, and the lifestyle at the lay

community was incredible. It was a lot of prayer, a lot of silence, and then

the retreats, and the community did everything. People, when they'd come,

everybody would help out, but it was a really hard life. It was very busy. We used to get up at 6:00 in the morning to do an hour of Centering Prayer.

And then the day just went on and on. So they planned to leave the community. I don't know what time of the year it was, and they started looking for a new place, and they weren't able to find one.

[Speaker 1] And then they have a two year lease.

[Speaker 2] They had a two year lease, but after a year the owner wanted it back, so they had to move. They had to plan on moving and there was no place. They couldn't find a place. And it was interesting because there might have been, or should have been, questions about, "Well, is this supposed to continue then? Is God saying something to us?" I don't remember hearing that, but that would have been my question at the time.

So, again, this friend of the communities had a home in Greenport on Long Island and a summer home that was quite luxurious. Actually it was wonderful, and she invited the community, which was just Mary and David at that time, to live there until they found a place. So they were there about seven months, because the people who owned it then did want it back. They didn't want this to be an on ongoing arrangement. So Mary and David's work was now looking for a place, and so they were looking all over. They had no idea where to go, but to stay on the East Coast. Mary had no desire to go south or to the West Coast. So, the story goes that David was looking at the New York *Times* one Sunday, looking at all the places for rent, and this house on Ball Road in Warwick, New York was available to rent, so they connected with the man who owned it. He had

built the house. He was a contractor. Everything was beautiful, the wood, everything was incredible. And the one difficulty with it was that the rooms were upstairs. There were two rooms. One slept three, and one slept four, which was not what people who were doing contemplative prayer wanted to be. And people today are so fussy about having their own, me included, but it was fine. We just accommodated it. We stayed in silence. I was still just visiting as a retreatment. I used to try to go at least once a month, if I could.

[Speaker 1] You now were a member of the community full time.

[Speaker 2] And it was wonderful. I loved it.

[Speaker 1] You were still working at the time.

[Speaker 2] I was still working. This was '85, at the beginning of '86, so they were there until May of '86, or June. So it was about seven months later in the early spring of '87, they found the House on Ball Road, and they moved it in. It was just perfect. It was just wonderful for what they wanted. It was off the road, and it had trees, and a path you could go up and look over the whole thing. It was just beautiful, but they couldn't hold that many people. It was maybe about twelve was the most retreatants we could take, and that was sharing all those rooms. So they were there for a couple of years, and then it became apparent that, I guess when I went there was in '88 I went to Ball Road where I joined the community, and they were open to receiving me. And then after I was there, it became apparent that we needed more space for retreatants. They did not want to have to share so

much of the room, and in the work that we did, that was appropriate to let people have more space. So that was '87, and I went there in '88. And then in 1990, I think it was in 1991, it became apparent that we just needed more space. Mary Dwyer had come to live with us. Different people were coming in and out, and for a few months at a time sometimes. So we were again looking for a place, and I don't remember who found it, but there was this place on Belleville Lakes Road, also in Warwick. It was owned at that time by a group of Carmelite nuns from Pennsylvania somewhere. And they wanted to sell it and go back to their community. And maybe that's how they found out about it. And so Mary talked again to this great friend of theirs, and he agreed to buy the house because the nuns didn't want to rent it. They wanted someone to buy it, and they had it on the market for a

while. And I think they paid about \$500,000 for it, and the nuns had wanted a lot more, but Angela wasn't willing to pay anymore. And so they bought it for us to use, and the community paid all the expenses. He owned the house, but everything, even a new driveway, we put in. So then we began to really grow. There were more rooms for the community, more space. We had a whole area that was really just for the community, which was wonderful. We began doing more retreats. We had the nine month course, begun in 1990, I think it was in September. And that had just begun when we moved. It began in September, and we moved to Belleville Lakes Road in October of that same year. And so we were doing the nine month course, and we had all this wonderful space for it, and down stairs where people could stay. And it was a lovely, lovely place and a lovely chapel. And it was

just a wonderful space for us. So we really expanded and began doing all kinds of retreats and workshops, and we had the nine month course. We did a lot of other things. We had the days of prayer which were unstructured days where people used to come. They were wonderful, where you could go and just stay there for a couple of days, and enter totally into the community life, doing the work, and prayer, and we used to lead the prayer sometimes. It was just wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, taking us right into the whole experience, the contemplative learning.

[Speaker 1] So the core community at that time, besides you and David

[Frenette] and Mary [Mrozowski] was Mary Dwyer.

[Speaker 2] Mary Dwyer was there for two years, and others had come for six months or a year. But for that point of time, it was Mary [Mrozowski].

And so everything was going great. Everything was really going great at their community, and I think it was August we asked Thomas to meet with us. We wanted to have a meeting with Father Thomas because Mary had made a request that she do more work outside the community. She wanted to go out into the network, which, if I was in the network, I would want her out there too. But I was now in the community, with her in the community because she was a great wisdom figure. She offered so much and she was so much fun and just a wonderful, wonderful model of a true human person. Grounded. Wonderful. So she wanted to go more, and she was energized by the people out in the groups, out in the different areas. So we had this meeting with Father Thomas and after much discussion and prayer,

David and I decided that we would let her go, and that was exactly the words that we used. We will let her go.

[Speaker 1] Now she died in '93. This would have been when.

[Speaker 2] This was August of '93. We made the commitment to her to let her go. Little did we know that we weren't just letting her go for two weekends a month at Chrysalis House. We were letting her go forever. In October that same year, Mary died quite unexpectedly, quite suddenly. And again, everything was turned around. So what I remember so much at that time was my own mother was dying, and Mary was like my spiritual mother, and I didn't know who I was mourning. I was mourning Mary. I was mourning my mother, and then mourning the loss at Chrysalis. What were we going to do? So after Mary died, October 18th, 1993, David and I were

still at the Community House in Warwick, and it surprised me so much that people thought that because Mary died that we were going to close or we would not continue. Actually it never dawned on David and me that maybe we should think about closing or not continue, because we did, we decided to continue the work which Mary was part of, but we had gotten used to not having her there all the time anyway. So it was a little easier. Also, we had those people from the nine month course who became this service community for us, and they came and helped with our retreats. They cooked, and they helped serve, and they cleaned, and they did all the things that helped David and me to function as a community in the work and to continue the work. And so then the people who owned the house

on Belleville Lake Road all of a sudden decided that they wanted to sell the house, and this was a shock for us. It was like, "Oh, God!"

David had already left. He had been there for ten years. He was in a five year commitment that he had just finished, and his discernment was to leave, so that was in 1995. And then the following year, the people who owned the House on Belleville Lakes Road said that they had decided to sell it. They really had been so generous in buying it for us to use. They were friends. Their great friendship was with Mary. Mary was gone, and now David was gone. And here I was with the house and the community and everything else. And so they said that they wanted to sell it. So I had some wonderful help and guidance during that time, Mercedes Capetto, who was very active in the founding of Contemplative Outreach in Florida,

and also Sister Meg Funk from the Benedictine monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana were both so very helpful at the time. So Meg, when I told her that they were going, they said I could stay there for as long as I needed to, unless the house was sold. If they sold it, I would have to leave quickly, if necessary, depending on when the new owners wanted it. And so this was a little concern because it was a vague thing. I couldn't just get out in a moment's notice. I had all these programs in place, and people who were planning on making them. And I couldn't just leave them. So Sister Meg Funk suggested that I look at my work and come up with a date that worked for me and the people I was serving. And so I did. And we were doing the nine month course which ended in May. And so that was the date I set for the closure of Chrysalis House, at the end of May 1996. And at that

time, it was quite stressful for the community because none of us knew where we were going to go. One of the things I became clear about was that wherever I went, I wasn't taking community with me. I knew that I had community. I didn't want to be in a community any longer, and this was very upsetting to the people who were in community. So Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler came to us and did a process with us for a couple of months to help us to integrate the anger and all that was going on about closing Chrysalis House. In the meantime, during this time I had an invitation from Sisters whom I had known in West Virginia. They had a house, Saint Andrew's Retreat house in Walden, New York. They had no programs to put in it. And here they knew that I had these programs and no place to put them. And could we collaborate somehow? And I was like, "God, this is incredible. How

could all this be happening?" And so I went over to look at the house, and talk to the sisters, and agreed that at the end of May, when we closed, I would move everything into Saint Andrew's Retreat House, and the sisters were so generous because they moved all the furniture, everything from Bell Road right into the house and everything was set up. It was just wonderful. And so we began doing work right away. We had a ten day post-intensive almost immediately after we got there. We were doing all kinds of retreats right away at Saint Andrew's Retreat House in Walden, New York. We were doing all these wonderful programs at Saint Andrews Retreat House, and loving being there, and during this time, all of a sudden, I realized it wasn't really Chrysalis House anymore and it wasn't really Saint Andrew's work. And so that was the place that we became Contemplative

Outreach of Orange County, and I was named the coordinator for that. So that again put everything in a whole different perspective. First of all, my work wasn't basically the same as what coordinators were doing, because my work was all about retreats and planning these retreats all over, which were teaching Centering Prayer and everything, so that is what we've really begun to function as Contemplative Outreach of Orange County. So I was part of the Board of Directors and really connected with all the other coordinators around, and put our schedules together so that we could support a broader area. We formed a cluster group of all the different coordinators. Our programs really expanded. Again, the creative juices in me kept flowing, and also one of the things I had always recognized was whatever I needed was always what was created, and it really was always

created out of my need. So here, as I was growing, and deepening my contemplative lifestyle, I had other needs for support. The ones that we had been having weren't enough, anymore. So I began creating all these other incredible workshops, which Thomas was so helpful with, too. He was the hub around which I did everything, because people would come if he was the presenter. So the first thing I did when I got there was create a 21-day Centering Prayer retreat, which was an incredible, incredible experience. It was three one-week sessions. Thomas was one of the speakers. Cynthia Vorzel was one. Fr. Carl Arico did some. Gail did some, Bill Sheehan. It was always around Centering Prayer. But it was this lived-in experience. And each week, at the end of each week, they had an evening off that they could do anything they wanted. It was the experience of living a lay life in

the world as a contemplative. So I tried to bring in all the dimensions that would be going on in their lay lives. They had work to do. They had prayer time. They had meals to cook, and also friendships, and everything else going on. So it was a wonderful, wonderful experience, and they went on for maybe about four or five years, and then many of them made them a couple of times, because it was so enriching, so charging. And then I also had a 40-day for a formation for contemplative living. And that one guided itself, full of surprises. Sometimes Thomas was the center of that, for 40 days to really have his wisdom and teachings, along with everything else.

Well, lo and behold, it was supposed to start on a Friday, and the week before, Thomas got sick and he was not allowed to travel. And if ever there was a time that David and I showed the fruits of this whole journey, it was

when we got that news, because we were going to be part of it and do part of it. But the bulk of it was Thomas, and people were coming for Thomas. So it was a couple of days before. We didn't say anything. We just kept going, and the people came, and, much to their credit, most of the people were fine with it and just saw it. They were disappointed, but this is the way it is, whatever it's supposed to be is what it is.

So we had the 40-day experience, which David and I both agree we would never do again. It was incredible, but it might have been different if Thomas had been there, but it was a real deepening of living together. It brought out a lot of stuff in people that they weren't even aware of. It was a good experience. We had the nine month course we continued with. We've been doing that for 20 some odd years now, and that's always a great

formational experience. We had ten-day retreats, post-intensive and intensive in the summers. Coral did the intensives in July, and the post-intensives in August. A regular group was coming for different things all the time. People were committed to certain retreats, and it was great.

So life went on like that at Saint Andrew's, until 2006. The sisters told me that they were selling the house, and I thought, "Oh, here we go again." So I said to God at the time, "God, why are you always pulling the rug out from under me?" And this is what I heard in response: "Cathy, there is no luck. Mary died, David left, and the house is being sold. And that's all there is." That helped me in so many other circumstances. The rest of my life, with challenges, to ask that question, "What are the facts here? Not my story about what's happening, but what are the facts?" Because the facts I can

deal with. And I did. It was like an incredible awareness. And then, with the surprises, I just said, "Why are you always surprising me with these things?"

And this again is what I heard. "The only surprise is that God is so good to me and generous." This is what I heard. "The only surprise is that you are still surprised." And I thought, "Oh my God, isn't that incredible?" Because it was true. It had been true my whole life with God. And why was I even questioning any of it?

So, anyway, in 2006 we had to again start looking for another place, or make some decisions about what we were going to do. So there was this wonderful person, Kendell, who was living with us at the time, and she was there for the last three years, and so they wanted to leave. They thought we were going to continue the community, and I wasn't continuing the

community. So when I was at Saint Andrew's Retreat House, and the nuns were selling the house, there was no one else I had to think about but myself, and I had this wonderful five room stone cottage that was just incredible where I was living. So for me, I didn't want to let go of that. But I started to look for a place to put the retreats, because I knew that I wasn't going to find another retreat house. It was like, "Forget it." I had been to most of them. And they didn't want retreats or programs that were ongoing. What we had always had was the full use of whatever facility we were at, and nobody wanted to do that anymore. They had all kinds of other groups they had commitments to and everything. So Sister Peggy Murphy, who's now my co-coordinator, had mentioned Bethany Spirituality

Center in Highland Mills, New York, which was about fifteen minutes from where I lived.

When I left Saint Andrew's, first I had to look for a place for me to live, and I found a place in Cornwall in this wonderful senior development that I used to pass a lot when I was going for massages. So I went right over there. I thought, "Oh, this sounds great," and I have a wonderful apartment there with an attached garage, and everything I've ever wanted I have there. So I was living there, but I did not yet know what to do with the programs. So Peggy had suggested Bethany. And, as it turned out, when I went there to see the superior and talked to her about them, they too had just had a meeting and had decided that they had to close this part of the house, because they had no programs. And here I come again with all these

programs to a place that had a place but no programs. So it was a match made in heaven, and they were wonderful, wonderful to me, too. We started to do retreats there, and at Saint Andrew's. Towards the end of the 21-day retreat, I became reconnected with Cynthia Bourgeault, the Episcopal priest who's doing all these wonderful things within and outside of Contemplative Outreach. That was a great connection. When I went to Bethany, she was also doing these wisdom schools, which Bethany had places for, because they everything that was part of that experience for Cynthia was available at Bethany and had not been available at Saint Andrew's or any of the other places. So what began there was not only the programs I was already doing, but Cynthia then came in with her wisdom schools, which were an incredible, incredible gift within Contemplative

Outreach and also her following. It was a wonderful merging of the Contemplative Outreach people, who hadn't been exposed to someone like Cynthia and her teachings and content, her challenges. Her followers were amazed sometimes at how quiet we were, and not really looking so much for information, but formation. It was like it was an incredible coming together. I still do things with Cynthia, because Neil and Bethany closed. I'm the great closer in all of this. I close all these places I go to. But Cynthia moved on, and was doing things in other places, so I couldn't have the Wisdom School anymore because of Bethany closing. So she's doing it now in other places.

Then this brother, Jerry McCarthy, who works a lot with me, Theresa, Sonia, and I, had gone. Everybody was so good and kind with me, because

we would go to all these different places, trying to find out if we could have retreats. And one of the major ones was Cynthia's retreats, because she was making a commitment to me to do some of these that I had a place for them. The retreat house that we were going to had a lot of different groups going on at the same time, and we went to this one in Connecticut and it just was so inappropriate.

Brother Jerry McCarthy, one of our people in Contemplative Outreach, had suggested that we try this Saint Lawrence Friary in Beacon, New York. He said, "Some of the brothers had gone there for days of retreat, and they were very impressed with it. I have to tell you, my thought was, "I've been to every place. What could this offer that I haven't known about?" So Theresa and I decided -- we were coming home on 90 and 84

from Connecticut -- to stop there on the way and see what it was like. Oh my God, I was so thrilled I could not believe it. It was this wonderful house run by Franciscan Capuchins, and the grounds were lovely. And it was a priest, Father Jude, and this Mary Ratajkowski, who met with us and showed us around. The rooms were all private rooms, each with their own full bathroom. Not this little thing that you just went in, this full bathroom. Comfortable beds. The place was immaculate. Wonderful. Private dining room. We would have the cook the food. Everything was wonderful. And we said to Father Jude, "We want it. I'm going to go home and get all my retreat schedules, all that I have that I need, and I'll come back, and we'll settle the dates for everything. And we did. They had just made the decision to use this place for retreats. So they had fixed it up, and really it

just is a lovely, lovely place. So that's where I still am today, and I do the course there, and Cynthia is doing another retreat next year there. I'm doing fewer of the retreats now than I used to. There's more going on in other areas, other people are doing more. So the the network is still being served. I don't have the energy to put in that much anymore, although the Beacon Retreat House has conserved my energy, and I was always going from one place to the other, adjusting to all the different places and what their rules were. And this is a very loving, they all were loving and wonderfully wonderful places. But they call us the contemplatives. They're supposedly contemplatives, too. But they call us the contemplatives, because we're so quiet, and they're so respectful of our silence. So that's where we are now. That kind of brings that whole journey of Contemplative

Outreach. in the beginning, and then my journey through it with all the wonderful support and generosity of so many people, the groups that have helped so much during all the transitions, and followed in all of them.

So I have no idea what really is next, just doing what I'm doing right now. And again, I'm usually surprised. By what? By what God, all of a sudden, puts on my plate or puts before me. But it may just be a time to ask one question. The one I've had a lot recently over the recent years is, "What does it mean to retire as a contemplative? And what does it mean to age? How do you age contemplatively?" So I know what I think of all the stock answers, you just keep praying and you just keep doing what you're doing. And I do. But it seems as though for me, there must be something about contemplative aging, either what we need to give, or I don't know

what it is. Maybe that's part of it. And maybe it's just doing nothing. I like that part of it, just hanging out and doing not much of anything. And then I look at someone like Father Thomas, he's 91, and that doesn't help. So I don't know. I don't really know for myself what's next. I think I need to look at this for a minute.

So to bring all of this to some closure for myself and for those of you who have listened so occasionally, I can't imagine what my life would have been without Centering Prayer. I knew the first time I experienced it that it was what I'd been looking for all my life, and that has never changed. I'm more faithful and less faithful at different times, but, as part of the fruit of that prayer, it's not that rigid hanging on or doing of anything. My life now is prayer, even if I'm not formally praying, everything I want to do is for

God, even if I'm not saying that God knows that my relationship with God is more grounded, it's more mature. I think of God as a friend. Walking along, talking to each other, when things are going on in my life and I need to consent to something or get clear about something. It's always how I experience God, that God is right there with me all the time, and I know that. I never have to ask, "Where are you, God?" God is always there. I may leave at times, but God never leaves. God is always there. So. I don't know how to begin to say thank you to Father Thomas for his wonderful consent that empowered my consent. I mean, he was a monk and he did all these things that were so not what he was supposed to be doing, but that, following the spirit without question, was such a great gift for me. To know

that if he could consent, I can consent. And that without question, just to follow where the spirit is leading. What is the next thing on our plate?

And to all the other people, to Gail and Carl, the original Lama group, I was so impressed with them when I first heard about them that that group went off with Thomas before any of this happened, because he wanted to see what was going on with this Centering Prayer, and I think of them as the roots of my contemplative journey. They went off to the desert, and just created all of this and allowed the Spirit to free them from all the stuff that was blocking God's work. I can't tell you how much I appreciate them, and most of them are still within Contemplative Outreach offering their service in whatever way they're able to. so. And all the people who have worked with me, and served with me over the years, and loved me, and who have

allowed me to love them, sometimes people say to me, "Don't you get bored doing these retreats and things?" I just say, "Think about my life. It's all consists of people, all the time, who have a dedication and a commitment to learn more about God, to love God deeper, and to make more of a commitment to their spiritual journey. Imagine being around people like that all your life day in and day out," and that has been one of the greatest, greatest gifts and I still am grateful. I have all these wonderful friends, and friendships, and support in everything. It's been really great.

I just want to say this in closing: some years ago, I broke my hip, and when I was having surgery, I was outside on the stretcher waiting to go into the operating room. And of course, I was a little anxious. I could die in anesthesia. I wasn't afraid. I was just a little ... well, this could be the end.

And all of a sudden I heard someone down the end of the hall yell out, "OK, let's go!" And I just started to laugh, and I said to God, "OK, God, let's go."

And so that's the way it's been ever since. It's like, OK God. Let's go. And that's how I feel. And so I'm still letting go. And let's go. That's it.

So when Gail and I were doing these formats, for what wasn't even named Contemplative Outreach yet, but we knew that we needed to put something together to help people who were doing introductory workshops, in the evenings one day, workshops on weekends, and what did this mean? Were they all the same? Were they different? So we used to come together in prayer, looking for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to create what would work.

For instance, there were evenings, most of the prayer groups worked in the evening. So what was a typical Centering Prayer group? What did it look like? What were we experiencing in the network? It was not only from Long Island. Denver was also doing stuff, and there were other places where people were praying on their own. What was the format for a Centering Prayer group? So we realized that most groups did two twenty-minute Centering Prayer periods, did a contemplative walk, had a brief sharing on some scripture or something from one of Thomas's books that was attuned to the spiritual journey. And then the sharing was on that scripture or piece of their life that dealt with that, how it was transformed within the Centering Prayer, or whatever. And then we had one-day introductory workshops. So how much of the day did we want to spend in

prayer? How much for lunch? Did they bring their lunch? Did we provide lunch? So on Long Island at the time, when we had a Centering Prayer day, we cooked. We stopped that after a while. We used to cook the meal. We had the Centering Prayer to begin with. We made ourselves available as what we called "soul friends" at the time, where whatever they wanted to talk about, it wasn't just spiritual direction, or therapy, or anything like that. It had to do with Centering Prayer and what was happening in our lives right then. Those of us who had practiced longer were the mentors for that. Whoever was facilitating the retreat would be available for whatever people wanted to talk about. Usually on the one-day, there would be a conference on Centering Prayer, or review of the method or one of the other practices, or one of the other teachings, on thoughts, or whatever was part of an

introductory workshop. We established essentials of what the introductory workshop was to teach. I talked about the formation for Contemplative Outreach service, which was held in Beech Grove, which was established just to get the essentials together of what an introductory workshop was, what needed to be taught, what were the essentials? What we did was take Father Thomas's Open Mind, Open Heart, and cull from that what we thought were the essentials of the introductory workshop in Centering Prayer. At that point on Long Island we didn't have essentials. They were emerging, but they weren't yet put together. So we did a lot of prayer. One time we did two hours of prayer. Thomas said, "You just gotta kill them." But we didn't know what we didn't know, which was the impact of the prayer at that time. So we were developing those formats with Gail. We

were looking at all of them, what we had experienced, because she had been in different places than I, and we were comparing what we thought should be in with what we thought should come out, and created this handbook of how you do everything, and these formats for all these events, and began using them ourselves, so that we had something to go to when we were doing any kind of retreats. So the weekend retreat began on a Friday evening. We came together for supper, and it was done by the facilitators on Long Island. I realized at that time that Mary and Martha were not separate. I knew that was certain when I watched them, so here they were, part of the group. Mary was the prayer person and Martha was doing all the cooking and everything. They did it all. It was Mary and

Martha rolled into one. There was no separation. It was just wonderful to witness and to be part of.

So the weekend retreat started Friday evening. Saturday, we had a lot of prayer. We had conferences, we had soul friending, went to bed early.

The evenings were in silence, a lot of silence and solitude. And walking. We always had grounds they used at Long Island. At that time we had a retreat

house in Rockville Centre. The House of Prayer had nice grounds. It was

quiet. So we always had what we needed. That was amazing. We'd get an

idea, and whatever we needed was always there. The great trust of all of us,

in each other, and in the wisdom of the Spirit, and in those who were

leading us and evolving with us. And it was just an incredible, incredible

experience.

So the formats became eventually the handbook. We added to it as we had post-intensives and intensives that were longer and shorter, and so [we compiled] all the different samples of how this prayer could be out there and available, so that you didn't have a lot of questions and concerns. It was really genius, actually, really inspired. Everything had to be inspired to come out the way it did. We were still human, and we still had all our little things going on, but they were never the essential thing. It was always the work was always primary, the service, and we always got over whatever it was that was part of our process.

When I think of taking all that information from Thomas's book, and saying, "This is what it needs to be on thoughts, Thomas, not what you wrote, this is what we have agreed it's supposed to be." And we had to

present the work to Thomas the night before the presentation. And it was such a humbling experience. And he was so generous and was so grateful to all of us. It was just a wonderful example for us all.

As time went on in the process of educating people to Centering Prayer, there were all these audio tapes and videotapes that were developed. When I first was involved in going to the community for retreat weekends, before I joined the community, they used to read from Thomas's *Open Mind, Open Heart* on the weekends, and in March of '86 we had a ten-day intensive where Thomas did the Spiritual Journey videotapes. He gave the live conferences, and somebody took video of them. At some point, one of the people in Colorado agreed to finance Thomas creating those Spiritual Journey videotapes and made them available for sale. So

that was before I went to community. But it was in the early stages, because I bought a set when they were available, and I used to watch them all the time. I watched especially eight, nine, and ten, which were all about the false self system, and I learned so much and I was so encouraged. When I was doing workshops, if I had to give a conference, I would go to those tapes and listen to what Thomas said about those subjects, and immerse myself in them, so what I was presenting was what Thomas had presented on these tapes. They were incredible. And we began showing them at the different retreats, and then they broke them into parts, and they added on. When I first got them, there were seventeen, and they were wonderful to get to know Thomas, too. Videotape twelve was Bernie's story, Bernie O'Shea, who was a monk, one Thomas had been very hard on. It told

Bernie's story beautifully, but it told Thomas's story. Most of us would cry when we'd see that because of the effect it he had on Thomas. It just always said something. Everything on those tapes said something about how God was working. You couldn't watch them and not come away with something. I can. I have them on DVD's now, and still I would love to show them every week to a group. Maybe that's what I need to do. But they were incredible, and Carl did a lot of work with Iris watercolor [?]. Rico and Mary were part of it also, and Thomas. Thomas was like the theory behind everything, and Mary made it happen. Mary was the practical person, she's what brought it into life, and gave it life. And they were wonderful together. They were so wonderful together, their energy together, they were fine. She was fun. I always felt that she really brought out the humanity, because he really has

an incredible sense of humor. But he was always so stoic, but she brought him out, and it was just wonderful being part of it all. I'm so grateful to be part of it all, you know. It was great.