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Article published Oct 21, 2006

Centering prayer: Opening yourself to God's agenda

By Nancy McLaughlin
Staff Writer

WANT TO GO?

What: Centering Prayer Retreat featuring the Rev. Carl Arico of Contemplative Outreach Ltd., the organization founded by Thomas Keating

When: 5:30 p.m. Thursday, dinner with Arico, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church; full retreat, Thursday through Sunday, St. Francis Springs interfaith retreat in Stoneville

Cost: \$10 for dinner; prices begin at \$185 for retreat, including housing

Information: 275-0447 or randerson@triad.rr.com for dinner; (866) 797-0966 or www.4thdayjourney.org for retreat

After you've tried everything for fulfillment and failed, you might ask yourself, what's left?

"Like a person who leaves home and strikes out on their own and begins to wonder does anybody care?" said the Rev. Carl Arico, a diocesan priest. "People need a place to belong. ... People are longing for something, some place, some practice to belong to — something that gives meaning to their lives because they are not finding it outside the circle of religion and spirituality.

"They are trying to get in touch with a hunger deep down inside ... that's not being satisfied."

Arico, a protege of oft-quoted author and monk Thomas Keating, will be in Greensboro next week to share the practice of "centering prayer," which is described as a movement beyond conversations with God to communion with God. Keating founded the international ecumenical Contemplative Outreach Ltd. two decades ago as a way of sharing the practice of centering prayer. Arico is the non profit's outreach director.

"In any relationship that's going to grow ... there needs to be a time to talk, there needs to be a time to work things out together, there needs to be a time for affection and there needs to be a time to simply be with the one you love, without an agenda," Arico said. "Centering prayer is that last level of relationship. ... You simply rest in the power of God."

Arico's visit is part of a "stop, rest, refresh" spiritual retreat at the St. Francis Springs Prayer Center in Stoneville. He will also speak at a dinner at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church.

It would be easy to consider "centering prayer" a dressed-up term for meditation — if the word

weren't disconcerting to those who may see it as more New Age than retro-Christian.

"Centering prayer is a prayer of consent — consenting to God's presence and action in our lives," Arico said . "Read Matthew 6:6: '... but when you pray, go to your room, close the door and pray to your father who is unseen, and your father who sees what you do in private will reward you. In your prayers do not use a lot of words. ... Your father already knows what you need before you

ask.' "

The problem is , people often only pray to God; they don't listen to him.

"It gives us a space to have some quality time — opening ourselves to what's God's agenda in our lives instead of trying to convince God to follow our agenda," Arico said . "You look for nothing at all in the prayer. You are not looking to get higher or lower (emotionally). ... No, you don't manipulate the prayer, it's simply being in God's presence. How do I know anything is being accomplished? Your life begins to change outside the presence. Maybe you simply see things differently."

These "centering prayer" discussions typically draw an eclectic faith crowd. Arico sees a common denominator: "I think all people can identify with silence, quiet, peace, rest — and that's at the heart of all religions."

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