Centering Prayer Experience

Have you ever had a friend with whom you exchange long intense conversations as well as comfortable periods of silence in which you simply enjoy each other's presence? Meditation is the intense conversation. Contemplation is the ability to be with God and to know that God is being with you at the same time. In meditation, the mind is working and actively seeking to understand something. In contemplation, the mind is at rest, simply drinking in the moment. Centering prayer is one path to contemplation, for it helps us to quiet ourselves down to just listen and be with God.

- Choose a sacred word (or mantra) as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. A short one- or two-syllable phrase without strong emotional content works best. Possible choices might be: Abba, Jesus, Spirit, Wisdom, Peace, Home, or Shalom. Pick your own. There is nothing magical about this and no "best word." Use your intuition and choose a word.

- Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Keep your back straight, not slumped. Let your head remain free—leaning against the back of a chair or other back support is fine, but do not lean the head against anything. Remain reasonably comfortable, so as to maintain the position effortlessly and not be distracted by it. Your hands can be in a palms-open position as a sign of receptivity, or folded in your lap, or open and extended. You may also choose to lie flat on the floor with your arms resting beside you.

- Silently repeat in your mind and heart the word with which you have chosen to center yourself. The goal is to focus on the repetition of the word so that you are no longer paying attention to your thoughts or feelings. Sit (or lie) with a straight back and head free. Close your eyes and let go of what is going on around you.

- When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.