

## OCTOBER 7 MEETING ON "CREATING A THRIVING PATHWORK COMMUNITY"

In the Fall of 2012, we invited Sharon Balsama, spiritual director of the Philadelphia Pathwork, to talk to us about "creating a thriving Pathwork Community." She met with us in Manhattan on October 7. After a prayer, Sharon opened the talk by asking us what we meant by "thriving." The consensus response was something along the lines of "passionate and energized." Sharon expressed that she thinks of the Philadelphia region as "thriving" in that sense, although this doesn't mean that people are beating down their doors to participate in their programs. Sharon proceeded to share what works in Philadelphia, with the caveat that it might not necessarily work the same way in New York.

Sharon started by looking back at the condition of the Philadelphia region years ago. She noted that they had a lot of the same good programs as they do now, but the region wasn't thriving. In spite of a lot of efforts to plan things, intentions typically failed to manifest. Things would often fail to "gel." Just as individuals can't manifest fruitfulness without confronting inner splits, Sharon observed, Philadelphia wasn't thriving because people were trying to operate "over" a lot of anger and pain which wasn't being talked about and needed to be "unpacked." It took years, and it's still ongoing, but it has made a tremendous difference. Lorraine Marino ran the process all the way through.

Some of the guiding principles are that we don't emotionally "dump" on others. If I have a problem with you, I name it, I make time to do my work on it, and then, once I have some clarity, I come to you and communicate what's going on for me. There is still conflict in the region, but it's out in the open and being processed and communicated, and therefore the community is alive. Another aspect of this new way of being in relationship and community around conflict involves allocating an hour at the beginning of each meeting to name and address "beautiful problems." Whether or not the entire hour is used, the meeting flows smoothly and productively after this has been done.

After answering a question about the qualification requirements for helpers and teachers, Sharon moved on to the next phase of the talk, which had to do with how decisions are reached in Philadelphia. The first aspect Sharon explained was the consensus process. To make sure that there are no hidden, unexpressed disagreements which might come back to roost later, Philadelphia uses a "three-finger" voting system. One finger means "I approve;" two fingers means "I'm not enthusiastic but I don't feel a need to block this from happening;" and three fingers means "I can't go along with this." Whenever three fingers come up, it's time to revisit the issue until true consensus can be reached.

The second aspect of decision-making is a process for deciding who is the right person to do something, such as take on a responsibility or a position. The goal of the process is to find God's will, as opposed to just asking "who is called?" Key elements of the process are: Are you at neutral? Do you have a preferred answer? What are your reactions? If God said no, where could there be a blessing in that? If God said, yes, where could there be a blessing in that? Pray to know God's will. Label a chair with the responsibility or position, sit in it, and see what happens for you or comes to you.

The final phase of the talk was devoted to specifics of the Philadelphia program, and some financial and other administrative details. Sharon shared with us a number of documents explaining various aspects of the Philadelphia program. These documents evidence a tremendous amount of work, caring,

intelligence and professionalism, and can certainly serve as a foundation for top-quality programs in the New York region as well.

Throughout the talk, Sharon emphasized that Philadelphia isn't perfect, and that we might not come to all of the same decisions as they have. She was humble and gracious, and left us all with deep feelings of gratitude and hope.

*I(Sharon) included this summary so you can all witness that in the Philadelphia Pathwork Region we are trying our hardest to live the Pathwork concepts in conducting the business of the region and to give you examples of how we attempt to do that. Our intention is to keep the Region as healthy as possible and in to stay in alignment with our Pathwork beliefs.*

Many blessing in 2013.

Sharon Balsama