

The Enneagram and our Lenten Journey

Interview with Sandra Smith, M. Div.

The Enneagram is a powerful tool for personal, spiritual and professional development as we learn to “un-stick” ourselves from fixed and limiting patterns of our personality. Bringing awareness to our patterns reorders the energy and allows us to suspend established ways of seeing the world. Recently Ruth D. Anderson interviewed Sandra Smith, M.Div. about Sandra’s upcoming workshop on the Enneagram to be held at Holy Trinity.

Ruth: We at Holy Trinity are delighted that you will be offering a workshop on the Enneagram during the season of Lent. How does understanding our Enneagram type (or more about our personality) facilitate our Lenten journey?

Sandra: During Lent, a lot of people choose to deny themselves of something as a way to mark Lent. Actually the Enneagram is a great map we can use to better understand how we overuse our strengths and also how we tend to limit ourselves. The Enneagram can help us bring our lives into clearer, better balance. The Season of Lent is a meaningful time to explore this issue of balance in our lives.

R: How does knowing more about our ego or personality balance us?

S: The Enneagram gives us two great gifts. The first is that through the tool we have the ability to see ourselves more clearly. Secondly, the Enneagram gives us the ability to see others as they see themselves. Both gifts expand our hearts greatly and move us towards seeing ourselves and the world differently.

R: What do you think the Enneagram helps us *best* understand?

S: One huge gift that the Enneagram offers is that it helps us understand that we have three centers of intelligence and that each type has a very specific focus of attention. In my teaching, I help people access the intelligence of not only the head (our minds) but also of the heart and of the body. I ask people to respond to many questions with each center and we see how easy it is to access the center—and also how easy it is to be asleep in these centers. Also the Enneagram shows how each of the nine personality types focuses attention in a narrow manner and actually limits us in tremendous ways.

R: So if we understand our Enneagram we become less narrow?

S: Well, yes. Our fears bind us into a constricted way of being. Knowing our type helps us soften the fear and open the grip of the ego in our lives. We actually can miss our very lives if we are not aware of how our personality works.

R: What does the Enneagram have to do with our spiritual lives?

S: In many ways, the Enneagram helps us answer the question: “Am I fully available to myself (and to others) right now?” When the ego is in charge, we cannot possibly have a spiritual experience. We are closed or not available for Spirit. When we, through spiritual practices and Enneagram understanding, let go of some of the constriction of our ego, we become receptive to Divine Presence.

R: How do we know if we are open and soft and receptive or if we are operating out of “the ego way” which seems to be closed down and narrowly focused?

S: We have a saying in the Enneagram world: the ego is a great ally but a bad governor. In other words, the ego brings innate gifts and strengths (which the Enneagram points out to us) but also shows the limitations of our ego. When we are truly in the present moment, open to what is emerging right in the here and now, without trying to control what happens next, then we know that we are in that place of the truth of who we are. The Self that is present is very different from the Self that is reactive and automatic. Again, regarding the theme of balance, I'll be discussing this shift of "compulsion to compassion" throughout our time together in the workshop.

R: How do we get more of that Present Self?

S: That is exactly what we are going to explore at the Enneagram workshop. The Enneagram is a good map, as I said before, but knowing it with our minds is not enough. In other words, cognition never changed anything! We need spiritual practices to move from perceiving to receiving or from ego-identification to dis-identification. I will ask during the workshop: “Given your type, where is your greatest invitation to grow spiritually at this point in your life?” This exploration is the road to resurrection—when we make this shift.

Spiritual Reflections for the Nine Personality Types of the Enneagram— offered by Sandra Smith, M.Div.

At the threshold of what has been and what can be, these simple practices can help to loosen the grip of our type structure, providing us a bit more freedom to become more fully who we are.

Ones:

--Routinely stop before a task is done. This creates anxiety for the task-oriented One. Breathe through this. Rest in the *lack* of completed order.

--Create some “empty time” when spontaneity can arise or you can rest in the non-doing without the shadow of guilt.

Twos:

--Notice when you are using flattery excessively and with whom? What might be - your agenda with this person and why now?

--In your body, where would you locate worthiness? Go to that space and sense

worthiness. Use this as a resource when you notice yourself seeking approval.

Threes:

--When deciding to "act" ask yourself, "Am I doing this for recognition or because I want to?"

--Once a week, take the long way home from work, taking time to notice your surroundings.

Fours:

--Notice when your mind goes into a comparing state. In these moments, bring something to mind for which you are grateful.

-- Practice sensing or feeling a light-hearted heart. What is that like for you?

Fives:

-- Offer appreciation each day to two people.

-- Notice when you may be substituting information for emotion. Check in with yourself to see what you are feeling.

Sixes:

--Check in with your own wisdom when you notice yourself seeking the advice or opinion of another. Ask, "What would I do?" before polling others.

-- Spend some time each day in touch with the feelings you shut down in order to feel safe. How might allowing these feelings to be felt the moment they arise benefit you?

Sevens:

--Try eliminating a third of the "balls" you have in the air as you multitask. Don't fill the time with other "balls."

--Three times each day, slow down your activity and bring your body's energy to your midsection. Breathe in the belly.

Eights:

--To enable you to open to other options, ask yourself, "How is an all or nothing frame of mind influencing this moment?"

-- At the end of each day ask, "how was my heart affected today?"

Nines:

--Before vacations or weekend of leisure, plan ahead for those things you want to do. This helps you remember and you'll be less likely to merge with others agendas.

-- Journal at the end of the day about how you mattered to yourself and to others. Notice how it feels to matter, to be seen.