

WFWP Westchester, NY's Cornerstone for Happiness: Marriage & Family Seminar

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The Westchester, New York chapter of WFWP brought together about forty individuals and couples on Saturday, February 22nd, 2020, from 9:30 AM to 2 PM to introduce the Cornerstone for Happiness: Marriage and Family Seminar (find out more here). In light of the social distancing practices that were implemented only a few weeks later, such a gathering is a precious memory to share for a time in the future when normal life returns.

The Cornerstone for Happiness program was created specifically by the Women's Federation for World Peace for those interested in understanding and improving their relationships. One of WFWP's fundamental approaches to bringing greater peace is to empower ourselves to strengthen relationships and families through educational programs like this.

The morning began with a bagel and lox breakfast with coffee and a chance to mingle before getting started. Kathryn Ross, chairwoman of the WFWP Westchester chapter, gave an introduction to WFWP and showed a video presentation of its ongoing projects. This was followed by an introduction to Debby Gullery, who is an experienced marriage coach, relationship counselor, and author of the popular book *Small Steps to Bigger Love*.

Debby Gullery assisted in creating the curriculum and was the main presenter for this half-day seminar. Her expertise and insights into healing and relationships came shining through in the condensed three-part program:

1. The State of Our Unions
2. A New Way of Looking at Marriage
3. Can You Hear Me Now?

She explained the objectives for the day were to understand the importance of marriage, the challenges that exist, and -- by the end of the day -- take away a practical understanding of how to improve our relationships. As she presented interesting facts and statistics, it became overwhelmingly evident that marriages and families are the most crucial building block for peace in the world.

"If our goal is to improve our relationships, it is important to understand what is happening in our culture and personally in our everyday lives that create barriers in our relationships," she said. Mismatched understanding of commitment and unrealistic expectations for our relationships can cause them to fail.

The second session focused on how our vision of marriage and relationships determines how and what we create. From the book *Sacred Marriage* by Gary Thomas, the quote "What if God designed us to be holy

and not happy in marriage" gave us all something to think about. Viewing marriage as an opportunity to grow our heart and capacity to love is truly a new way to look at a relationship. A common expectation in marriages is that the spouse should make us feel happy. This lesson encouraged us to change ourselves by being responsible for our own happiness, developing good habits, and becoming a loving person.

Too often the effort to change others and not ourselves causes conflict and hurt feelings. One of the participants said, "Too bad I did not hear this years ago because it would have helped my marriage" and another remarked that "this has made me think of deeper ways I can grow."



This was an interactive seminar with time for group discussions and activities. After sharing lunch together, we had a chance to be entertained by award winning dancer, Rose Cho, who had us all dancing, laughing, and re-energized for the last lesson.

The final session "Can You Hear Me Now?" explored ways we can improve communication skills and the ability to have empathy for others. A simple test evaluating our listening skills opened the discussion about how we talk with one another. It was noted that sometimes we are not listening to those we love the most and are kinder to those we know the least. Debby emphasized the habits of listening without interrupting and the power of asking "Is there anything else?" This was referring to giving sincere attention and time in conversation.

There was a consensus that the heartfelt lessons presented in The Cornerstone for Happiness seminar enriched our perspectives and relationship skills that will enhance our ability to love for the rest of our life.

Below are some reflections by participants:

"I feel the program was a wonderful reminder of many of the things that are on my mind but I had pushed down during my business, especially listening." - Nancy

"Debby is an excellent speaker. The subject matter was pertinent to my life and communicated in a clear, entertaining, and interesting way. It made me consider many personal issues". - Linda

"Many subjects definitely hit home today. It's too bad I didn't know about this material before because it would have helped my first marriage to be better. I would absolutely want to bring my friends to this kind of program whether they were single or married so they could benefit from this advice." - Anonymous

"My husband and I greatly enjoyed the lessons and I liked how it was broken down into three parts which made it easy to follow. My husband and I feel committed to practice spiritual growth in our marriage." - Kim

"This program was a worthwhile event that introduced really positive listening skills and relationship advice for a healthy marriage." - Justin

"I enjoyed the program and it gave me real next steps to improve my relationship with my wife." - Isaac