

St. Bart's Dream Group, NYC

In the city that never sleeps some still find time to dream. Some even to belong to a dream group! Among the attractions and distractions of New York, a church-based dream group is steadily growing. To suit the city's lifestyle, our dream group meets for several weeks, breaks for a while, and then gathers again for another round. St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, our host church, is in the heart of Manhattan—it is open 24/7 and gives space to 18,000 meetings/events per year. One reason for our dream group's intermittent schedule is that people want the opportunity to experience a variety of St. Bart's offerings. Another reason is that our members live in a wide geographical area from Long Island to New Jersey and worship at different churches. It is the passion for dreams that brings us together!

Dreamwork at St. Bartholomew's began in 2003 with *The Art of Listening to Dreams*, a series of dream workshops that attracted twenty to thirty people. The series offered an introduction to dreams that included placing them in a Biblical and historical context, guidance for how to work with one's own dreams, and group dreamwork practice. Learning to do dreamwork is like learning to swim: after receiving a little theory, you have to jump in the water with an experienced coach encouraging you on to become a swimmer. And so our dream group formed. Four years later it continues on and attracts new members from the introductory workshops repeated each year.

Our dream group meetings begin with stillness, silence, and a short prayer. Then we move into the dreamwork process of telling the dream and making it our own as we work and “play” with the images, feelings, and metaphors to uncover layers of meaning. We enjoy the challenge of the strangeness of material that arises from the unconscious as we engage in the fun—and work—of unraveling it to uncover the hidden treasures. Then, finally, as in Biblical dream stories where the dreamer takes action based on the interpretation of the dream, each dreamer who has shared a dream is encouraged to take appropriate action to honor the dream—and to return next week to tell his or her tale.

Mining a dream for meaning with support from the group is never as daunting as when the dreamer first awakes with the “raw” dream. For the group, working with the dreams of others rewards group members with new insights for their own lives. With every meeting we realize once more that the gift of a dream is sent not only for the dreamer but for those with whom the dream is shared.

Annette Thies, founding member and leader of the St. Bart's Dream Group, is a spiritual director and teacher of prayer, dreamwork, and “things spiritual.” She enjoys pioneering dreamwork in the New York area, which is home, too, of Dr. Montague Ullman, her mentor and dreamwork leadership trainer.