

WHAT IS EfM AT ST. BART'S?

Education for Ministry (EfM) is a four-year distance learning certificate program in theological education based upon small-group study and practice. Since 1975, EfM has assisted participants to discover and nurture their call to Christian life, to encounter the breadth and depth of Christian tradition and bring it into conversation with their experiences of the world as they study, worship, and engage in theological reflection together. People commit to one year at a time.

EfM groups meet as seminars. Groups must have at least 6 participants and may not have more than 12. All four program years meet together, akin to a one room schoolhouse.

EfM is a program of The University of the South: Sewanee School of Theology. Sewanee develops and designs materials and curriculum, and trains and accredits "Mentors" who lead the groups.

These links are informative:

<https://efm.sewanee.edu/> <https://efm.sewanee.edu/about/>

<http://efm.sewanee.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EfM-Books-Handout-2021-2022-Rev5-2021-.pdf>

EfM at St. Bart's approaches EfM as an invitation. EfM invites us into a sacred space of time apart and community for:

- Learning and context: We study the Bible, Church doctrine and history, Christian theology and ethics and some of the Jewish tradition that is their foundation.
- Prayer: We pray together. We explore different prayer approaches and spiritual practices. For some, prayer is conversation with God.
- Exploring faith, beliefs and spirituality: We study teachings and voices primarily in the Christian tradition and reflect deeply upon what we personally hold as our own.
- Theological Reflection ("TR"): We develop skills to reflect theologically on scripture, culture, world events, personal experiences and more. TR serves to "connect the dots" between our faith/beliefs and choices/actions in everyday life, and to help us discern. Some call it "seeing through the eyes of faith" or "faith seeking understanding" per St. Augustine.
- Ministry: Every Christian is called to ministry at Baptism according to our gifts. EfM can help you determine what ministry means for you with your gifts, whether it be a particular type of work or service, "merely" a way of being in the world, finding a place where "your great gladness and the world's deep hunger meet," or _____ ?
- Seeking the answers for yourself!
- Transformation. EfM'ers dare to be changed.

Tell me more about the program

- **St. Bart's currently has one "face-to-face" group. We will be meeting weekly on Wednesday evenings, starting between September 15 and 29 through the end of May or into early June (tbd), from 6:00-8:30pm.** We began meeting exclusively via Zoom in March 2020 and did so through the end of the 2020-21 EfM year. We will not meet via Zoom unless this is necessary for health and safety.
- New EfM'ers must start with Year One of the program. You can take breaks, stopping and re-starting later. There's no penalty for not completing any year or all years. If you need to, you can continue the program by transfer to another group. If someone starts and determines "not for me" or "not now," partial refunds or credit may be available, depending on the timing.
- The curriculum for the EfM year has 36 lessons, typically one per week. As agreed by the group, we break for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and sometimes for either Ash Wednesday or during Holy Week. We double up lessons or, as agreed by the group, add an extra meeting to stay on track.
- **There are no papers or tests**, no penalty for not doing the week's "homework." In fact, people are warmly encouraged to come and participate even if they haven't done the week's work.

- **EfM is a program for laypeople. It is also a prerequisite for the Diaconate** in the Episcopal Diocese of New York, among many other dioceses.

What's expected of me?

- An open heart and open mind. Deep listening to others, oneself, and for God (or the Spirit, Jesus, voice or presence of your understanding...).
- Sincere seeking and honest inquiry.
- Confidentiality. What is shared in EfM stays in EfM.
- A commitment to the life and work of the group, presence and participation in weekly meetings. *Living into this commitment means being with us for at least 28-30 of the 36 weeks and making a good faith effort to do at least a goodly portion of the assignments most weeks.*

We meet for 2.5 hours on Wednesday evenings, including the break. Independent reading and reflection between meetings may require 2-4 hours per week, depending on the week, the person, and how deeply or broadly one wishes to go.

Perfection is not expected; that's God's business, not ours.

The group may decide to have one or more short "retreats" on a weekend. These would be optional, but encouraged.

Are there any requirements? What else do I need to know?

- ***EfM welcomes you as you are.*** You can join EfM without having been "churched" and without having done much (if any) organized study of the Bible or theology. You don't have to be Episcopalian, Anglican or Protestant, though most EfM'ers identify as such (or as Christians) by choice and/or background. Many EfM'ers have done significant Bible study or have some formal theological education. Many are just beginning to wrestle with Scripture, theology, and the notion of ministry.

People in an EfM group have different understandings of the Bible, theology, and what it means to be a Christian. We seek understanding and illumination, not consensus or conversion. We have conversation and dialogue, not negotiation or debate.

- If you do EfM for continuing education credits or for the Diaconate, greater attendance is required.
- ***Fees*** There is a \$375 annual tuition fee to cover the costs of all the year's texts (other than your own Bible) and Sewanee's administration. Reduced fees and partial scholarships may be available to some for whom the fee poses a barrier. All payment and registration must be done online.

More than Bible Study

- The EfM program for Years One and Two centers on the Bible, and all four EfM Years are steeped in the Word. But EfM is more than Bible study. EfM members must be prepared to engage their hearts as well as their minds. Along the way, people often choose to share personal insights, feelings and experiences in confidence within the community of the group, as a natural part of theological reflection and seeking personal application.
- The readings are only "half" of EfM. The greater half is taking the journey together, and over time transforming as a group into a community. This happens in conversation and prayer, in sharing our stories, our faiths, thoughts, doubts, concerns and questions. It happens by honoring where we are similar and where we are different. It happens through regular presence and participation. The more you put into EfM, the more you get out of it.

Understanding EfM and whether it's right for you is best done through conversation. Please contact EfM Mentor Liza Page Nelson at lnelson@stbarts.org to enter into that conversation.