

## What is EfM?

Education for Ministry (EfM) is a distance learning certificate program in theological education based upon small-group study and practice. EfM participants meet weekly in small mentored groups that provide a framework for study, prayer and theological reflection. The work of EfM deepens the connection between people's faith and their lives; it assists them to discover and nurture their call to service, to put their faith into action.

EfM is a four-year curriculum, but people commit for only one year at a time. Each of the four program years is 36-weeks long, typically from early September into early June. EfM groups meet as seminars of 6 to 12 participants from all program years.

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. EfM groups operate in nearly every diocese of The Episcopal Church and online, with participants from around the country and the globe. Since its inception in 1975, more than 100,000 people have participated in this life-changing program.

<https://theology.sewanee.edu/education-for-ministry/about/>

<https://theology.sewanee.edu/files/resources/efm-books-handout-2021-2025-2.pdf>

### ***EfM at St. Bart's is an invitation into sacred space, time 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.
- ***Exploration of faith, beliefs and spirituality:*** We study different perspectives, primarily in the Christian tradition, and we 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 in personal discernment. Some call it "seeing through the eyes of faith" or "faith seeking understanding" per St. Augustine.
- ***Translating faith into action for good in the world:*** Christians are called to serve the world, called to "ministry" according to our gifts. The work of 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 \_\_\_\_\_ ?
- ***Asking questions and seeking answers for yourself!***
- ***Transformation.*** EfM'ers dare to imagine, grow, and even to be changed.

### ***Tell me more***

- St. Bart's currently has one group that meets weekly *in person* on Wednesdays from 6:00-8:30pm. We may meet one week a month via Zoom, and more often if necessary for health and safety. We start after Labor Day and end by early June. We break as the group agrees for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and sometimes either Ash Wednesday or Holy Week.
- New EfM'ers must start with Year One. 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.
- **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 is EfM? (continued)

### ***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. If you do EfM for continuing education credits or the Diaconate, greater attendance is required.*

In addition to the weekly evening meetings, independent reading and reflection (homework) 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 does it cost?***

- ***EfM welcomes you as you are.*** You don't have to be "churched" or to have done much (or 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 God, 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.***

- ***Fees*** There is a \$325 annual tuition fee to cover the program costs and EfM study guide. Reduced program fees and partial scholarships may be available to some for whom the fee poses a barrier.

Participants are responsible for purchasing their own program texts and Bible. Based on *current* Amazon prices, *new* course books *over the entire four years* would cost approximately \$245 (Kindle) to \$350 (paperback). The cost for any individual year's books at current prices is highest in Year One, \$75 (Kindle) to \$100 (paperback). Used books are less expensive. The cost does not include a Bible, of which many translations are available to EfM'ers for free online.

### ***More than Bible Study***

- The EfM program for Years One and Two centers on the Bible, and all four Years are steeped in the Word. But EfM is more than Bible study. EfM'ers must be prepared to engage their hearts as well as their minds. People often choose to share personal insights, feelings, and experiences in confidence within the group.
- The readings are only "half" of EfM. The other half is taking the journey together, and over time transforming into a community. This happens in conversation and prayer, in sharing our stories, thoughts, doubts, concerns, questions and insights. 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](mailto:lnelson@stbarts.org) to enter into that conversation.**