

EfM in the Diocese of Western MA

Questions and Answers

More information:

<https://www.diocesewma.org/spiritualformation/education-for-ministry/>

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What Is EfM?

EfM is “Education for Ministry”, an adult program of Scripture study, church history and theological reflection and education. EfM is “Theological Education At a Distance”.

At a Distance ... distance from What?

EfM is a program created and administered by the School of Theology at the University of the South (Sewanee). EfM is Theological Education by Extension.

Oh ... So This Is Not Just a Diocese of Western MA Program?

No, EfM seminars are found in most Episcopal Dioceses in the United States, and indeed there are seminars ongoing around the world. The Diocese of Western MA is a sponsoring diocese of EfM, and there are six EfM seminar groups throughout our diocese.

Is it taught by professors or is it a video presentation?

No. An EfM seminar group is led by mentors who are group facilitators, not teachers. There is no video component to EfM.

Where does the material presented come from?

Theological textbooks and other relevant works are selected by EfM staff at Sewanee. EfM also provides a “Reading and Reflection Guide” which outlines the lessons each week and provides additional resources.

Is EfM the same as seminary?

No. EfM is not a substitute for a seminary education.

Who teaches the classes?

Classes are led, not taught, by EfM mentors. The mentors simply facilitate the discussions and theological reflections as well as handling the administrative details of the group.

Who are the mentors?

Mentors are members of our congregations—lay or ordained, who have completed mentor training. All EfM mentors (even priests) must receive mentor training from the EfM program, either at Sewanee, or at mentor training sessions held throughout the world. They must receive training every eighteen months to remain certified as EfM mentors. Most are also graduates of EfM.

How is the content of the seminar courses determined?

The EfM program (Sewanee) provides each student with one or more textbooks and the “Reading and Reflection Guide”. The “Reading and Reflection Guide” contains reading assignments and other material for each lesson, one for each week. Participants read the assigned lesson each week and discuss and reflect on what they have read at the seminar. The mentor’s job is to facilitate that discussion and reflection, not to teach the material.

So, EfM isn’t just a Bible study?

Although part of the program does involve reading the Bible and discussing it, EfM is really not a Bible study. About half of the time in the seminar each week is spent discussing the weekly reading assignment from the textbooks. Year 1’s reading covers the Old Testament; Year 2 covers the New Testament; Year 3 covers Church History; and Year 4 covers Theology, Ethics, and Non-Christian Faith Traditions.

Wait, this is a 4 year program?

Only if one chooses for it to be. There are four years of curricula, but a participant is only expected to commit to one year at a time. By the way, a “year” is really about nine months. More on this below.

You said “about half” the time was spent on the reading. What’s the other half?

The other half of each seminar meeting is spent in a variety of activities, primarily something called Theological Reflection.

What is “Theological Reflection”?

It is a way to learn how to think theologically. It is a way to learn to see God’s presence in one’s everyday life, in places one might never expect. Theological reflection can be a deeply moving spiritual experience.

Theological Reflection is really the heart of EfM. Although the weekly reading assignments are academic and intellectual, Theological Reflection is experiential. The EfM program has developed a number of techniques to help seminar participants learn to “do” Theological Reflection and to learn to think theologically. The mentor’s primary responsibility is to guide and encourage this process. Most of the mentor’s training is devoted to learning how to facilitate Theological Reflection.

Theological Reflection sounds like it could touch on personal issues?

Yes, it can. EfM has a few rules to deal with this.

1. Participants are asked not to bring personal issues to the group that are still open issues for them and are not resolved. EfM is not group therapy.
2. All participants covenant with each other at the beginning of the year that everything, and that means EVERYTHING, which is discussed in an EfM seminar meeting stays within the group and is not discussed outside the group.
3. Participants are only asked to share as little or as much as they are comfortable with. The mentors work very hard to ensure no one feels pressured to share anything they are not comfortable discussing.

What about the “four years”? Just what is the expected time commitment?

Each year consists of 36 lessons, one per week for approximately nine months. As mentioned above, a participant commits to one year at a time. During that year, each participant is encouraged to do the reading each week, and is expected to attend seminars willing to participate. However, participants are also encouraged to come on those weeks when getting the reading done was just not possible. There is much to be gleaned from the discussions even if one had no time to prepare.

Will everybody be starting in Year 1 this fall?

No. Most groups have students in all four years. We even have some students who are re-taking EfM because of the new curriculum adopted two years ago.

Are there separate sections for each year?

No. EfM is designed to work with students in different years studying together. Much of the material is common to all students, regardless of what year they are in.

How Much Time Should I Expect to Spend Each Week?

Each seminar meeting will last approximately 2 ½ hours. The mentors are responsible for ensuring that sessions begin and end on time.

Homework assignments require on average about an hour per week. Some students spend less and some spend more. The material is so rich you could easily spend a lot more. The assignments during the first two years tend to take more time as you are reading from the Bible as well as the text. The reading for years 3 and 4 is mostly confined to reading the text and can be completed in less time.

Are there any other commitments other than time?

Yes, a financial one. The annual fee (paid to Sewanee) is \$375.00 per participant per year which includes all materials. We realize this is also a significant commitment.

We are determined, however, that the fee should not serve as a barrier to those who would otherwise be able to benefit from this program. The diocese has limited funding to assist those who have financial need. You are encouraged to explore funding that might be available through your parish. If you have need and would like to apply for a scholarship from the Diocese, please have a conversation with your mentor or Rector.

Anything else?

Yes, you will need a Bible. We recommend an Oxford Annotated New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), but any bible will do. The fee pays for all the other materials used in the seminar, including the textbooks.

Why should I do this?

EfM can change your life. More importantly, it will deepen and enrich your ministry. That's what it's all about ... Education For Ministry.

The Education for Ministry (EfM) program can provide you with the education to enrich and empower your ministry. EfM holds before us that the foundation for bringing Christ to the world lies in a Church empowered by an active theologically articulate laity.

Now I'm Thoroughly Intimidated

Don't be. You don't need to be a scholar, or to even to have ever attended any Bible study. EfM will take you wherever you are. The only prerequisite is a desire to learn and to serve.