



**Report to the 223th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia
Education for Ministry in the Diocese of Virginia**

By Jane Dowrick

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EfM is a theological education-by-extension program for laity, and includes both individual and group work in weekly seminars under the guidance of trained mentors. The four-year program of study includes the Old Testament; the New Testament; Church History; and Theology, Ethics, and Interfaith Relations. We are grateful for the financial support from the Diocese of Virginia, through which EfM participants enjoy a reduced enrollment fee. For the 2016/16 EfM year, there are 202 EfM participants enrolled in 23 EfM groups, led by 39 trained EfM mentors. Compared with last year, this is a net decrease of two groups and a net increase of 38 group participants.

In July, a training hosted by our Diocese was held at Roslyn Conference Center in Richmond for 51 EfM mentors from Virginia and beyond. In addition to four basic “Foundations of Seminar Life” training sessions, we offered formation training in “Spirituality” and “Vocation – Ministry in Daily Life.” EfM mentors are required to attend a training every 18 months. Training events must be authorized by Sewanee, which trains and provides trainers for the event. Our Virginia EfM training event is one of the largest in the US. The next training will be July 20-22, 2017 at Roslyn. At the training we enjoyed a visit with Rev. Deacon Edward W. Jones, Secretary for the Diocese, who brought greetings from Bishop Shannon and expressed thanks for the EfM program on behalf of the Diocese of Virginia.

Also in July, \$1,306 in scholarships were awarded to support a portion of tuition fees for 5 EfM participants in our diocese, and one individual attending the Diocese of Virginia mentor training. Funding for the scholarships came from two sources: \$832 in dues paid to the University of the South - Sewanee by EfM alums from the Diocese of Virginia, and \$474 of surplus income from the 2015 EfM mentor training.

The EfM program curriculum, materials, and reading selections are directed by the University of the South – Sewanee. EfM was founded in 1975 and is now in its 41st year. The program was significantly updated in 2013 and rollout is now complete with the issue of the “Reading and Reflection Guide, Volume D: Living into the Journey with God.” Themes for volumes A, B and C are, respectively, “Living Faithfully in Your World,” “Living Faithfully in a Multicultural World,” and “Living as Spiritually Mature Christians.” Volumes A through D will continue to be read on a four-year cycle. Each volume guides EfM participants through their assigned readings and helps them learn how to think reflect theologically and to use various systematic theology methods. Sewanee will continue to evaluate and update the contents of the Reading and Reflection Guides, and of the assigned readings that accompany the Guides. Each year, Sewanee selects two “interlude” books that participants in all four years of EfM read together; 2016/17 interlude books are “Transformed Lives: Making Sense of Atonement Today” by Cynthia S.W. Crysdale, and “Care for Creation: a Franciscan spirituality of the earth” by Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner, and Pamela Wood.

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Here is a sampling from several EfM groups, to tell the story of what EfM is, and does, in our diocese.

From Christ Church, Middlesex: Our reading and discussion of "Jesus and the Disinherited", by Howard Thurman had a great impact on the women in the group. Our group sponsored an individual for Christmas through the local Department of Social Services. Also, some women in the group reached out to the parish as a whole for two activities – we sponsored a yard sale to raise funds for the Cryer Center, an umbrella entity that houses and facilitates several local groups – Hands Across Middlesex, the local food bank and Habitat for Humanity, and a week of working on two habitat houses that were nearing completion. Parishioners, led by several members of the group, painted the interior of one house, helped install sheet rock and baseboard on another, and cleaned up and hauled away construction debris from both houses, which were constructed on adjacent lots. The parish also participated in the "pounding" – provided pantry items for the new owners, and Father Stuart led the house blessing and dedication. This year, we have changed our meeting time to participate in Father Stuart's mid-week Eucharist on Wednesdays mornings, and find that moving directly from that brief, very reflective service to our class session adds a deep spiritual dimension to our studies. Also, half of the class and a couple of EfM grads attended Fall Camp as a group this year. We are planning to sponsor one or more persons through Social Services this Christmas as well. We are also planning a field trip for a labyrinth walk.

St. Matthew's Sterling has formed it's first EfM group which began meeting in October with six year one, one year three and a graduate. We are excited to embark on this journey together and hope to grow our group next year.

From St. James's, Richmond, on the right is a collect developed by the EfM group at the close of their year:

