



Reading and Reflection Guide A: Living Faithfully in Your World

**Opening Session
Unit One: Spiritual Autobiography and Listening
and
Resources**

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Education for Ministry (EfM) program is a four-year study and group reflection process for the formation of Christian ministry through the development of knowledge, attitude, skill, and identity as Christians. Published texts and essays provide the primary knowledge content in the study of the Christian tradition.

The first year studies the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). The second year offers a study of the New Testament. Year Three provides study of Christian (Church) history. Theology, ethics, and interfaith encounter constitute study in the fourth year.

Texts for Each Year

- **Year One:** *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* by John J. Collins. *The Holy Bible*, Old Testament and Apocrypha .
- **Year Two:** *Introducing the New Testament* by Mark Allan Powell. *The Holy Bible*, New Testament.
- **Year Three:** *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* by Diarmaid MacCulloch.
- **Year Four:** *Theology for a Troubled Believer* by Diogenes Allen. *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* by Timothy F. Sedgwick. *My Neighbor's Faith* edited by Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley.

Note: The most recent Oxford Annotated edition of New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended, but any translation may be used as long as it includes the Apocrypha. Paraphrased Bibles are not recommended for study.

Reading and Reflection Guide

A *Reading and Reflection Guide* provides weekly reading assignments, reflection questions, and additional supportive resources for the group.

- The entire group uses the same *Guide* each year Volume A, B, C, or D. Each volume has a particular focus: Volume A, "Living Faithfully in Our World," works with the contexts of a person's life; Volume B builds on "Living Faithfully in an Intercultural World"; Volumes C and D explore "Christian Maturity" and "Our Journey into God," respectively.
- Each volume contains **Part One**, the reading and reflection assignments, and **Part Two**, supporting materials, such as methods of spiritual autobiography and theological reflection.
- Five primary units in each volume have six sessions each.
- Two interlude units in each volume have two sessions each.
- An organization session at the beginning and a closing session at the end bring the total to thirty-six sessions in a year.

Focus of the Reading and Reflection Guide Units

The first session of each primary unit is either an essay or other material for all in the group to read to help set the stage for the focus of the unit:

- **Unit One**—identity and meaning (individual, corporate, and historical);

- **Unit Two**—theological reflection as a life skill; orientation to attitudes to prayer, worship, and spirituality;
- **First Interlude**—the authority of the Bible, praying with the Bible;;
- **Unit Three**—spirituality, prayer, and worship;
- **Unit Four**—integrating behavior and belief into a congruency that supports faithful living;
- **Second Interlude**—ministry and the priesthood of all believers ;
- **Unit Five**—vocation: hearing the call and passion of our lives in relation to God.

Introduction

Reading and Reflection Guide Volume A, "Living Faithfully in Your World," attends to the different worlds (contexts) in which each person lives. These worlds have distinctive qualities and features that distinguish one from another.

Family life, especially the family of origin, provides a primary contextual reality. Work presents another context, while the world of play, recreation, and entertainment make up yet another sphere. The physical world including our body constitutes another powerful world. Over time these worlds change and morph into significantly different contexts, yet past events, people, and values endure even when they have faded into the past.

Once a person recognizes the various worlds she or he inhabits, faithful living can be explored. It is important to begin an examination of faith issues in our worlds by clarifying the difference between faith and belief. Urban T. Holmes and John Westerhoff, in a remarkable book called *Christian Believing*, made the distinction between faith and belief in the following way:

It is important to distinguish between *faith* and *belief*. Religious faith is an attribute of personhood. As long as we have records of humanity we have records of religious faith. Faith, deeply personal, dynamic, and ultimate, has always been present among all peoples at all times in history.

Faith—the word appears two hundred and thirty-three times in the Authorized Version of the Bible (belief appears only once)—is best understood as fidelity, as trusting obedience. Faith implies a deliberate and positive existential involvement; it precedes belief. The word for "belief" in Latin is *opinio*. "To believe" is *opinor, opinari*—that is, to have an opinion or to make an intellectual assertion.

Credo should never have been translated as "belief." The only reason it was so translated is that in classical theology, faith and belief were once considered synonymous. In any case, *credo* literally means "I set my heart." To have religious faith—*credo*—is to pledge allegiance, to hold dear, to prize, to love intimately, to give our loyalty, to commit our lives.

Faith can be and indeed must be expressed in words and ideas. *Beliefs are intellectual expressions of a people's faith*. But beliefs are *not* faith. Traditionally, theology has said that seekers ask two basic questions: First, "Is there a God?" —a question which demands a simple "yes" or "no" answer; *faith* is the affirmative response. Second, "What is God?" —a question of *belief* whose answer is complex, diverse, and inadequate.

Faith is like falling in love. But suppose you are the father of an adolescent daughter, with a typical, built-in suspicion of all her suitors. Your daughter tells you that she is "in love" with a man, but you want more than that. You ask: "Tell us what he is like." What you are asking for is a statement of belief.¹

In the coming weeks, our work will move through five integrated units. Each has a purpose and builds on the work done in the prior unit(s). Unit One, "Spiritual Autobiographies and Listening," focuses on reflecting on experience from the standpoint of a variety of worlds (contexts). Its purpose is to provide the resources needed to create a spiritual autobiography using contextual lenses. In addition, as

¹ Urban T. Holmes and John Westerhoff, *Christian Believing* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) , 16.

individual spiritual autobiographies are shared, this unit explores listening as a fundamental skill for ministry. Unit Two, “Theological Reflection as a Life Skill,” lays the foundation for developing another fundamental skill for ministry, reflecting from a theological standpoint on all of one’s life. This unit provides the models and methods that EfM uses to integrate experience with the Christian heritage. Unit Three, “Spirituality, Prayer, and Worship,” encourages prayer and worship as spiritual disciplines and explores how spirituality sustains and supports a life of faith. Unit Four, “Building Your Theology,” provides resources for the intentional examination and construction of a personal theology through the integration of belief, behavior, and doctrine. Unit Five, “Vocation,” reflects on vocation as lived in daily life. This unit offers a vocational development model for use in discerning and responding to God’s call.

In Volume A, the first interlude unit, between Units Two and Three, assigns reading for the group in Christopher Bryan’s *And God Spoke*, which offers a perspective on how Anglican Christians approach the Bible. The second interlude unit, between Units Four and Five, assigns reading for the group in L. William Countryman’s *Living on the Border of the Holy*, which considers ministry in the context of the priesthood of all believers.

The year promises to be challenging, exciting, frustrating, encouraging, and sometimes perhaps even disturbing. The work is done together in a reflecting community of colleagues committed to helping one another know better what it means to live as an adult Christian in our worlds.