

Backstory Preaching Preaching Among Friends

A Practical, Spiritual, Online Course
for Deacons and Lay Preachers
for the Diocese of Massachusetts, Fall, 2026



FAQ's for Participants

Backstory Preaching
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Frequently Asked Questions: PAF

Thank you for your interest in joining Preaching Among Friends, offered by Backstory Preaching (BsP), an online, ecumenical ministry for lay and ordained preachers.

Below are answers to the most frequently asked questions about Preaching Among Friends (PAF).

Additionally, you are invited to attend an online information session by registering through a link below.

We'll cover the information in this document in more detail. Potential Participants and Curious Clergy are welcome to attend!

The sessions will be recorded and provided to your judicatory contact to share.

Information Sessions

Participants will receive all the details, including the dates, the time required for homework between sessions, and what you will learn over the seven weeks so they can discern whether this course is right for them. While attendance is not required to participate, our experience is that those who attend are more engaged during the course.

- June 28, 7-8:00 PM ET: [Zoom registration](#)
- July 26, 7-8:00 PM ET: [Zoom registration](#)

What will I receive from the course?

By the end of the course the successful participant will:

- claim their voice as a beloved child of God who was asked to preach
- apply biblical exegesis to sermon prep
- determine a sermon prep schedule that is realistic and faithful, and doesn't overwhelm their personal lives
- practice a spiritual approach through Lectio Divina for sermon prep that brings them closer to God
- always know what to do next for each step of their sermon prep, from the initial prayer through revisions and sermon review
- craft sermons they believe with one clear message of Good News they can't wait to share with their church friends and family
- upon completion of the course (and with the sponsorship of lay leader's parish priest and completion of Diocesan Safe Church requirements) lay leaders will be Licensed Lay Preachers by the Diocese of Massachusetts

How do I register for Preaching Among Friends?

Parishes and clergy may register participants by emailing Joe Viola, the Diocese of Massachusetts's Administrator for Discipleship and Leadership Development, at jviola@diomass.org

How much is the tuition?

Tuition is \$475 per participant, plus optionally, \$65.00 for a sermon appraisal by a BsP Mentor.

The Diocese of MA will offer a 50% scholarship for a total of \$270 to be paid by each DioMass participant.

What are the dates and times of the course?

The course is seven weeks (including orientation), running Sunday evenings, September 20th (orientation) - November 5, 2026.

Start-to-Finish week (November 1-5) is when participants craft a sermon in real time from start to finish. The final day they preach and appraise one another's sermons in small group breakout rooms.

Each session is 90 minutes long, from 7-8:30 PM ET:

- September 20: Orientation
- September 27: Session 1
- October 4 : Session 2
- October 11: Session 3
- October 18: Session 4
- October 25: Session 5
- November 1: Start-to-Finish, Day 1
- November 2: Start-to-Finish, Day 2
- November 3: Start-to-Finish, Day 3
- November 4: Start-to-Finish, Day 4
- November 5: Start-to-Finish, Day 5: Preach and Appraise in Small Groups

What are the course expectations and requirements?

In addition to the live sessions, participants can expect two-three hours per week of homework through videos, reading, and online chat discussions.

All course materials will be provided at no additional cost.

All sessions will be recorded and made available so you can review or watch them if you miss a session. We strongly suggest missing no more than two sessions. **Participants seeking licensure as a Licensed Lay Preacher in the Diocese of MA must not miss more than 2 sessions and must make up all missed material.**

During Start-to-Finish week (the final week of the course), it's particularly important to attend Days 1 & 4 (Sunday and Thursday) of Start-to-Finish week.



What technology is needed to take this course?

This is an entirely online course. Participants who are getting used to some technology will need to devote extra time to learning platforms that support online learning.

The cohort leader will guide participants to learn the course site, but participants must be able to:

- access a computer with high speed internet (Mobile devices can work but are cumbersome and usually lead to increased frustration. They don't have the capabilities of a computer.)
- download and upload pdf and Word files
- click links
- join a Zoom room, mute microphones, and accept the invitation to join a breakout room
- type in dialogue boxes
- check spam and trash folders for email (and ideally, safe-list incoming messages from Backstory Preaching)

If you need additional technology support, please talk with your parish leader to determine best way forward to support your learning.



What is the course overview?

Week One: Who Says You Can Preach?

Goal

- The preachers will build on their relationship with God to trust they are loved, so that they authentically preach God's love as the source of their authority.

Week Two: Reading the Text

Goal

- The preachers will practice Lectio with the text to see Scripture with a “beginner's mind,” so that they discern the theology of the sermon; that is, who God is in the text.

Week Three: Studying the Text

Goal

- The preachers will practice Meditatio so that they are able to connect the world of the text to the world of their listeners.

Week Four: Discerning a Word, Part 1

Goal

- The preachers will practice Oratio to apply BsP's “Heart of the Message” to discern one clear message of Good News.

Week Five: Discerning a Word, Part 2

Goal

- The preachers will continue to practice Oratio and apply sermon forms to their Heart of the Message to craft one clear message of Good News.

Week Six: Crafting a Sermon in Real Time

Goal

- The preachers will practice the course concepts to craft a sermon in real time over four days and preach on the fifth.

Am I qualified? I don't feel I know the Bible enough to preach or to take a preaching class...

Totally normal! The great thing is that preachers often learn more about the Bible through the process of preparing to preach.

Preaching Among Friends is designed to give practical tools and tips to dive into the Scriptures and understand them more deeply as you prepare your message. It's not about knowing everything up front—it's about learning how to study and communicate what you discover.

We do expect you to know how to find the books of the Bible, follow footnotes, and understand that the books of the Bible have different authors and were written over thousands of years in multiple locations, and always for a specific audience.

What if I get to the end of the course and discover I don't want to preach?

That's okay! Part of the learning process is figuring out if preaching is something you feel called to do.

By engaging in the course and doing the work, you'll have the chance to discern that for yourself.

Have more questions?

Please reach out to Lisa Cressman by email:
lisa@backstorypreaching.com.

Thank you again for your interest, and blessings in your discernment!