

# GETTING STARTED



**UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES**

*Written by John Thornhill SM  
Designed and produced by Patrick Lim*

**THE EMMAUS SERIES**



Questions Catholics ask on their journey of Faith



**John Thornhill** is a Marist Father with an international reputation as a writer and lecturer in theology. He was a member of the International Theological Commission (1980-1985), appointed by Pope John Paul II. For several years he was a member of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II). In recent years he has been giving lectures to parish audiences throughout Australia and in neighbouring countries. From 2002 to 2005 he has worked in collaboration with Patrick Lim, a Diocesan Priest in the Archdiocese of Perth, to record and produce his lectures in digital formats. The outcome of this project is "The Emmaus Series".

**Patrick Lim**, a priest of the Archdiocese of Perth, was born in Singapore. Before undertaking studies at St Paul's National Seminary for late vocations (Kensington, NSW), he was trained as an artist, taught art, and later worked as an interior designer and decorator. He has also been a freelance photographer. He was hospital chaplain for 4 years at the Repatriation Hospital while assistant at Nedlands and Subiaco parishes. He has been a parish priest since 1991. He has for twelve years been the Webmaster of the Archdiocese of Perth. He has also developed the website for 'The Emmaus Series' which makes available John Thornhill's Sunday reflections. In 2000 he obtained a MTh degree at Notre Dame University Fremantle, WA. At present he is the Parish Priest of Hilton in the Archdiocese of Perth.



### *A word from the Presenter*

*"I feel more than ever duty bound to point to the [Second Vatican] Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning."*

*(John Paul II, 6 January 2001)*

It is understandable that many Catholics are uncertain how to react to the upheaval and change the Church is experiencing today. This series of reflections is designed to help them find their balance. The talks set out to do this in two ways.

Firstly, they show how today's best theology can deepen and enrich our understanding of the main truths of our Catholic faith.

Secondly, they provide the material for discussions which will give parish and school groups the common understanding and shared vision they will need in the decades which lie ahead when – because of the diminishing number of clergy – they find themselves responsible for local Church communities.

Discussions of the basic truths of faith carried out in the right spirit – an open and generous spirit, motivated by a genuine love of the Church as the bearer of God's Good News to the world - can help form the kind of community the Church will need in the challenging times which we are going to face before too long.

*John Thornhill sm*

## The purpose of 'UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES' booklets

Many of those who have commented on the series have praised the accessible language in which the themes of a renewed faith are presented. The makers of the series are aware, however, that the typical parish group may find it difficult to assimilate, in one sitting, the contents of many of our presentations.

The booklets accompanying the DVDs aim to overcome this problem in two ways:

- ◆ By dividing the contents of our presentations into units suitable for group sessions.
- ◆ By helping groups to enter into an **ADULT LEARNING PROCESS** that can make the interaction of the group a source of enlightenment and personal enrichment for all concerned.  
*(This approach, if properly carried out, does not require the assistance of an expert leader.)*

## How can **THE EMMAUS SERIES** benefit today's Catholic community?

**THE EMMAUS SERIES** is designed to help people who seek a more mature grasp of our Catholic faith.

By itself, **THE EMMAUS SERIES** can provide faith formation for rank and file Catholics. It can also be used as a follow-up to more basic programs of evangelisation – such as **ALPHA** and **CaFE**.

The booklets do not put restrictions on those viewing the presentations. Some may like to view each DVD in one sitting, selecting appropriate readings and questions from the booklets.

Groups can use their creativity by introducing songs etc. appropriate for the theme of the presentation.

## WAYS OF USING THE SERIES

- ◆ People who want a user-friendly introduction to key themes of the faith, and those who have some theological formation and want a better understanding of the vision of Vatican Council II, can make use of these booklets, as they view the presentations of the series. *(A written record of personal responses to the questions given in the booklet, of key insights gained, and of personal reflections arising from the presentations will help make this approach more profitable.)*
- ◆ It is envisaged that most people who view the presentations of **THE EMMAUS SERIES** will do so in groups. *(groups belonging to parish communities seeking faith development and a shared vision of renewal; teachers following in-service programs; students taking up the study of theology; groups belonging to Church organisations and movements who wish to clarify together the journey of faith they share in)*
- ◆ Sometimes, large groups *(of up to 40 people)* have made use of the series. Groups of this kind can join together for a common opening and closure and for the **READINGS** provided in the booklet. They should break up into small groups *(about 8)* for the **SHARINGS**. Refreshments before and after the session helps make the interaction and community building of such groups more profitable.
- ◆ Some groups may prefer to **OMIT THE READINGS**, if it is judged that participants would not find them helpful. This is a decision that should be made by those organising the viewing, taking account of the background and sensibilities of those who are going to take part.

## WHAT IS THE ADULT LEARNING APPROACH RECOMMENDED?

Understandably, most teachers and lecturers adopt the 'class room' style of presentation – in which the teacher passes on material to a group of learners. This form of teaching, it is obvious, has an essential place in all education. But as more and more mature age students join educational programs, it is recognised that the form of instruction we have described can be complemented by a more participative form of education.

This sharing will only be effective, however, if those taking part are helped to avoid the pitfalls that can make group discussions an unpleasant and frustrating experience.

The great benefit to be derived from an interchange within the group is a sharing in **THE RICHES OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND ATTITUDES** that are to be found in every group – if only they can find expression. Everything depends upon the quality of **SYMPATHETIC LISTENING** achieved by the group, as participants share their reactions to questions that are raised.

**SYMPATHETIC LISTENING** is essential, if our adult learning experience is to be profitable. Here are some of the characteristics of **SYMPATHETIC LISTENING**:

- ◆ It is a listening with the heart as well as the head; it involves a grateful awareness that others in the group will often be sharing a precious personal experience.
- ◆ It respects all that is shared as confidential to the group.
- ◆ Knowing that many people are embarrassed to share their personal point of view, it expects participants to share as much or as little as they are comfortable with.

- ◆ It ensures that each person has the opportunity to share, before others speak for a second time.
- ◆ It never debates or contests what has been shared. Rather, it seeks to appreciate the concerns behind views that may seem strange.

## THE FORMAT OF THE SESSIONS

The format that is suggested, to help participants benefit from the presentations of **THE EMMAUS SERIES**, is simple and uniform for all sessions:

### Introductory reading

- ◆ An introductory Reading on the theme to be discussed.

### Sharing

- ◆ A Buzz Session in which groups share their responses to set questions that open up the topic.  
*(This sharing is entered into in the spirit of the Adult Learning Style that has been described.)*

### Viewing

- ◆ Viewing of Emmaus Series material.

### Reactions

- ◆ A Buzz Session in which participants share their immediate reactions to the recorded presentation *(commenting on what has struck them as enlightening, inspiring or even puzzling)*

### A second reading

- ◆ A Reading that is related to the theme of the recorded presentation.

### A final reflective sharing.

- ◆ This final sharing of personal responses to a couple of set questions should be seen as the most important phase of the session, in which it is essential to enter generously into the Adult Learning Style that has been described. It may begin with a brief period of silent reflection, followed by two stages:
  1. An informal Buzz Session in which each participant is able to express their response to each question – questions should be discussed separately.
  2. The sharing is brought to a conclusion, with each participant expressing, in a few words, what – in view of all that has been discussed in the session – is their personal response to each question.

## MAKING THE INTERACTION WORK

The role of the **Coordinator**, or **Facilitator**, is important for the success of the process. This role is concerned with **process** *(ensuring that the process already described is followed)*; it is not concerned with the **content of the sharing** – which the Facilitator listens to respectfully and generously with the rest of the group. It belongs to the

Facilitator to prepare for the sessions, arranging for readers who are well prepared, and identifying beforehand the recorded material to be used in the session.

It is important that all participants have an opportunity to speak when the moment of simple sharing takes place. Going around the group in turn is a practical way of making sure this happens. If some participants choose to make no comment on the question raised, however, their freedom should be respected. Contributions should be to the point; but participants should feel free to share all that is important to them.

*(Participants who are aware that they can 'go on and on' should make sure that they are not spoiling things. Sometimes they may need a gentle reminder.)*

The **READINGS** can contribute significantly to the group sharing. It is important, therefore, that readers are carefully chosen beforehand, and that they are able to prepare well. In some sessions **alternative readings** are provided. It belongs to the Coordinator, in collaboration with the reader for the session, to make a choice of the reading to be used.

Often, the greatest benefit from sharing will come later, between the sessions, when those who have been good listeners ponder the responses they have heard – particularly those that surprised them.

## **USING THE SERIES FOR PARTICULAR GROUPS**

Our presentations can be used, for instance, in the 'programs' that have become customary in Lent and Advent. **THE EMMAUS SERIES** provides an abundance of material for such 'programs' taking up particular themes. Here are some suggestions.

### **For a parish program of Basic Evangelisation (For example, as a follow-up to ALPHA or CaFE):**

- ◆ Good News for our World
- ◆ Jesus Christ Today
- ◆ Why the Cross?
- ◆ Do We Need the Church?
- ◆ Do this in Memory of Me
- ◆ Beyond Death: What Can We Hope for?

### **For a program fostering a greater appreciation of Life as a Member of the Church:**

- ◆ Do We Need the Church?
- ◆ The Community of the Lord's Disciples
- ◆ The Liturgy as the Centre of our Faith Life
- ◆ How is Church Ministry Changing?
- ◆ Vatican II: The First Council of Evangelisation

### **For a program fostering Growth in Personal Faith**

- ◆ Discovering an Australian Spirituality
- ◆ Can Prayer be a Satisfying Experience?
- ◆ Conscience in Catholic Teaching
- ◆ The Sacrament of Forgiveness
- ◆ Stages of Faith Experience

### **For a program during Advent**

- ◆ Mary's Place in our Faith
- ◆ Jesus Christ Today
- ◆ The Community of the Lord's Disciples
- ◆ Making Good Sense of the Scriptures

Needless to say, parishes and other communities can make up programs related to particular needs and concerns – Recollection Days for particular groups; Formation Days for Acolytes, Special Ministers and Readers; an on-going RCIA process etc.

Those involved in Recollection Days and Retreats can select presentations suited to the individuals or groups concerned.

**If all human groups have a wealth of personal experience and attitudes to share, the sharing of a group united in their Christian faith can give expression to the life they share in Christ's Spirit.**

**Such a group should be open to the blessings that come from a sharing of the journey of faith with fellow believers.**

## **A KEY TO COMMUNITY BUILDING**

If groups follow successfully the process we are suggesting, those taking part will find that they come to appreciate qualities of others in the group they did not recognise before. This brings a growth in trust and genuine community. For this reason, maintaining the same group membership for the sessions of a particular program (*in Lent and Advent, for instance*) can be important.

# **THE EMMAUS SERIES**

## **Basic themes of Evangelisation**

- ◆ Good News for our World
- ◆ Jesus Christ Today
- ◆ Why the Cross?
- ◆ Do this in memory of Me
- ◆ Mary's place in our Faith

## **Life in the Church**

- ◆ The Community of the Lord's Disciples
- ◆ Do we need the Church?
- ◆ The Liturgy as the centre of our Faith life
- ◆ Making good sense of the Scriptures
- ◆ How is Church Ministry changing?

## **Living the Faith**

- ◆ Can Prayer be a satisfying experience?
- ◆ Conscience in Catholic teaching
- ◆ The Sacrament of Forgiveness
- ◆ Discovering an Australian Spirituality
- ◆ Stages of Faith experience

## **Other themes**

- ◆ The Creed: Statement of our Faith
- ◆ A fresh look at 'Original Sin' (Not Available yet)
- ◆ Christian Faith in today's world
- ◆ Vatican II: The first Council of Evangelisation
- ◆ The Sacraments of Initiation
- ◆ Beyond Death: what can we hope for?

**Published by**

**THE EMMAUS SERIES**

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