

*Encounters with Jesus
in the Gospels*



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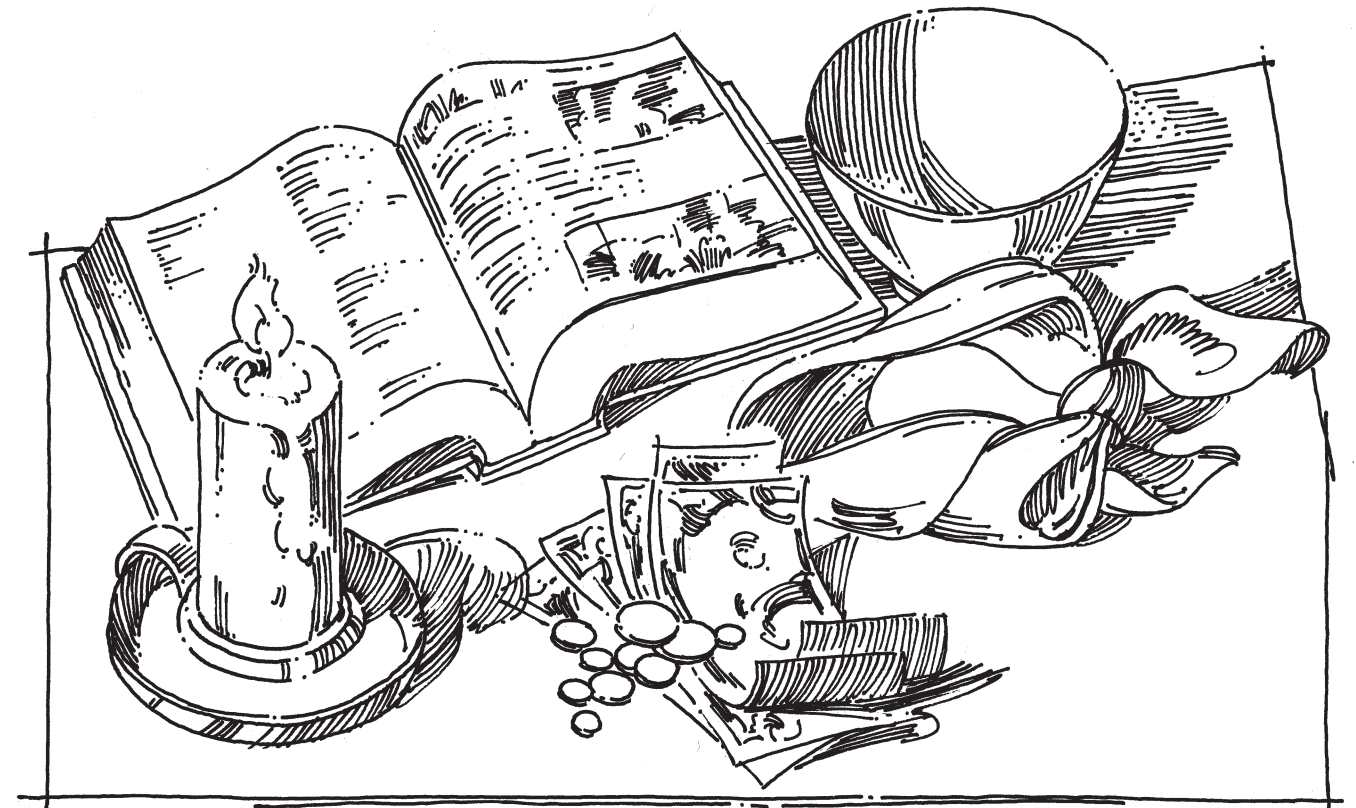
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2 Cor. 4:7, NRSV)

Jesus is the treasure of the Gospels. Each Gospel story radiates his loving presence. He burned with a desire to set people free and give joy to anyone who came his way. Throughout the Gospels Jesus invites people to journey with him, to get to know him, to see what he sees and share what he has. *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* offers young people a chance to respond to this invitation. It provides them with

a unique opportunity to receive and ponder the extraordinary treasure that is Jesus the Christ.

This opportunity comes in the breaking open of three Gospel stories: the man born blind (John 9:1–41), the woman at the well (John 4:1–42), and the rich man (Mark 10:17–31). These stories were chosen because of their ability to reach the heart of a young person's experience. Because of Jesus, the man born blind was able to rise above the wounds caused by lifelong rejection. Jesus revealed his heart to the woman at the well, an outcast lost in a sea of broken relationships. And for the rich man who felt restless and unfulfilled despite his monetary success, Jesus pinpointed the one thing he really needed—a deeper, more authentic spiritual life.

Throughout the course the Gospel stories are proclaimed in all their power and are pondered in prayer. Because the original Gospel writers and their readers were people of another culture and another time, the stories also need to be studied from their original context. To be able to do this successfully, the young people should have completed the Horizons Program's core course on the Scriptures, *The Bible: Power and Promise*, before taking *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. The core course teaches the contextualist method for interpreting and studying the Scriptures. By helping the young people apply the contextualist method to the three stories in this minicourse, you can lead them to discover the many layers of meaning in each story, some of which might otherwise remain obscure to them.

Young people who have not taken the core course can also participate effectively in and benefit from this minicourse. Information on the literary form and cultural context is provided for each story to help you guide the young people to a proper understanding and interpretation of the stories. You are not expected to be an expert in the Scriptures; adequate information is available so that you can lead the study part of the course effectively.

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels is intended to be taught as three weekly 2-hour sessions presented in consecutive weeks. Extended breaks between sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. The activities are structured with a group of about ten participants in mind, but the course will also work with a larger group or a group as small as three.

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels allows the young people to enter into three Gospel stories experientially, intellectually, and prayerfully. Each session begins with a simulation related to one of those stories. The participants experience being blind in the first session, being thirsty in the second session, and being burdened in the final session. The simulation is followed by a proclamation of the Gospel story, the primary means through which the young people encounter Jesus. Various activities then prompt the participants to raise questions about the story and search for answers. Each session closes with a prayer experience designed to help them connect the message of the story with their own life.

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels strikes a comfortable balance between using intellectual tools and opening up the mind, heart, and imagination to the mysterious, transforming power of Jesus. It is more about raising honest questions and responsibly following where they lead than it is about receiving

precise or complete answers. It is an invitation to you and the young people to seek Jesus together, to be fellow journeyers into the Gospels.

The journey into the Gospels leads to a profound sense of Jesus' nurturing, compassionate love as experienced by the blind man, the woman at the well, and the rich man. The journey also leads to an encounter with radical demands in the story of the rich man. In calling the rich man to be stripped of his wealth, Jesus "looked steadily at him and he was filled with love for him" (Mark 10:21). Only when the young people discover themselves held in God's loving gaze will they ever really hear the call to follow Jesus. Ultimately, as the rich man found, the cost of following Jesus is dwarfed by the heart's desire for union with him. If *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* leaves the young people with even a taste of such desire, its purpose has been accomplished.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

Most older adolescents are at a rather comfortable stage of development. They have a sense of their identity, their limits, and their talents, and have probably gained a sense of their autonomy. They have made some important choices, and have been given a measure of responsibility at home and at school. They have begun to raise questions about the important things in life. They have developed some close friendships, and many of them have fallen in love. They are busy and occupied with the tasks of daily life. Some of them experience a high degree of stress.

By the time they are in their junior or senior year of high school, almost all young people have developed some sense of their capacity for sinfulness, and with it some appreciation for the need to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. They may be in touch with their vulnerability as well as their desire to be known, accepted, and cherished for who they are. Many have a growing desire to work toward personal change so that they can be more loving and lovable people. In short, older adolescents are moving rapidly toward adulthood, with a firm grasp still on childhood.

The young people who choose to participate in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* may already see

the Gospels as something of a treasure and have a relationship with Jesus that they wish to nurture and develop. The idea of meeting Jesus in an even deeper way through this course is likely to be quite appealing to them. The time for stillness, pondering, and silence offered by this course can remind them of how valuable and life-giving prayer and quiet reflection can be. This reminder is a gift they may carry with them throughout their life.

The culture that these young people live in neither encourages nor tolerates unanswerable questions. Instead, it teaches that one can find immediate answers to any question by consulting an authority or a web site. *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* gives the young people a chance to voice their deepest questions, to ponder them, to wait patiently while an answer unfolds with the help of an unseen God. Each of the three Gospel stories in this course brings them face-to-face with a Jesus who sees through to their heart, recognizing and responding to their unique struggle and potential. Jesus saw the three protagonists of the stories as they were, and gently challenged them in their weaknesses, inspiring them to be the best they could be. His gentleness, sensitivity, unconditional acceptance, and compassion addressed the deepest hungers of the blind man, the woman at the well, and the rich man. So too does Jesus speak to the deepest needs of the young people, bringing them life and joy in abundance.

The Theology of This Course

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels is based on the belief that Jesus is as powerful and present in the Gospels whenever they are proclaimed as he was two thousand years ago. What Jesus taught was as countercultural then as it is now: that the sighted are blind and the blind are sighted; that those who are shunned will be embraced; that selling everything can make a person rich; that the impossible is possible.

The world teaches us to claim a measure of invincibility and perfect "eyesight." It scorns any admission of weakness or vulnerability. The story of the man born blind teaches that we must recognize and admit our own blindness before we can really see with the eyes of a true disciple of Christ.

The world also teaches us that all our thirsts can and should be fully satisfied immediately. Its message is that we are to draw from our own well and maintain our own inner supply of refreshment. The

story of the woman at the well teaches that we must value our thirsts for what they can teach us about our deepest needs. It also teaches that we cannot satisfy our most profound thirsts by ourselves. We need other people, and we need God. The challenge is to wait for the truly satisfying drink that Jesus offers, rather than desperately downing beverages that fail to quench our thirsts.

The world teaches that the best security is found in material wealth and possessions. Of the three Gospel stories explored in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*, the one about the rich man is probably the hardest for young people, as well as adults, to hear. The challenge to cling to nothing more than Jesus is severe, especially in a materialistic culture such as ours.

Hearing the truth of the Gospels and responding accordingly is an enormous challenge. Jesus leads us into suffering and even into death with him. The kind of intimacy Jesus offers is not to be underestimated or taken lightly. What Jesus asks he asks out of love. Having passed through death with him, we will find ourselves in the ultimate intimacy of the Resurrection.

A Note About Scriptural Interpretation

Christians believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God. By this we mean that it is a vehicle God uses to reveal truth to us. To receive the word God intends to speak to us, we need to understand what kind of vehicle the Bible is and how to use it. Biblical scholars help us understand the origin and nature of scriptural writings. Their work helps us learn to appreciate the literary techniques, poetry, color, language, and symbolism of the Scriptures as we attempt to discover the original intent and cultural context of the writer. This method of scriptural study is known as the contextualist approach. It is the starting point for the study of the three stories in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*.

In the twentieth century, Christians have become more aware that the Gospels are not accurate historical accounts of Jesus' earthly activities. Rather, they are creative, personal expressions of faith in the Risen Jesus. We must read the Gospel stories with a searching heart, using the resources at our disposal, trusting God to teach us what we need to learn, and remembering that the loving power of God's word is freely offered to everyone.

The contextualist approach to scriptural interpretation was introduced in the Horizons Program's core

course on the Scriptures, *The Bible: Power and Promise*. That course quotes the article “What Scripture Says . . . and Doesn’t Say,” by Margaret Nutting Ralph, which is summarized here for your reference:

The Bible is a library of books written by various authors, each of whom lived in a particular culture during a specific historical time period. Each author wrote with a certain purpose in mind. Discovering the author’s original intent is critical to knowing how to read and interpret the Bible.

The first step in understanding what a particular Bible passage is about is to recognize what kind of writing it is, or its literary form. The Bible is filled with various literary forms: poetry, debate, parable, discourse, and so forth. Recognizing the literary form used by the author gives a sense of the author’s original intent. To see that the Book of Job is a debate is to see that its author wished to show the true meaning of suffering by presenting two opposing arguments.

The second step is to understand the cultural context in which the author was writing. Cultural context refers to the prevailing presumptions, customs, and biases of the people living in a particular time period. For example, the cultural context of the writings of Paul included a belief that women were inferior to men. By contrast, the culture we now live in holds that neither men nor women should be considered inferior and that everyone should be on an equal footing. Each scriptural passage is rooted in a revelation from God that is eternally true, but the application of that truth may be relevant only to the original culture addressed.

The third step is to understand that the Bible is part of a larger process of revelation. As a faith community, the church grows continually in its understanding of God’s word and how to apply that understanding to daily life. The Bible was written over two thousand years ago. Therefore, its authors worked with initial insights and beginning understandings. These insights and understandings develop and deepen over time. When reading a scriptural passage, we need to recognize that we are reading an early insight and consider what has been learned since its writing.

Finally, with all these steps completed, what is most important of all is approaching the Scriptures in a prayerful way. This means that when we read them, we must begin by asking God’s spirit to open up our mind and our heart to help us hear the truth that God wants us to receive. If the meaning we derive from a given passage helps us to grow stronger in faith and in love, we can be confident that we have touched on the truth.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as “the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers” (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to *be* “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels invites young people to deepen their relationship with Jesus by experiencing and exploring three Gospel stories that profoundly connect with their own life. The course also challenges young people to continue to recognize the personal messages of the Scriptures so that God’s words of hope, challenge, and promise are fulfilled in the world through them.

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing Yourself

Listed below are the basic things you need to do to prepare to teach *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. You may want to do these well in advance of the first session to allow adequate time for other preparation steps.

- Read through the entire course to get a sense of its plan and progression. Become familiar with the processes so that you can carry them out skillfully.
- Read all three Gospel stories and the section on the Scriptures, numbers 101 to 141, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Review at least the introduction to the Horizons Program’s core course on the Scriptures, *The Bible: Power and Promise*.

A course such as this one depends as much on your personal willingness to wrestle with the stories as it does on your readiness to lead the activities. Consider taking some time to prepare yourself spiritually in the following ways:

- During the week before each session, prayerfully read the scriptural passage for that session. Ask Jesus to let the Good News take root in your heart.
- Read one or more commentary entries on each passage.

- Keep a running list of questions and insights as they occur to you, and bring it to prayer before teaching each session. You may also want to discuss your list with a trusted friend or another teacher.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings of and community climate among the members of the group. High school students are likely to share their thoughts more readily and respond more positively if the space is comfortable and somewhat different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to introspection and sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. All three sessions of *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* require the participants to spend some reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom arrangement is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using banners, pictures, candles, greenery, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules.

Given the content of this course, it is particularly important that you establish and enforce these rules. They directly affect two things the course asks of the participants. The first is to voice questions from the heart. The young people need to reverence and respect one another’s questions—no matter what they are. The second is to respond to questions raised by the Gospel. The young people must be able to offer their suggestions and insights without fearing ridicule from others.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This ranges from copying a simple list onto newsprint to gathering objects for a simulation. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to clarify, summarize, or bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you to share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the young people but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experience as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.

- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers or that answering the big questions of life is easy. Remember, *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* is based on the firm belief that the Gospels help us move toward answers, each in our own way. Young people need to be reassured that no one ever has all the answers, but everyone has a part of the answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using the Scriptures

Each person in your group needs a Bible. It is easiest if all the participants use the same translation. You are also encouraged to have on hand different translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, the New Jerusalem Bible, the New American Bible, and the Contemporary English Version. Referring to multiple translations helps the young people become aware of the different interpretations of the texts in light of ancient cultures and time periods. It reminds them that the Bible is not to be read literally. It also highlights the nuances and impressions they might miss if they hear or read just one version of a passage.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. In some cases journal activities are designed to be included in the session; in others they are intended for use by the participants between sessions.

Journal activities present an opportunity for one-to-one ministry to young people. A young person might write something in a journal that she or he would not feel comfortable sharing in a group or even talking about at all. If you do assign journal activities, take the time to read the young people's responses—with their permission—and then write in comments or words of encouragement or affirmation. Your personal attention might make a big

difference to a young person who is struggling, searching, or just growing up.

Though we strongly encourage you to consider using at least some of the journal activities in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*, they are not an integral part of the course. In fact, some practical reasons can be given for *not* including the journal component. First, if *every* teacher of *every* course in the Horizons Program chose to include journal keeping, the young people would quickly tire of the activity. Second, journal keeping is a time- and energy-consuming process for teachers. Teachers of multiple courses could become frustrated, if not exhausted, by having to monitor a large number of journals. Finally, some people simply do not like to keep a journal. It is better to encourage journal writing as a form of personal exploration for young people than to demand it of them.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into your course, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way? What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* suggest using music. No activities in this course *require* music or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. Circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that

they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer. Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose the young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

Finally, remember that silence also has its place. Music is an effective tool, and we very much encourage its use, but be careful not to fill every reflective moment with sound. Leave at least a few moments for quiet stillness.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Many of the courses in the Horizons Program can be recast as a retreat or a day of reflection. Other courses do not lend themselves to reformatting because of the content or intensity of the material. *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* will work in a retreat format only with mature adolescents. The lengthy periods of reflection and prayer that make this course a potentially profound experience if spread out over three sessions will be too intense for most young people if compacted into a single session.

However, you might consider incorporating one or more of the sessions separately into a retreat on a related topic. For example, session 1, on the man born blind, might be used in an evangelizing retreat on recognizing God's presence; session 2, on the woman at the well, might be used in a retreat on social diversity; and session 3, on the rich man, might be used as a prayer experience in a retreat on Christian discipleship or spiritual growth.

If you are thinking about using *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* as a retreat or incorporating parts of it into one or more other retreats, consult the program coordinator. The first consideration must be the readiness of the young people. A retreat that is too intense can be a frustrating experience for everyone involved. The next consideration is the ability of you or other adults to adapt this material into a retreat format and lead an effective experience.

Special Preparation Needs

Each of the three Gospel stories explored in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* may be proclaimed from the Bible or through a script provided with the session plan. Consider these options for presenting a story directly from the Bible:

- Invite several readers to help you make a recording of the text. Use music and sound effects to bring the story to life.
- Read the story aloud to the group or ask a particularly capable young person to do so. Punctuate the reading with moments of silence, pieces of music, or anything else that might hold the listeners' attention and bring them into the tale.
- Play a commercial audiocassette of the story. Your parish, diocesan, or local library may have recordings of the stories used in this course.
- Coordinate your own reading of the story with slides carefully chosen to reflect various aspects of it.

Also consider these options for presenting a story from the script provided with the session plan:

- Ask a parish or school group to prepare and present the story in dramatic fashion. Provide photocopies of the script, and encourage the group to use costumes, props, music, and visual arts to bring the story to life.
- Invite selected participants to read the script of the story to the rest of the group. Provide them with photocopies of the script before the session so that they can practice their part. Provide appropriate props, costumes, music, and so on if you so desire.

In making your choices, consider the time and resources available. Note that each option for proclaiming the Gospel stories will take a slightly different amount of time. Thus, depending on the option you select, you may need to adjust the timing of other elements of the session plan. Also, whoever does the proclamation must have sufficient time to practice and prepare. If the text is spoken too quickly, too quietly, or with frequent stumbles, those hearing it will not be able to experience the full power of the word.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Arrange a field trip to an institute for people who are blind, and enable the young people to talk with those who have lost their sight. Also, if possible, arrange for the young people to talk with those who have gained or regained sight.
- Arrange an excursion to a shopping mall. While there or afterward, discuss with the young people how consumerism and advertising strategies help create the same sort of situation in which the rich man found himself. Also talk with them about how a Christian can make healthy choices in a consumer world.
- If there is an adult Bible study group in your parish, ask it to include the young people in one of its gatherings. This will give the young people an opportunity to talk with adults who see the Scriptures as a treasure and who have made Bible study part of their personal faith.

- Form an ongoing Bible study group for young people, using the principles presented in this course and applying them to other scriptural passages.
- Invite the young people to form small groups to write and illustrate scriptural prayer books for young children. Each book may be based on one of the three stories presented in *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*. The prayer books may include pictures or drawings, and simple reflection questions appropriate to the age of the children.
- Offer a creative workshop where the young people can prepare artwork for use with the parish baptismal preparation program. This artwork may be a banner to hang during a baptism, a mural to put up in the church, or greeting cards for a christening or for the anniversary of a baptism. The themes, symbols, and words expressed in the artwork can come from the material about baptism presented throughout *Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels*.

Family Connections

Parents are generally interested in knowing what their children are learning. They are entitled to know what is going on in the program and how they can be involved if they choose to be. In addition to the suggestions below, this course includes activities for families in the Alternative Approaches section of each session plan. Also, the preceding section, Parish Program Connections, offers many suggestions that might involve parents.

- Encourage families to use each of the stories presented in this course as the basis for a family prayer. The participant in the course could be the one to proclaim the scriptural passage. This person might also lead the rest of the family in a brief version of the simulation exercise that opens the session focusing on the passage.
- Send home copies of the scripts that accompany the stories, with the suggestion that some family members work together to present a dramatic version of each story for other family members.
- Just before each session, send to each participant's family a summary of the main points of the session. Also include a focusing question, and suggest that the family post the question in a conspicuous place and refer to it often either individually or as a group. Here are some examples of focusing questions:

- *Session 1*
What truth were you blind to today?
How have your eyes been opened?
Is there something or someone that you see
in a new way today?
- *Session 2*
What do you need from God right now?
Where did you go today to satisfy your thirst?
Where is your emptiness?
- *Session 3*
What is Jesus asking of you that is difficult to
do?
What are you willing to give up for Jesus?
What do you need to let go of?

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator’s manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels

Goals

This course has four goals:

- That the young people reverence the proclamation of the Gospel as Jesus himself—as the Word of God—coming to meet them
- That they apply the contextualist method of scriptural study to three Gospel stories and understand this method as a reflection of the church’s commitment to reflect Jesus faithfully to the world
- That they hear the messages of the Gospel stories, allowing God’s word to take root in them
- That they voice the questions the Gospel stirs in them, letting their search for answers move them deeper into relationship with Jesus

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which help realize the four course goals:

Session 1: “The Man Born Blind”

- To present the Bible as a gift from God, and to help the young people articulate their questions and ideas about Jesus and the Gospels
- To review with them the contextualist method of scriptural study
- To proclaim the Gospel story of the man born blind, and explore with them its meaning through simulated experience, reflective prayer, and guided study
- To guide them toward a recognition of their own spiritual blindness
- To help them apply the messages of the story to their own life

Session 2: “The Woman at the Well”

- To guide the young people as they get in touch with their own thirsts, particularly their thirst for Jesus
- To proclaim the Gospel story of the woman at the well, and explore with them its meaning through simulated experience, reflective prayer, and guided study
- To help them apply the messages of the story to their own life

Session 3: “The Rich Man”

- To guide the young people as they reflect on the riches in their life and the things that get in the way of a relationship with God
- To proclaim the Gospel story of the rich man, and explore with them its meaning through simulated experience, reflective prayer, and guided study
- To help them apply the messages of the story to their own life
- To encourage them to continue to explore, study, and pray the Scriptures as they grow in their relationship with God

Suggested Resources

Bibles

The Complete Parallel Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
The Contemporary English Version: God’s Promise for People of Today. Nashville: Nelson, 1995.

Bible Study

Bergant, Dianne, and Robert J. Karris, gen. eds. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989.
Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990.

Background

Ralph, Margaret Nutting. *“And God Said What?” An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms for Bible Lovers.* New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
———. *Discovering the Gospels: Four Accounts of the Good News.* New York: Paulist Press, 1990.
———. “What Scripture Says . . . and Doesn’t Say: Reading the Bible in Context.” *Scripture from Scratch: A Popular Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Cincinnati: Saint Anthony Messenger Press), March 1996.