

## Laudato' Si: Care of our common home



### Winton Higgins with Michael Whelan

**Winton Higgins** is an honorary associate in the School of International Studies at the University of Technology Sydney. He is a graduate of the universities of Sydney, Stockholm and London. Winton has presented a number of courses at Aquinas Academy, including one with Michael on Buddhist-Christian dialogue. **Michael Whelan** completed his post-graduate studies at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, in spirituality. He is Director of Aquinas Academy and Parish Priest of St Patrick's Church in The Rocks.

*The Pope's 2015 ground-breaking encyclical about the current ecological crisis, Laudato Si', sought a wide readership both inside and outside the Catholic Church. Not only has it succeeded in this endeavour, it has received strong praise from influential commentators from many diverse backgrounds. For instance, Robert Manne – one of Australia's leading public intellectuals and a secular Jew – calls it 'one of the most important documents of our era'.*

*The encyclical focuses on climate change – the main facet of today's multi-faceted environmental crisis. Two critical themes run through the encyclical: no response to climate change can succeed if it doesn't simultaneously address the intensifying social injustice and exclusion that drives the abuse of our planet; and our need to withdraw from the consumerist culture that implicates each of us in that abuse while at the same time impoverishing our spiritual lives.*

*This course will explore the encyclical and draw out its implications for us as citizens and as individuals seeking to live wisely and decently.*

**WHEN?** 4 Thursday mornings: 10am – 12 noon, August 1, 8, 15 & 22

**WHERE?** Level 5, Aquinas Academy, 141 Harrington St, The Rocks, 2000

**COST?** \$150

Registration at [secretary@aquinas-academy.com](mailto:secretary@aquinas-academy.com)  
Phone: 02 92474651 or [www.aquinas-academy.com](http://www.aquinas-academy.com)

Over four weekly sessions we will tackle the following topics on successive weeks:

1. **The parlous state and growing danger that 'our common home' faces; and how human activity has led to this predicament.** In this week we'll get a sense of the *dynamism* of this deepening tragedy that must inform any attempt to work our way out of it. We'll explore the origins of our current predicament not just in the ongoing industrial revolution, but also in the mind sets that have mismanaged it so that it no longer serves human wellbeing, social justice, and the health of our natural environment.
2. **Underlying causes and conditions of 'the great acceleration' of global warming that we're witnessing today.** Because we're embedded in highly organised societies we can't solve the problem merely by cleaning up our own individual life styles. As citizens we need to intervene in the processes, systems and policies that *routinely* disrupt the biosphere of which we're part, generate social injustice and exclusion, and impoverish our inner lives. We need to expose the misleading axioms that are directing these global systems as well as moulding much of our own personal behaviour.
3. **How we live now, and its climatic and social implications.** How big is the gap between our needs and our wants? Where are our wants coming from – the advertising industry, or the popular culture it generates, or the felt need to conform and to 'keep up with the Joneses', or a combination of these prompts? How well do we bring climate consciousness to our everyday activities, such as the moment before we start the engines of our cars? Does the pursuit of our wants actually frustrate our needs – needs such as an inner life, immersion in nature, neighbourliness, a fulfilling family and community life, and an unobstructed two-way flow of empathy with the other residents of our common home? Can we really equate an affluent life with a good life?
4. **What are we going to do to restore and nurture our common home when we get out of bed tomorrow?** As individuals we should assert our own good-life priorities against the malign axioms bombarding us from the media and the popular culture more generally. But we need to make a special point of resisting the hyper-individualism in that culture, so we can also fully grasp our responsibilities as participants in civic affairs and in the wider democratic polity. Do we enter the polling booths on election days with a mature understanding of the policy options being presented in defence (or jeopardy) of our common home? Or are we voting for party X because we always have, or mum and dad always did, or it claims to champion our sectional interest?