

Catholic Alpha:

Last week a number of us on the Evangelization Team watched a live Webinar (on the computer) of information shared on running the ALPHA program in our parish. I wanted to share with you some of the insights gleaned from the online discussion . . .

- “Throughout the world, let us be permanently in a state of mission Christians have the duty to proclaim the gospel without excluding anyone because this is the first task of the Church” – **Pope Francis (Joy of the Gospel)**
- Alpha is an opportunity to explore life and faith in a friendly, open and informal atmosphere through 11 interactive sessions and a day-long retreat. **No pressure. No follow up. No charge.**
- “The Alpha Course is a new way of announcing the gospel.” –Archbishop Fisichella, President, Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization
- Who is Alpha’s Audience? **Alpha is for everyone.** Alpha started as a program for the unchurched, those who are not Christian and have little or no familiarity with Jesus. That being said, we often find many people in our parishes who have been sacramentalized without ever having been evangelized. If you are running Alpha in the context of a Catholic parish, such individuals may very well be a part of your initial audience. Here are a few keys to keep in mind.

Key 1: Run Alpha for those furthest from God, even if they are not in the room. It is important to stress right from the beginning that **Alpha is a place where anyone is welcome to come with their questions and concerns, regardless of their commitment level to the Church or to God.** Because of this, some of your more established parishioners may feel that the concepts are more introductory than they need. If they express this, affirm their knowledge and then encourage them to think of this as a refresher for their hearts as well as their heads. If they do not feel inclined to stay, that is alright. No one should experience Alpha because they have been pressured to participate. Such an experience may tempt us to adjust Alpha to be deeper or more catechetical. However, if we give in to that temptation, Alpha will never reach those furthest from God, those who are not in your churches. Likewise, the movement towards deeper and more catechetical content will reinforce the idea that this Alpha is just a class. In so doing, it will decrease the likelihood that those who have been sacramentalized but not evangelized will even experience a life-changing encounter with the person Jesus on Alpha.

Key 2: In the context of running Alpha with those who are already committed to the Church, there will inevitably be small group participants who bring up deeper catechetical concepts like the theology of the Church, the saints, or the sacraments. If this happens, it is important to affirm and support their experience without letting the conversation alienate those who are unfamiliar with deeper concepts.

The goal of this is not to hide from deeper theology, but rather to make certain that sufficient time is being spent on the more introductory questions. Remember, the small group leaders are not trying to teach or catechize. Rather, they are hosting thoughtful conversation that helps everyone personalize the concepts and wrestle with what they really believe and feel.

Of course, Alpha is not meant to bring people all the way to a fullness of the understanding of the Catholic Faith. It is after all, Alpha, the beginning. That being said, it is important that we do lead people towards an ongoing journey of conversion after Alpha. It could be involving them in a small group. It could be connecting them to a men's or women's group. It could even be another course on Sacraments or some deeper concept of faith. Regardless, we need to be encouraging them that Alpha is only the beginning of a life-long journey!

Key 3: Because Alpha runs for an entire semester or 11 weeks, some people may not be able to attend every session, or may need to miss some of the weeks. Assure them that each session is independent of the others, so if someone needs to miss one or a few, they still are welcome to participate when they can.

ALPHA SCHEDULE FOR MEALS, PRESENTATION, AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Monday March 6 at 6 PM to 8 PM – Meal, Presentation, Discussion

Topic 1: **Is there more to life than this?**

Monday March 13 *Time same as above*

Topic 2: **Who is Jesus?**

Monday March 20 *Time same as above*

Topic 3: **Why did Jesus die?**

Monday March 27 *Time same as above*

Topic 4: **How can I have faith?**

Monday April 10 *Time same as above*

Topic 5: **Why and how should I pray?**

Monday April 17 *Time same as above*

Topic 6: **Why and how should I read the Bible?**

Monday April 24 *Time same as above*

Topic 7: **How does God guide us?**

Saturday May 6 **Day long retreat from 9 to 3 PM**

Topics 8—11: **Who is the Holy Spirit?; What does the Holy Spirit do?; How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?; How can I make the most of the rest of my life?**

Monday May 8 *Time same as above*

Topic 12: **How can I resist evil?**

Monday May 15 *Time same as above*

Topic 13: **Why and how should I tell others?**

Monday May 22 *Time same as above*

Topic 14: **Does God heal today?**

Monday May 29 *Time same as above*

Topic 15: **What about the church?**

Sunday June 4 **Pentecost: The Birthday of the Church**