

From the PA's Desk

Advent Program: ALPHA

This Advent as a prelude to the future of evangelization in our parish, I would like to begin an adult faith sharing program called ALPHA. Alpha is a practical introduction to basic Christianity over 10 weeks. Unique in its adult learning approach, Alpha meets participants where they are, starting with their questions. Each session involves food, a presentation, and small group discussions. There is no cost to attend the "Come & See" gathering or the Alpha series.

Since Advent is the traditional beginning of the Church's New Year, and since the word Alpha in Greek means "Beginning," it seemed like the perfect time to begin. The simple truth is that before we can be asked to evangelize and bring others to Jesus, we must all have a clear understanding of who we are as disciples, and what message we want to share with them. Alpha is more of a faith sharing opportunity where people come together and explore what it means to be Christian. Alpha is not so much concerned with theological facts, but with basic "why am I here" questions. Alpha is much more about heart knowledge than head knowledge.

Christianity is first and foremost about relationships rather than rules. It is about a Person more than a philosophy. It is about the most important relationship of all—our relationship with the God of all. Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God. The second is to love our neighbor. So, it is also about our relationships with other people as well.

About Alpha in a Catholic Context

Alpha is a tool for evangelization that is being used by thousands of Catholic parishes in over 70 countries around the world. Alpha is also run by churches of many other denominations to introduce people to the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. This has led to more than 24 million people around the world experiencing Alpha. In particular, it is attracting many young people who are asking the question, 'Is there more to life than this?'

How can Alpha help the Church promote Pope Francis' book, "The Joy of the Gospel"?

Alpha is a kerygmatic (a fancy word meaning "proclamation") tool for parish and community renewal. Alpha introduces people to the first proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, otherwise known as the Kerygma: 'Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you, and now he is living at your side to enlighten, strengthen and free you.' ([Evangelii Gaudium \[Joy of the Gospel\], 164](#)).

Alpha invites people to respond to the good news through a decision to follow Jesus. Parishes around the world have seen significant growth in numbers and a new enthusiasm for mission.

New members of the parish, having come to faith during Alpha, frequently join parish activities and bring the freshness and joy of their encounter with Christ into the life of the parish.

Alpha equips parishes to go out and to reach those who are outside the Church

Alpha is a tool which helps parishes develop into 'communities of missionary disciples', fostering a renewal for the Christian community that desires to be transformed by evangelization. It offers a simple and attractive invitation to those outside the Church to come and ask life's big questions.

An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first, and therefore we can...go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.' ([Evangelii Gaudium \[Joy of the Gospel\], 24](#))

Alpha develops missionary disciples

Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.' ([Evangelii Gaudium \[Joy of the Gospel\], 120](#)).

Alpha engages lay people in the life and mission of the Church. With the blessing of the parish pastoral leader, a core team takes ownership and hosts Alpha in the parish. These parishioners are equipped to proclaim the good news in a simple and effective way.

Alpha engages and reaches young people

In recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young.' ([Evangelii Gaudium \[Joy of the Gospel\], 70](#)).

Alpha is relaxed, interactive, non-judgmental, and lots of fun. It is designed to reach the young generation and engage with them in a culturally relevant way. It enables them to ask the questions they wish to ask and doesn't assume any level of knowledge or understanding of Christianity. Alpha creates space for genuine exploration of life's big questions and provides the opportunity for young people to form meaningful friendships with each other.

What's next?

I need help in determining the best time to run this weekly (ten weeks) two hour program. Should we meet on a Monday evening, Thursday evening, or on a Sunday morning after Mass? Your input is very much needed. Please let me know your thoughts!