

From the PA's Desk

Sacrament of Reconciliation:

Fr. Fred, Joshua, Mary Moomey, and myself, had a brief discussion last week regarding our low attendance at our Advent and Lenten Reconciliation Services. I learned that it has been an ongoing situation here for a few years now. I came from the Hemlock and Merrill area, and we didn't have the same experience with low participation, and I'm wondering what is different here?

In looking at some possible ways to address the questions, blessings, benefits, and need for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I was asked to offer a series of **"three minute teachings"** on why we have the Penance, before Masses begin. **The dates for the three-minute teachings on Reconciliation will be March 4/5, March 11/12, March 18/19, and March 25/26. Even if you think you know everything there is to know about the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I promise to share with you things you didn't know or consider. Fr. Fred mentioned that he will shorten his homily on those four weekends, so we will still get you out around the hour mark.**

Alpha: "If You Build It They Will Come"

Years ago in 1989 I remember seeing a fantasy-drama sports film called Field of Dreams. In the movie, a novice Iowa farmer who lives with his family, talks about his troubled relationship with his father, who had been a devoted baseball fan. While walking through his cornfield one evening, he hears a voice whispering, **"If you build it, he will come."** He continues hearing this before finally seeing a vision of a baseball diamond in his field. Long story short; at the end of the movie he builds his baseball field, and once it's complete, late at night when only his family is watching, not only his father, but other great departed baseball legends appear to play for him.

I have those words in my head as I write about the progress in our Alpha program. **We have 90 people registered so far,** so I image we will have over a hundred participants join us as we journey into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

I have mentioned that not everyone can attend all 11 weeks including the all day Saturday retreat, but I believe we will still have a large and consistent group from week to week.

Alpha is currently running all around the globe, and Alpha generally has three key things in common: food, a talk and good conversation.

Food—Whether it's a group of friends gathered around a kitchen table, or a quick catch-up over coffee and cake, food has a way of bringing people together. It's no different at Alpha. We start with food, because it's a great way to encourage community and get to know each other. Jesus often preferred to engage people in conversation over a meal for the same reasons. **We will have two caterers from the area provide our sit-down meals from week to week. I've seen the menus and they are delicious. The idea is that the people who eat together at each table will also stay in the same small group for the faith discussion after the video presentation.**

Talk—The talks are designed to engage and inspire conversation. Generally thirty minutes long, and we will use the video option for the presentation.. They explore the big issues around faith and unpack the basics of Christianity, addressing questions such as *Who is Jesus?* and *How can we have faith?* We will use the newest Alpha series which is even appropriate for teens.

Discussion—Probably the most important part of any Alpha: the chance to share thoughts and ideas on the topic, and simply discuss it in a small group. There’s no obligation to say anything. And there’s nothing you can’t say. It’s an opportunity to hear from others and contribute your own perspective in an honest, friendly and open environment. The discussion is not a class on theology or catechesis or doctrine, but simply a time to share thoughts on the videos and your feelings about what you heard. This after all is the core foundation of evangelization. **The Evangelization Team has decided that we will move to different locations throughout the complex for the small group discussions. This will allow each group to have privacy and quiet as they talk in groups of approximately ten people or so, lead by a group host or facilitator. The various spaces we will use are: 1) The K of C multi-purpose room. 2) The St. Vincent de Paul meeting room. 3) The library in the church. 4) The sanctuary of the church. 5) Four to six meeting spots in the hall, spread out from one another.**

My hope is that Alpha will help us learn the language needed to reach out to others in our area and invite them to join our faith community. We Catholics were never taught how to talk to others about the basic concepts of Christian faith. And how can we share that information with others if we don’t have the right vocabulary to do so? Alpha will help us begin learning how. Ultimately Christianity is about a living relationship with Jesus Christ, not just a set of doctrines and dogmas, so Alpha focuses on our most important relationship of all—our relationship with the God who made us.

ALPHA SCHEDULE FOR MEALS, PRESENTATION, AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Monday March 6 at 6 PM to 8 PM <i>Meal, Presentation, Discussion</i> Topic 1: Is there more to life than this?	Monday May 1 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 8: Who is the Holy Spirit?
Monday March 13 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 2: Who is Jesus?	Saturday May 6 Day long retreat, 9 to 3 PM Topics 9—11: 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 March 20 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 3: Why did Jesus die?	Monday May 8 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 12: How can I resist evil?
Monday March 27 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 4: How can I have faith?	Monday May 15 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 13: Why and how should I tell others?
Monday April 10 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 5: Why and how should I pray?	Monday May 22 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 14: Does God heal today?
Monday April 17 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 6: Why and how should I read the Bible?	Sunday June 4 Pentecost: The Birthday of the Church
Monday April 24 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 7: How does God guide us?	Monday June 5 <i>Time same as above</i> Topic 15: What about the church?