

From the Deacon's Desk

Alpha this Lent:

Alpha again will be offered to parishioners this Lent, beginning on Monday February 19 from 6 PM to 8 PM in the hall. For 11 weeks, we will start with a free catered meal, followed by a DVD presentation and small group discussion.

This year we will also offer an Alpha Youth discussion group for kids between the ages of 11 to late teens. They will join the adults for the community meal and then break off into their own DVD presentation and faith discussion group.

Alpha is more of a faith sharing opportunity where people come together and explore what it means to be Christian in a Catholic context. Alpha is not so much a catechetical or learning program, but focuses on 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.

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. **In the past year we as a parish have grown by almost 10%, and although we can't attribute it entirely to Alpha, our community-building gatherings have surely helped. 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 has been called a "discipleship pipeline" and it gets fallen away and inactive Catholics reengaged with parish life.**

One Catholic pastor has said this about ALPHA: "I have been running Alpha in all my parishes since 2001, and I am even more convinced than ever that it is the most effective tool I have found to date. There may be another, but I have not yet found it. I have seen all my parishes transformed by placing Alpha at the center of our evangelistic efforts, and have even expanded the use of Alpha in my present parish. At my parish, we are clear that Alpha is not just one of many programs we use, but

that it is foundational to our identity as a missional and evangelizing Church. All these courses are run by our parishioners, many of whom have experienced conversion and transformation through their own experience of Alpha.”

This same pastor also said it took three years before his parish really began to see the fruits of Alpha, so we will begin our second year on Monday February 19 at 6 PM.

Whole Community Catechesis:

Our next Whole Community Catechesis gathering will be next Sunday after the 9:30 AM Mass and our topic of discussion will be the Lenten Season. Everyone, young and old, with and without children are welcome to join us for breakfast and the discussion led by Deacon Jerry beginning at 10:45.

Art & Environment Committee Meeting:

The Art & Environment Committee met last Sunday and we would like to invite every parishioner, older and younger, to make a small cross out of any material, no bigger than six or ten inches, that will be used with our Lenten decorations. Be creative and use your imaginations. More information will follow soon.

The Traveling Last Supper Troupe:

We will be hosting a live-drama presentation of the Last Supper by a community theater group on Saturday March 24 at 7 pm in St. Vincent church.

The Traveling Last Supper Troupe is an ecumenical group made up of a cast of 18 people, a narrator and a musical duo. The group has been performing since 2006, with 6 of the original members still in the cast. They are mostly Catholics from Hemlock, Merrill, Saginaw, Midland and the Auburn areas.

The Last Supper presentation starts with Jesus informing the Apostles that He will be betrayed. In their horror they examine themselves to see if they might be that person.

Admission is free but they do ask for an offering at the exits if you are able to contribute. The money they collect will go to area soup kitchens and food pantries, and they will keep a small amount for themselves for publicity materials and costume upkeep.