An Introduction to Alpha - Catholic Context

“For the disciple of Christ to evangelize is an obligation of love.”

St. Pope John Paul
Over 24 million people have experienced Alpha. 66,000 courses are running in 112 languages in 169 countries worldwide.*

“We cannot forget that evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ ... Many of these are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone.”

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*
INTRODUCTION TO ALPHA

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?”

*2014

“Alpha brings people closer and helps them to find that power which unites. The Alpha experience is not only a means through which one finds true life, but also a way to share the good news of the Living Christ.”

Cardinal Marc Ouellet
Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America

Cardinal Marc Ouellet with Revd Nicky Gumbel, Pioneer of Alpha
WHAT IS ALPHA?

Alpha is a series of interactive sessions that explore the basics of the Christian faith. It is a parish tool for evangelization based on welcome and hospitality, sharing and prayer. Each session includes a meal, a talk and small group discussion, where no question is too simple and no answer is pre-packaged.

GOOD FOOD

Each Alpha gathering begins with a meal or snack. This is a time of fun and relaxation in a casual atmosphere... perfect for making friends.

ALPHA TALK

Following the meal, there is a short talk exploring various aspects of the Christian faith. Talks may be presented using video or live speaker.

DISCUSSION

Guests break into small groups where everyone is welcome to share thoughts and ask questions in a nonjudgmental and relaxed setting.

ALPHA EXPLORES THESE QUESTIONS:

Life: Is There More to Life Than This?
Jesus: Who is Jesus?
Cross: Why Did Jesus Die?
Faith: How Can I Have Faith?
Prayer: Why and How Do I Pray?
Word: Why and How Do I Read the Bible?
Follow: How Does God Guide Us?

Spirit: Who is the Holy Spirit and What Does He Do?
Fill: How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?
Evil: How Can I Resist Evil?
Healing: Does God Heal Today?
Church: What About the Church and Telling Others?
“Alpha really does help people to come to a personal encounter with Jesus. Many Catholics have been Catholic all of their lives and they have a relationship with Jesus but they are not really conscious of it and not intentional about it. Alpha helps them discover the intense relationship that Jesus wants to have with them.”

Bishop Michael Byrnes
Archdiocese of Detroit, USA

“The meal on Alpha was so good because it broke down so many barriers. And the discussions were wonderful ... Exploring those topics through Alpha was really helpful for me to understand my purpose in life.”

Shannon MacDonald
St Benedict’s parish, Canada

“Alpha encourages us to build relationships with each other and, as the course progresses, it points to a relationship with Christ. But people are also searching for answers to the big questions, ‘Why am I here?’, ‘What is my purpose?’, ‘Am I good enough?’ One of the things Alpha does well is to allow a lot of time for discussion.”

Sarah Kaczmarek
Director of Youth Ministry at ‘St Paul’s on the Lake’ parish, USA

“Alpha helps you to actually get in touch with people who have not met Jesus Christ yet – to eat with them, pray with them, teach them and mostly, to listen to them.”

Maximilian Oettingen
Loretto community, Austria
**ALPHA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

Alpha’s easy style and welcoming atmosphere makes it a wonderful way of responding to the Call to a New Evangelization and sharing the “Kerygma” (the core of the Gospel message) with others.

“Entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or ‘re-evangelization’.”

**St. Pope John Paul**  
Redemptoris Missio

“The term ‘new evangelization’ highlights the increasingly clear awareness that even in countries with an ancient Christian tradition the need has arisen for a renewed proclamation of the Gospel, to lead people back to an encounter with Christ that transforms life and really is neither superficial nor by rote.”

**Pope Francis**

“One of the advantages of Alpha is that it focuses on the Kerygma. In the ancient Church there was a clear distinction between the Kerygma and the Didache, the catechesis. The Kerygma was the starting point of faith, and the catechesis had to form the faith. But faith in itself blossoms only by hearing the Kerygma.”

**Father Raniero Cantalamessa**  
Preacher to the Papal Household

“Alpha is without doubt a great experience of new evangelization.”

**Archbishop Rino Fisichella**  
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelisation

“It was an amazing privilege to be invited to represent Alpha at the Synod on the New Evangelization in Rome. Alpha is a great way to help the Church to grow disciples, and to raise missionaries and leaders. There’s no greater joy for a Catholic than to see people coming to Christ and joining the local parish.”

**Marc and Florence de Leyritz**  
Founders of Alpha France and Chairs of the Global Alpha – Catholic Context Board
Global Catholic Alpha Board Chairs, Marc and Florence de Leyritz, were invited to represent Alpha at the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization in Rome and to give an intervention together in the presence of Pope Benedict XVI and over 300 Catholic Bishops from around the world. Here is an extract* from their presentation:

“We thank you for the invitation to bring the witness of a couple. We are a couple who have worked for 15 years in the first announcement of the Gospel with Alpha and in the formation of lay leaders for the New Evangelization.

Our passion has been the Kerygmatic proclamation – the first announcement which leads a person to acknowledge Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour – by ordinary lay people in the ordinary life of the parish. We bear witness to you that wherever the name of Jesus is proclaimed with faith and love, together with listening and a simple and strong proclamation, the Lord accomplishes marvels: hearts are touched, lives are transformed, parish communities are renewed.

With Alpha, 24 million people have been through an experience which touches the mind but also the heart and the will. Many ask for baptism and join the local Christian community, hundreds of thousands of evangelizers are born. Wherever you trust lay people, encouraging them to announce the Kerygma, they themselves grow in their life of faith in witness of Jesus. They themselves have the joy of seeing their friends, their neighbours and their parents enter salvation.”

Vatican, October 17, 2012

*Visit zenit.org for more information on the Synod, including Marc and Florence’s full intervention.
WHAT DO CATHOLIC LEADERS SAY ABOUT ALPHA?

Archbishop Gérald Lacroix
Archbishop of Quebec, Canada

“I have had the privilege of participating in various Alphas in Quebec and have witnessed how lives are changed and how the participants are touched by the teachings, witnessing and fellowship experienced during the course. The method is simple yet very effective. Small groups are definitely a key to the success of this tool of New Evangelization.”

Bishop Xavier Novell
Bishop of Solsona, Spain and Co-Head of Youth for the Bishop’s Conference of Spain

“Alpha is a treasure for evangelization, especially of the youth. Many people have met Christ for the first time in their lives. Many have also had a first and foundational experience of the Holy Spirit, through which they have come back to the Church as a result. Some of those who had not been confirmed have been confirmed and long to know the Lord better and to collaborate in this wonderful task of making this treasure known to many.”

Cardinal Seán O’Malley
Archbishop of Boston, USA

“Many of our Catholic parishioners have benefited from Alpha by way of its building on their initial interest in the Church, as a pre-catechumenate experience, or for others, a renewal of their desire to more deeply understand and live their Catholic faith.”

Archbishop Buti Tlhagale
Archbishop of Johannesburg, South Africa

“Alpha has shown across the world, as well as here in South Africa, that it can be a most effective tool for evangelization ... It empowers lay people. I would certainly like to see Alpha becoming increasingly involved in our church communities.”

Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno
President of the Brazilian Bishops’ Conference and Archbishop of Aparecida

“I recommend Alpha; an excellent method for the first proclamation of the gospel.”
Further endorsements can be found at alpha.org/catholics

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn
Archbishop of Vienna, Austria

“The focus of Alpha is Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour. The goal of Alpha is to lead people to Him so that they will relate with Him personally and with others in community. The approach of Alpha is to be non-threatening, respectful and open to the ‘seekers’ of the Lord. The effect of Alpha is that many have come to experience the Lord as real and truly present in their lives. As a result, they have come to accept the Lord, become His disciples and be involved in community living.”

Archbishop John Ha
Archbishop of Kuching, Malaysia

“In an age where there is so much confusion about moral questions, and when there are so many mixed messages, Alpha provides an important and useful means for learning about Christianity and the basic teaching of Jesus Christ.”

Cardinal Kurt Koch
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

“Alpha is for meeting Jesus. What I like in all that I have seen and heard about Alpha is the simplicity. For me, the Christian life has something to do with simplicity, friendship, closeness and joy. That’s what I feel about Alpha and I think that’s a sign that it works and that it’s given from the Lord.”

Archbishop Octavio Ruiz
Secretary for the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization

“Alpha, which I have had the opportunity to attend … is a providential tool because it precisely tries to reach out to those who are far from the Church, who are indifferent to the faith. By means of a very simple and humane tool based on fraternity and friendship, Christ is introduced to them and enters little by little into their hearts …”

Cardinal George Pell
Archbishop of Sydney, Australia

“The focus of Alpha is Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour. The goal of Alpha is to lead people to Him so that they will relate with Him personally and with others in community. The approach of Alpha is to be non-threatening, respectful and open to the ‘seekers’ of the Lord. The effect of Alpha is that many have come to experience the Lord as real and truly present in their lives. As a result, they have come to accept the Lord, become His disciples and be involved in community living.”
WHO IS ALPHA FOR?

Alpha is designed primarily for individuals who do not go to church. However, it also provides a fresh opportunity for everyone to look at the basics of the Christian faith. It has benefited:

- Individuals who are baptized, but have lost connection with the Church
- Engaged couples preparing for marriage within the Church
- Parents who have children receiving baptism or confirmation but have lost contact with the Church themselves
- Those who only come to church on occasions such as Christmas, Easter, weddings or funerals
- Those within the Church who feel they want to get back to the basics of their faith
“I’d describe Alpha as a really good chance to explore Christianity. It’s a safe environment where you can ask what you want, say what you want. Being brought up as a Catholic I knew all the stories you hear at Mass, when to sit and when to stand up but during Alpha it made it all a bit more real and you experience more feelings of being Catholic and being Christian rather than just the knowledge of it.”

Keighley Shepherdly
St Joseph’s parish, UK

“Alpha provides a communal context where people can once again ask the fundamental basic questions about life: ‘Why are we here, who are we, what’s our purpose?’ It is a fantastic way to begin to draw people into a deeper communion with the Church.”

Matt Maher
Catholic Worship Leader, USA

“Our [church] is laying a groundwork for what it means to be an intentional disciple of Jesus...A tremendous community is building. I have countless people coming up to me saying, I can’t thank you enough for bringing Alpha here.”

Fr. John Riccardo
Our Lady of Good Counsel parish, USA
The Impact of Alpha in the Parish

Alpha helps the parish to become an evangelizing community. Those who have experienced Alpha become evangelists, inviting friends, family and work colleagues to come to the next course.

The structure of Alpha and the training available make it easy for lay leaders to run the course under the supervision of the parish priest. Parishioners can be involved in evangelization in a simple and effective way, even if they feel inexperienced or ill-equipped. Roles vary from hosting a small group, serving food, giving a talk, to being part of the welcome team.

Parishes around the world have seen significant growth in numbers and missionary zeal. New members of the parish, having come to faith during Alpha, frequently join the local parish activities and bring with them the freshness and joy of their renewed faith.

“The impact of running Alpha is that the laity can now engage in evangelization. Before we felt a bit timid about sharing Jesus with others but Alpha has given us boldness!”

Aima Lijadu
St Charles Borromeo parish, Nigeria

“I think Alpha is the most simple and direct instrument I know, because the whole focus is not only to know Jesus but to fully trust in Him. How amazing that it can happen in a short space of time but it really is so effective.”

Don Francesco Bonucci
San Giovanni parish, Italy

“Alpha is an excellent way of bringing about a personal encounter with Jesus, as well as having a profound experience of communion and conversion – especially for those who are furthest away. It is an amazing tool for releasing spiritual, pastoral and institutional renewal in parishes and in every context in which the course is run.”

Pbro Dr Salvador Valadez Fuentes
(Previously) Rector Itepal–Celam, National Director for Alpha Mexico

“I’ve never seen a program that yields so much fruit in proportion to the work that I put into it ... That’s why I continue to work with Alpha ... One of the great gifts of Alpha is that it serves the purpose to make disciples.”

Fr James Mallon
St Benedict’s parish, Canada
“In my parish Alpha has impacted some of the young people in amazing ways. Jesus has made a difference in their lives. With Alpha we see young people interested in being leaders in the Church ... It’s sometimes hard to even get them to go home after Alpha!”

Andrew Boodoo
St Anthony’s parish, Trinidad

“Alpha can do what has been, since the beginning, the most important job for a Christian – bringing people to Jesus ... The next step after building a first relationship with Jesus is of course what we call catechesis. The Catechism is one tool to help with this formation.”

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn
Archbishop of Vienna, Austria

“I love to use Alpha with young people because it takes them on a journey into the heart of God and it lays down foundations that they can build the rest of their lives upon. The easy-going, ‘come and see’ approach is perfect for teenagers, often provoking them to make a decision to follow Jesus, while launching them into a relationship with him that is real and honest.”

Will Desmond
Sion Community, UK

“Alpha is an incredible experience. I believe that for a parish that is a bit tired or indeed a parish that has lots of activity, or even a parish that has the desire to do something great – Alpha is a great opportunity for believers to encourage lots of people to meet Jesus.”

Gaetano Cammarata
Sant’Eustorgio parish, Italy
WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ALPHA?

Alpha can be seen as a “narthex;” a gateway to catechism, calling for further spiritual formation and catechesis within a Christian community. The course works best as part of an overall parish program of evangelism and catechesis that is run (ideally) 1–2 times a year, benefiting greatly from follow-up courses.

There are a range of different follow-up materials and courses available to help people grow in their faith. Many parishes have introduced post-Alpha groups that retain the key ingredients of Alpha: friendship, food, worship, teaching, Bible study, discussion and prayer.
Catholicism

Catholicism is a ten-part documentary series and study program about the Catholic faith. Created and hosted by Fr Robert Barron, the series presents what Catholics believe and why, enabling adults to come to a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith. Filmed in more than 50 locations throughout 16 countries, the series is engaging and interesting, using art, architecture, literature, music and all the treasures of the Catholic tradition to illuminate the timeless teachings of the Church.

For further information:
contact@wordonfire.org
+1 847-581-4285
wordonfire.org
5215 Old Orchard Road, Suite 410, Skokie, IL, 60077, USA

The Great Adventure Catholic Bible Study Program

The Great Adventure Catholic Bible study program is designed in such a way that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God's Word. Hundreds of thousands of people have found new meaning in their lives after going through The Great Adventure Bible studies.

For further information:
info@biblestudyforcatholics.com
(800) 376-0520
biblestudyforcatholics.com

The Marriage Course

A seven session course set in a fantastic atmosphere. You will be served with a candlelit meal and/or coffee, tea and dessert at a romantic table for two while listening to practical talks about marriage that are informative and fun, either given live or played on DVD.

“As [couples] re-discover the richness of their own relationship through The Marriage Course, it brings them back to the very source of love – God – and offers the opportunity for them to be witnesses of the mystery of that love and a living example of the domestic Church, reaching out and evangelizing to other couples and families in the Parish.”

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia
President of the Pontifical Council for the Family
“Do not be afraid! When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: ‘I am with you always’ (Matthew 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus does not leave us alone. He never leaves you alone! He always accompanies you.”

Pope Francis