Diocese of Green Bay
Alpha Small Group Leader
Training Booklet

Alpha Training Booklet Contents

- Alpha Tool Box
- Small Group Discussion Questions
- How to Kill Alpha in 10 Steps
- Notes on Leading Table Discussions
- Shared Prayer
- A Closer Look at an Alpha-based Catholic Parish

Alpha Tool Box and Discussion Questions: Courtesy of Alpha USA
Run Alpha Training

How to run Alpha
Story of Holy Trinity Brompton

Why Alpha works

And so it is with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

Real

Relational

Reliant

Reproducible
SAMPLE
ALPHA SESSION

Customize these schedules as needed for your group.

**ALPHA YOUTH FILM SERIES**

**120 MINUTE SESSION**
1 hr before – Alpha Team does set up
30 min before – Brief team meeting & prayer time
Alpha begins
10 min – Guests arrive and mingle
30 min – Food
10 min – Ice breaker game/welcome/skit/video
40 min – Alpha talk with discussion
10 min – Extra small group discussion
20 min – Post session mingle time with optional games or snacks/dessert

Alpha ends
15 min – Debrief with Alpha team

**45-MINUTE SESSION (EG. DURING LUNCH HOUR)**
10 min before – Alpha Team does set up & short prayer

Alpha begins
3 min – Guests arrive, eat together, relax/mingle
2 min – Welcome (encourage them to start eating)
35 min – Alpha talk with discussion
5 min – Short time to mingle

Alpha ends
10 min – Debrief with Alpha team (or later)

**ALPHA FILM SERIES & ALPHA WITH NICKY GUMBEL**

**130 MINUTE SESSION**
1 hr before – Alpha Team does set up
30 min before – Alpha Team info chat & prayer
Alpha begins
10 min – Meet & greet, welcome
45 min – Dinner
30 min – Alpha talk
45 min – Small group discussion

Alpha ends
15 min – Debrief with Alpha team

*If you decide to include a time of worship, include it before the Alpha talk and discussion*
Prayer is an essential part of the Alpha guest experience and it’s introduced gradually to guests through four specific moments.

1 Prayer during the first few sessions
Depending on what Alpha series you are watching, there may be a short prayer led by one of the presenters at the end of the talk. This is intended to give guests a chance to pray along silently if they want to.

2 Session 5 is all about prayer
Small groups are encouraged to discuss the topic and then try praying together at the end. Group hosts might simply say a short prayer or give guests an opportunity to pray out loud. In the following weeks hosts can choose to end all small group sessions with prayer.

Note: On Alpha we recommend that you do NOT pray before meals or during small group time until Week 5. This allows the topic of prayer to be introduced thoughtfully and discussed thoroughly in small groups.

3 Praying for others on the Alpha Weekend/Day
The Alpha Weekend is usually scheduled about halfway through your Alpha. It’s a chance to get away from the busyness of our lives, where people can take time to relax, think, have fun together, learn more about God, and, if they’re willing, to experience prayer ministry.

The Alpha talks on the weekend are primarily about the Holy Spirit - who, why, and how the Spirit helps us stay focused on Jesus and gives us power to live. After the last session, there’s time for guests to pray and be prayed for by a host or helper. We want to give them an opportunity to experience God’s love through the Holy Spirit.

There is also a Team Training video about Prayer Ministry to watch with your whole team.

4 Prayer and healing
After the Alpha talk about healing, we encourage small groups to discuss the topic and give it a shot and pray for healing. It’s often in those prayer times that God surprises us. Praying for others can be a bit nerve-wracking but if we have even mustard-seed faith, God will show up. God loves to reveal Himself to those who sincerely seek Him.

5 Get the whole church praying
Assign a team of people who can pray for Alpha. Encourage them to continue praying for your team and guests through your entire Alpha. Consider supplying them a list of team members and or guests so they are able to pray specifically.

6 Get your team praying
Have your team pray daily for guests. God moves powerfully through our prayers.
BEST PRACTICE #2
HOSPITALITY

The key to creating a great atmosphere for your Alpha is to think of it like a casual party. We aim to set the mood as if we’re welcoming guests into our home.

Here are some ideas from churches who made their Alpha a bit more welcoming. We hope this will help spark your creativity:

**FOOD** – Eating a meal or a snack together allows guests to have a space for casual conversations and to get to know each other. Remember to provide a meat-free option and to ask about allergies.

**VENUE** – Run Alpha where people are most likely to show up. Think about who you’re trying to reach and where they spend their time. Most Alphas have been run in a church, but Alpha has also been run in places like coffee shops, high schools, homes, gyms, pubs, and even bike shops.

**ROOM DECOR** – The way you set up the room, including things like table setup (centerpieces, place settings), signage (welcome sign, menu, food labels) and even lights (candles, table and floor lamps) contribute to the overall guest experience. Try to be creative each week because these types of things make the Alpha experience memorable and will help you shape your Alpha to best fit the demographic you are trying to reach.

**SEATING** – You want seating that will make conversation easy. Try to steer away from office or classroom set up and aim for small groups of 8-12. Use whatever is available - small round tables, big comfy couches, floor pillows - anything that will make people relax.

**MUSIC** – Depending on your context and audience, play upbeat music or invite a local artist to play during meal time. Some groups slowly introduce Christian music and worship after the Alpha Weekend and some begin with it right away. Whenever you choose to introduce it, explain why worship is important to Christians.

**TEMPERATURE** – Monitor this throughout the night because, if it gets too warm, guests will feel uncomfortable and possibly fall asleep during the Alpha talk. The more people that are in the room, the warmer it will get as the session progresses.

**FUN** – Laughing together is one of the best ways to build a sense of community and friendship. It can lighten the mood, bridge over awkward dynamics, and allow people to relax and have a good time. Depending on your group’s age and context, you can start with a video clip, tell a joke, or do a short icebreaker game.

These elements make the Alpha experience memorable. When we put some effort into creating a welcoming and fun atmosphere, guests will enjoy themselves, engage in the discussion and be comfortable enough to tell their friends about Alpha.

Showing up to Alpha for the first time can be extremely intimidating for some guests - especially for someone who wouldn’t typically go to church. That’s why we want to create a welcoming and fun atmosphere, wherever you do your Alpha. It sets the tone for guests to open up in conversation, to be more receptive to the Alpha talk, to build relationships and to come back each week.
The number of weeks to run Alpha depends on how many sessions you include on your Alpha Weekend/Day.

For example, if you’re using the Alpha Youth Film Series and you include a fourth talk on your weekend rather than three, your Alpha will take 8 weeks instead of 9.

### ALPHA YOUTH FILM SERIES
(8-10 WEEKS)

- **Week 1** – Life: Is This It? *(Launch Party)*
- **Week 2** – Jesus: Who Is Jesus?
- **Week 3** – Cross: Why Did Jesus Die?
- **Week 4** – Faith: How Can I Have Faith?
- **Week 5** – Prayer: Why and How Do I Pray?
- **Week 6** – Word: Why and How Do I Read the Bible?

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**Alpha Weekend**
- **Follow** – How Does God Guide Us Into Full Life?
- **Spirit** – Who Is The Holy Spirit and What does He Do?
- **Fill** – How Can I be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

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- **Week 7** – Evil: How Can I Resist Evil?
- **Week 8** – Healing: Does God Heal Today?
- **Week 9** – Church: What About Church and Telling Others?

*Optional Celebration Party***

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**ALPHA FILM SERIES & ALPHA WITH NICKY GUMBEL**
(11-13 WEEKS)

- **Week 1** – Is There More to Life Than This? *(Launch Party)*
- **Week 2** – Who Is Jesus?
- **Week 3** – Why Did Jesus Die?
- **Week 4** – How Can We Have Faith?
- **Week 5** – Why and How Do I Pray?
- **Week 6** – Why and How Do I Read the Bible?
- **Week 7** – How Does God Guide Us?

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**Alpha Weekend**
- **Introduction to the Weekend**
- **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?**

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- **Week 8** – How Can I Resist Evil?
- **Week 9** – Why and How Should I Tell Others?
- **Week 10** – Does God Heal Today?
- **Week 11** – What about the Church?

*Optional Celebration Party***

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* A Launch Party is a fun, pressure-free way to introduce how Alpha will run over the coming weeks. There is no small group discussion after the Intro Talk.

** A Celebration Party is an opportunity for guests to invite their friends and share their experiences on Alpha. There is no Alpha Talk, however, you may wish to show the Intro Talk again.
BEST PRACTICE #4
LISTENING LEADERS

SETTING THE STAGE FOR GREAT SMALL GROUPS

Thank you for saying yes to being on the Alpha team. There are so many benefits to volunteering on Alpha. You’ll have an opportunity to make new friends, serve your community, learn or develop a new skill, grow in your own faith and ultimately, make a difference in someone’s life.

What Do Hosts and Helpers Do?
Simply put, hosts are the ones who facilitate the small group discussion. Helpers are there to help with anything that might make the group experience even better. Helpers mostly stay quiet. They listen and pray silently as the discussion is unfolding. Being a helper on Alpha is actually one of the best ways for people to step into a leadership role for the first time.

For the Alpha Youth Film Series:
Small Group discussion is not only after the Alpha talks, but included throughout each episode. There are 3 pause prompts with questions for you to discuss with your small group. Take about 5-10 minutes and if you want more time to chat, there are additional questions in the Discussion Guide to go through afterwards.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION ALIVE
SHARE THESE GUIDELINES WITH YOUR SMALL GROUP

- You don’t have to talk if you don’t want to, but we’d love to hear everyone’s thoughts.
- Any question or comment is welcome (just be brief and respectful).
- Respect each other by listening and allowing different opinions.
- Keep things confidential when you leave this group.

From Good to Great
Show guests that they’re important by being 100% committed and consistent. Attend all the team training sessions, the Alpha Weekend, and all the small group discussions. Show genuine care for them by remembering their names and asking how their week is going. Remember, Alpha isn’t about ‘information transfer’; it’s about friendship and conversation.
TIPS FOR FACILITATING DISCUSSION

Use the Discussion Questions in the Team Guide that is provided, but don’t feel like you have to get through all of them. The questions are simply suggestions to help you spark key conversations. Be open to questions that guests have on their own. It will take practice to keep the conversation balanced. Watch for people who tend to dominate and engage those who seem disengaged or shy.

When guests ask a question, ask the rest of the group what they think or feel about it. If you answer all the questions, there will be no discussion and your answer will be viewed as ‘the final answer’. We want to encourage honest conversation.

CONVERSATION TIPS

**Questions**
- Yes, good question! What do the rest of you think?
- Can you explain a bit more, or give an example?
- Are you wondering if… (clarify, rephrase)
- Has anyone else felt that way too?
- And how does that make you feel?
- Can you share with us how that question came up for you?

**Affirmations**
- Thank you for sharing that.
- I appreciate your honesty. Tell us more.
- Yes, I can relate to that too!
- It’s ok to take a minute and think about it. That’s what we’re here for. No rush.
- It’s ok to have different opinions and disagree. Discussion helps us learn other viewpoints.
- I’m glad you’re here!
- Very interesting perspective!
Best Practice #5

ALPHA DAY/ WEEKEND AWAY

The typical Alpha Weekend runs from Friday night to Sunday morning. This creates unhurried time and space to watch all the talks about the Holy Spirit, for waiting on God and praying together, and for people to relax and have fun.

For some groups getting away for a whole weekend is not possible. Sometimes people can only do the Friday night, and all day Saturday, or even just the one full day. It does take some planning but it’s worth it.

Why do the Alpha Weekend?

• It gives guests the space, time, and atmosphere needed to thoroughly process and reflect on what they are learning.

• It helps guests, hosts, and helpers get to know each other better and form lasting relationships.

• 3-4 of the talks are given during the weekend (25% of the Alpha material).

• It provides an opportunity for guests to ask to be prayed for and filled with the Holy Spirit.

• It’s a special time to let God bless and encourage guests and leaders.

Tip #1: Go to a house, cabin, retreat center nearby – just somewhere different from the usual meeting space.

Tip #2: Watch the Prayer Ministry video with your whole team before the Alpha Weekend so they feel prepared.

The Alpha Weekend is all about getting away from the busyness of everyday life so people can connect with each other and connect with God. It’s the part of Alpha that many people say was the turning point in their Alpha experience. We consistently see hearts more open to Jesus and lives changed; that’s why we do it.

SAMPLE ALPHA WEEKEND SCHEDULE

FRIDAY
6:00 pm – Arrive
7:00 pm – Dinner or Snacks
8:00 pm – Introduction / Icebreaker Game
9:00 pm – Show Intro to the Alpha Weekend video*

*S for the Alpha Film Series & Alpha with Nicky Gumbel only. For the Alpha Youth Film Series, give a short overview of what to expect on the weekend.

SATURDAY
8:30 am – Breakfast
9:00 am – Leaders’ Meeting
9:30 am – Weekend Talk #1: Who is the Holy Spirit? (AFS/ANG) or How Does God Guide Us Into Full Life? (AYFS)
10:00 am – Refreshments and Snacks
10:30 am – Weekend Talk #2: What does the Holy Spirit Do? (AFS/ANG) or Who is the Holy Spirit and What Does He Do? (AYFS)
11:00 am – Small Group Discussion
12:00 pm – Lunch
2:00 pm – Free afternoon (activities can be organized)
4:00 pm – Snacks, coffee, and tea
5:00 pm – Worship & Weekend Talk #3: How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? (AFS/ANG/AYFS)
5:30 pm – Prayer Ministry Time
6:30 pm – Dinner
8:00 pm – Free time

SUNDAY
9:00 am – Breakfast
9:30 am – Leaders’ Meeting
10:00 am – Small Group Discussion
11:00 am – Weekend Talk #4: How can I make the most of my life? (AFS/ANG)
11:30 am – Prayer Ministry Time
12:00 pm – Lunch and Depart

*Your schedule may change depending on your Alpha material and number of talks you have on the weekend.
The word ministry, simply put, means service. So when we talk about prayer ministry, we are talking about serving people through prayer. If you’re planning to have someone else lead this time, be sure to coach them through it and have them watch the Team Training video on Prayer Ministry.

After the talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit, groups are encouraged to wait on God, and ask Him to fill them with His Holy Spirit. Since all groups and contexts are unique, there isn’t a perfect formula or exact model to do this, but here are three helpful tips for you:

1. **Invite them into a relationship with Jesus**
   Outline what will happen in the next while so they know what to expect. Tell them that you’ll watch the Alpha talk, and instead of discussion time, you’ll have a time of prayer. Explain that being filled with the Holy Spirit is a gift from God for His followers and then, before a time of prayer, invite people to start a relationship with God. Make sure they know it’s optional. Pray a simple prayer of commitment and allow time for them to give their lives to Jesus.

2. **Wait on God**
   Start with a prayer for everyone in the room, and invite guests to pray on their own. A simple prayer you could pray is, “Come, Holy Spirit and fill our hearts” or something similar. Then just wait on God - and this can be the hard part. Wait for minutes, not just a few seconds. It’s amazing how long a minute of silence actually feels – and as you’re waiting, encourage guests to be open to what God might want to do and to be patient.

   **Note:** Some groups want to have music playing in the background during prayer time, others prefer to have silence. The important thing is that people would be able to focus on God and not get distracted. You might want to encourage people to stand in silence and hold their hands out as if they’re about to receive a gift.

3. **Invite hosts & helpers to pray for guests**
   After some time waiting on God, invite your Alpha hosts and helpers to begin praying with people from their small group. Before you do this, explain to the group what will happen - that hosts and helpers will come around and ask them if they would like prayer, and tell them they can just say ‘no thanks’ if they prefer not to be prayed for.

   Prayer time can take anywhere from 15 minutes to over an hour. After a while, as hosts and helpers are praying for guests, it’s great to have someone lead in songs of worship.

   This time of prayer ministry needs intentional leadership. It takes a bit of preparation, but it is amazing to see all the things God will do. All of this is shaped by a confidence in God and His desire to pour His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

   **Practical tips for praying for someone**
   - Make yourself aware of God’s presence
   - Make the person feel at ease
   - Ask, “How can I pray for you?”
   - Ask the Holy Spirit to come
   - Be OK with silence
   - Pray for specific needs
   - Check in
CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE LEADER TO DECIDE

- **Timing** - Will you do an overnight Alpha Weekend or an Alpha Day?
- **Location** - Which venue accommodates structured and leisure time?
- **Cost** - How will we pay for this? Will the church subsidize or take an offering?
- **Food** - What are you going to eat? Who will prepare the food?
- **Insurance/Liability** - Are there forms or contracts required in advance?
- **Dates** - When will you do your Alpha Weekend/Day?
- **Number of Talks** - How many Alpha talks will you cover (2-4)?
- **Transportation** - How will everyone get there?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE LEADER TO DELEGATE

- **Team** - Do you need an Alpha Weekend planning team to help prepare?
- **Leaders** - Do you have people designated for the prayer ministry time?
- **Supplies** - Do you need to bring any supplies (e.g., TV, projector, speakers, games, etc.)?
- **Promotion** - How will you promote and confirm sign-ups from guests?
- **Prayer** - Do you have people praying throughout this entire event?
- **Handouts** - What materials do you need to prepare in advance to bring along?
- **Fun** - What else can you do to make the time memorable and fun?
- **Atmosphere** - What can you do to make the space inviting and comfortable?
- **Childcare** - Do you need to provide this? Communicate about it to guests ahead of time.

Possible items to bring:
- Alpha resources (Alpha videos, handouts, etc.)
- Bibles
- First Aid Kit
- Sound system (projector, computer, cables etc.)
- Name tags
- Pens/pencils
- Games and prizes
- Tissue
- Sports equipment
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Here are some team role examples. These roles might not all apply to your context but they'll help you think about who you might invite to be involved:

**FOOD** – Think about people you know who love cooking and hospitality. What would it look like if you invited them to help prepare and cook meals/snacks?

**TECH SUPPORT** – Who can make sure you have the right audio and visual gear so that everything goes smoothly? Find those people who love to help out behind-the-scenes.

**DESIGN** – Who can dream up creative ways to make your meeting space more welcoming and fun? This person probably spends a lot of time on Pinterest.

**WELCOME TEAM** – The greeters and registration table will usually be the first people that guests meet. Look for people with a friendly smile and who love connecting.

**SET UP AND TEARDOWN** – Think about those who are available to come a bit earlier for set up and who can stick around to do clean up afterwards.

**MC** – This is someone who can host your Alpha. Think of one or two people who don't mind speaking in front of groups and can make people feel at ease, especially if they don’t typically go to church.

**ADMINISTRATOR** – Is there someone who loves lists, numbers and budgets, and can help you pull together all the details?

**PRAYER TEAM** – One of the most important roles on your team is people who will pray. Think of who would be willing to lead a group to pray behind the scenes for all aspects of your Alpha.

**HOSTS AND HELPERS** – The Small Group Host keeps the conversation rolling and makes sure that guests feel safe to share openly. This role requires someone who is a good listener, encourager, and who is sensitive to the needs of others. Helpers provide support to Hosts by praying silently, and affirming and encouraging guests throughout the weeks. There is a Team Training video about 'Small Groups' that will explain more about this.

Being part of an Alpha team can be the most rewarding and fun experience for volunteers. People with a common interest get together and can make new friends, develop their skills and learn how to work together. A strong team will also provide a better, more positive experience for your Alpha guests.
4 TIPS FOR BUILDING STRONG ALPHA TEAMS

1. Utilize the online training center
   We have created a series of short videos which are designed to help the individual running Alpha come to know the DNA of Alpha and to better understand how to train their team. Feel free to share these videos with your team or use however you see fit. You can find these videos at alphausa.org.

2. Take your whole team through the Alpha Team Training Sessions
   Even if some of your volunteers have done the training before, we suggest that everyone attends the training sessions. It’s a great refresher and ensures that everyone is on the same page and feels like a team. The team training videos are available on the Alpha USA website.

   Note: You can do all 3 sessions in one training day or split them up into two. The videos are interactive with pause prompts designed to get your team talking through the ideas. Have fun when you get your team together - host a meal or provide snacks, do an icebreaker, share some laughs, provide time for Q&A.

3. Meet with your team each week during Alpha
   Usually teams meet together about 30 minutes before Alpha begins. It’s a time to share important info or top tips for that session, answer any questions and then pray together.

4. Get Feedback
   Some groups debrief each week if time allows, but we definitely encourage you to get together with your team after Alpha has ended. Maybe have a meal with them, thank them for their time, and talk about what went well and what could be improved.

Next Steps: Take a moment and think of some people who might be excited to be part of your Alpha team and write down their names. Pray about what role they can do. Next open up your calendar and schedule a time for team training if you haven’t already.
BEST PRACTICE #7
EVANGELISTICALLY POSITIONED

When Alpha guests have a positive experience, they tell their friends about it, and invite them to the next Alpha. **In fact 86% of guests come to Alpha because of a personal invitation.**

Things like print and digital advertising and Facebook invitations can help, but advertising at its best simply raises awareness and helps set up a personal invitation. The best thing you can do is to inspire and equip your team of volunteers and Alpha guests to invite others.

**Here are some ways to make inviting others easier:**

1. **Share stories**
   If you have one or two people who have just experienced Alpha for themselves, have them tell their story to your church. If you haven’t done Alpha before, use one of the Alpha video stories from alphusa.org/blog. Stories are the best way to share the heart of what Alpha is all about.

2. **Provide promotional tools**
   We have a variety of print and digital assets available for free that you can customize with your Alpha details. Get them into the hands of your team and Alpha guests so they have something to give to their friends as an extension of their invitation.

3. **Encourage your team to invite**
   It takes a bit of courage and risk to share something that’s important to you, but it’s worth the effort. Alpha could be an experience that someone else is looking for. We like to say - Alpha is a great place for you to invite your friends to come and explore faith. It’s designed to be a place where you can invite anyone from any background and know they will be honored and respected.

4. **Be aware of the Bell Curve**
   The first several Alphas tend to attract lots of “church-goers” by default. This is a season of introduction where they are experiencing Alpha for themselves so they can be confident in what they are inviting their friends to experience. We often see the first several Alphas having a high attendance and then attendance diminishes. Don’t be discouraged! This is when Alpha really becomes ALPHA. Encourage your team to invite and fill their groups with people from outside the church. You should begin to see Alpha grow from there. Run Alpha for several years and you will greatly a great invitational culture.
The Impact of Alpha in 2016

315,801 people tried Alpha in 2016

8,214 people trained
5,097 churches ran Alpha
9,273 Alpha courses
47,370 church volunteers

Did you know......

Alpha USA offers our resources to churches, organizations and individuals at no cost. That’s right, all the Alpha resources are made available through the generosity of donors like you!

If you would like to help us continue to make resources available and help Alpha grow and expand, please consider a gift to Alpha. All gifts are tax deductible

Go to alphusa.org/give or text "Donate" to 312-647-2477 today!
Alpha Lab
### 1-3 MONTHS IN ADVANCE

- Log in to Alpha Builder (run.alpha.org) and create your Alpha. You can choose to publish your Alpha on the Alpha USA website (alphausa.org/try) which will help guests search for and find an Alpha in their area.

- Watch the Leader Training videos and preview all of the resources. These are different from the Alpha Team Training videos that you will watch with your whole team.

- Edit the specific dates of your Alpha in Alpha Builder (including your Team Training meetings, weekly sessions, the Alpha Weekend/Day, holidays, etc.).

- Prayerfully pick your Alpha team members including the MC, tech support, food prep, setup and teardown, small group hosts & helpers etc. (Full descriptions of team roles can be found in the Alpha Toolbox Document - Building a Strong Team.)

- Consider attending a local Alpha Lab training day with your team or join with other teams for Open Alpha Training (see alphausa.org/events for training opportunities in your area).

- Develop a budget and a system of accounting for all income and expenses including the following:
  - Launch Party/Intro Night
  - Weekly Meals
  - Atmosphere & Decor
  - Promotional Materials
  - Alpha Weekend/Day
  - Celebration Party

- Make sure you have someone overseeing the following areas:
  - Food prep for each week
  - Fundraising (if necessary)
  - Prayer

- Check on insurance coverage and liability. Make arrangements to cover all aspects as needed.

- Check out potential Alpha Weekend/Day facilities and book one as soon as possible.

### Notes:

Feel free to customize this checklist for your Alpha.
1-2 MONTHS IN ADVANCE

☐ Go through Alpha Builder and finish up any parts you haven’t done yet: watch the Leader Training videos, confirm the weekly schedule and download the videos, etc.

☐ Plan and prepare food arrangements. Schedule the task force kitchen team members.

☐ Finalize the budget for all aspects of Alpha including weekly meals, the Weekend/Day, Alpha resources, and other incidentals.

☐ Select an appropriate playlist or specific music for each weekly session. Check on what kind of permission you need to print and display the lyrics (as necessary).

☐ Organize and plan aspects of your Alpha Weekend/Day. More information can be found in the Alpha Toolbox - Alpha Weekend/Day Planning Checklist.

2 WEEKS IN ADVANCE

☐ Get your Alpha team together to watch the Team Training videos, talk about team roles, the timeline, and have fun.

☐ Encourage small group hosts and helpers to begin praying for their (potential) group members.

☐ Meet with your decor team and brainstorm ways to create a welcoming atmosphere. Think about lighting, seating, table centrepieces etc.

☐ Finalize food arrangements depending on the number of guests you expect.

WEAKLY Alpha SESSIONS

☐ Arrange for the Alpha Team to arrive early for set up, create a welcoming atmosphere, and prepare for the session.

☐ Double check that all audio-visual equipment is in place before guests arrive. Set up the TV or projector screen, projector or computer, microphone and speakers as needed. (Download the videos in advance to avoid potential streaming issues.)

☐ Make sure there are enough Bibles and Alpha Guest Guides (optional).

☐ Each week, meet with your whole Alpha Team for prayer, updates and a pep talk before everyone goes to their places.

☐ Have a team of people praying while small groups are meeting.

☐ On week 2 or 3, place a donation box in an area that is secure but visible (optional).

☐ Promote dates for the Alpha Weekend/Day right from the start. Build it up as a fun getaway.

☐ Debrief with your Alpha team after guests go home. Celebrate the small wins, talk about what to improve and encourage each other.

Notes:
**WEeks Leading up to the Alpha Weekend/Day**

- Finalize the number of people who will be attending the Alpha Weekend/Day (for food and seating prep).
- Oversee the purchase and preparation of food provided for the Alpha Weekend/Day.
- Develop the schedule (including leisure time) and communicate this to your team and guests.
- Determine how/when music will be included. Select a team to oversee worship music and prayer ministry.
- Hand out copies of your Weekend/Day schedule, map of the facility, waiver form for minors, and list of things to bring (as needed).

**1 Week Before the Alpha Weekend/Day**

- Meet with your team to watch the Team Training video about “prayer ministry” and talk about what the weekend will look like for your group.

**Weeks Leading up to the Celebration Party (Optional)**

- Promote the Celebration Party and distribute invitations for Alpha guests to invite their friends.
- Prepare the schedule for the Celebration Party; assign tasks and finalize any entertainment, photo booth, themes, etc.
- Finalize the count for the Celebration Party, arrange food and atmosphere details.

**Celebration Party (Optional)**

- Arrive early for set up and to create a fun and friendly atmosphere.
- Double check that all audio-visual equipment is in place before guests arrive.
- Hand out the Guest Feedback Forms and Team Feedback Forms and allow at least 10 minutes for them to fill out the sheets. This will allow time for thoughtful responses.
- Announce the date and starting time for the next Alpha if it is already set.

**Week After Alpha Ends**

- Meet with your Alpha team to go over Alpha Guest and Team Feedback Forms to evaluate and improve aspects of your Alpha and to share stories.
- Send a thank you email or card to all team members who have helped throughout Alpha (don’t forget the Prayer Team!).

**Notes:**

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**ALPHA LAB - Alpha Checklist**

19

alphausa.org
3. Alpha Talks
The 15 Alpha talks cover several core elements of the Christian faith in a unique way. The tone is very gentle, kind hearted, clear and compelling. They are not intense and keep the balance of appealing to the head as well as the heart without ever coming across as preachy. Whether the Alpha talks are on video or live, utilizing them in their order is a best practice.

- Alpha talks are utilized in video format or via Alpha manuscript.
- At least 8 weeks long.
- Delivery tone is conducive for skeptics.

4. Listening Hosts
Alpha small groups are unique because our small group hosts don’t answer questions. Instead they facilitate group discussion and let people share their point of view. The litmus test for a small group host is: “Would you entrust your best non-Christian friend to be in this person’s group?” Look for those with the gift of hospitality and encouragement.

- Hosts do not answer questions but allow group to process together.
- Hosts rely on the helpers to jump start conversation.
- Hosts create an environment not just about content, but about friendship where everyone is respected.

5. Weekend Away
The Alpha weekend or Day away is the place where great friendships are solidified. It is also the best place to introduce people to the Holy Spirit. The special Alpha experience provides an opportunity to minister to people in prayer one on one and train team members in 1:1 Prayer ministry.

- Strong focus on relationships. It’s not just about the 3-4 sessions.
- Clear and helpful time of prayer ministry for guests on weekend.
- Plenty of time for guests to process the teaching on the Holy Spirit.
- Feels natural to focus on the supernatural.

6. Training
The Alpha process is a paradigm shift for many and we regularly see the Alphas that train their teams do far better and last longer than those that jump in with no training. When training is offered each term, new hosts and helpers will have the place they need to step into leadership roles. Visit alphausa.org for free training resources.

- Utilize online training for key leaders.
- Provide team training 1 before Alpha launches each term.
- Provide 1:1 Prayer ministry training before weekend away.
- Provide training tips each week of Alpha with team before guests arrive.

7. Evangelistically Positioned
Alpha is for everyone. However, it really seems to resonate best with those who would not call themselves followers of Christ or who have no church background. Make sure that you orient your experience towards those that have little or no understanding of Christianity. When you talk about Alpha, describe it as “A place where you can invite people from literally any background to explore faith, ask questions and share their point of view.”

- Team regularly invites the unchurched to Alpha.
- Solid ratio of hosts/helpers to unchurched guests in each group.
- Our team knows how Alpha fits into the life of the church.
- Our alpha has a good response from those unfamiliar with church.
Cohort Coaching Questions

Gather with your cohort after each term and utilize the following questions to improve your Alpha experience. Then encourage and pray for one another!

SET 1: GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.
1. How are you doing as you lead Alpha?
2. Where would you say your team is doing the best?
3. What challenges are you facing and how are you handling them?
4. How can we pray for you?

SET 2: FINE TUNE YOUR EXPERIENCE
1. What is working and what is not working in your Alpha?
2. What is unclear in your Alpha for you, your team or for your guests?
3. Which of the 7 best practices are missing from your Alpha experience?
4. In what ways have you put together the right team? What adjustments should be made on your team? Do you have new helpers and hosts for next term?

SET 3. GROW AND MULTIPLY ALPHA
1. What is God doing through your Alpha? How are you telling those stories?
2. How are you growing as a leader in Alpha?
3. What would you love to see happen in the next year with Alpha?
4. Who else could/should be a part of a cohort like this?

What is a cohort?
A cohort is a collection of Alpha practitioners who gather several times a year to improve their Alpha experience.

How are cohorts formed?
Cohorts are relationally based and may start in a variety of ways: via invitation, ad hoc from a local training event, or from the recommendation of a coach or network director.

How much do cohorts cost?
As with much of Alpha, cohorts are relationally driven and cost nothing.

How long do cohorts last?
A typical cohort lasts about the time it takes for a lunch meeting and cohorts often meet 3-4 times a year. Each cohort is unique and exists to meet the needs of its attenders.

Who leads a cohort?
Cohorts are more hosted than lead… sound familiar? Cohorts can be hosted by Alpha practitioners, Alpha coaches, or anyone who wants to improve their Alpha experience.

Where can I find a cohort?
The best place to link up with other local practitioners is at a local training. Contact your local Network Director to see if there is a cohort near you. Otherwise, you can start one yourself and utilize our
Is There More to Life Than This?
HOST NOTES: SESSION 1

Tips and Ideas

1. Introduce guests to Alpha – What is it? Who is it for? How long does it last? What’s the format?
2. Always finish on time and try to do something social afterwards to carry on chatting – perhaps at a restaurant or coffee shop.
3. Remember that the first session is different from others: it’s more about getting to know each other. In future weeks we’ll have more discussion about the session’s talk.

Small Group Questions

TO GET DISCUSSION GOING AFTER THE TALK

• Start getting to know each other. Play icebreakers, such as the Name Game or Desert Island/Stuck in a Elevator. Try to discourage Christian-related answers
• How and why did you end up coming here today?
• If it turned out that God existed and you could ask one question, what would it be?

Good Points to End on

• We hope you enjoyed this evening, it’s a bit different from other weeks. If you’re feeling a bit frustrated, don’t worry – there will be lots more time for discussion next week
• Next session’s talk: Who Is Jesus?
• If you want to watch tonight’s talk again, you can catch up on alpha.org/tv

Books

What’s So Amazing About Grace?
Philip Yancey

The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming
Henri J. M. Nouwen

Searching Issues: Does Religion Do More Harm Than Good?
Nicky Gumbel
Session 1

Is there more to life than this
**ADMIN**

1. Ensure that you have registered everyone in the group and that each person has a name badge

2. Serve drinks and snacks before beginning the discussion

3. Welcome everyone to the group

4. Introduce yourselves and explain your roles

5. Explain the format for each session and the number of sessions

6. Highlight: no pressure, no follow up, no charge

7. Explain the format and purpose of the small group discussion

8. Reassure the guests that you always finish on time

**ICEBREAKERS**

These games will enable the group to remember each other’s names and get to know one another.

**NAME GAME**

- ‘Everyone think of a positive adjective that starts with the same letter as your first name’ eg ‘Jovial John’ or ‘Happy Helen’ OR ‘Everyone think of a famous person with the same first name as you’ eg ‘Justin Bieber’, ‘Sandra Bullock’

- Start with the person on your left. They must say their name and positive adjective or celebrity name. The next person must say their name and adjective or celebrity name and that of the person before them
• Each person must try and repeat all the names of the guests preceding them from memory. The host is the last person to go and repeats the names of everyone in the group

• Be quick to help any guests who might find this more difficult

DESSERT ISLAND GAME (IF YOU HAVE TIME)

• ‘If you were stuck on a desert island and you could take one thing (not a person) with you and you already have the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare, what would you take?’

• OR ‘Which person from history would you like to be stuck in a lift with, and why?’

‘HOW AND WHY DID YOU END UP COMING HERE TODAY?’

• This gives the rest of the group permission to say what they really think. Try to draw more out of guests if they are a bit hesitant. Start with the guest you think is most reluctant/hostile about doing Alpha

‘IF IT TURNED OUT THAT GOD EXISTED AND YOU COULD ASK ONE QUESTION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?’

• ‘These are great questions’
• Write the questions down on a piece of paper with a view to coming back to them at the end of Alpha

Finish on time and carry on discussion elsewhere (eg, café) for those who want to.
Session 2

Who is Jesus
ADMIN

Welcome the group then go around and ask each person to introduce themselves briefly. Welcome any new guests, and ask them: ‘How and why did you end up coming here today?’ Pass around the registration list. Add any new names and contact details and correct any mistakes from the previous week.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What makes you happy?
2. What do you think about Jesus?
3. If you had a chance to meet Jesus, how would you feel and what would you say to him?

Additional questions (if needed):

4. Before you heard the talk tonight, what was your concept of Jesus? Has it changed? If so, in what way?
5. What aspects of the evidence presented tonight did you find convincing/not convincing?
**ADMIN**

Introduce any new guests. Pass around the registration list. Add any new names and contact details and correct any mistakes from the previous session.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

This is often the session when the subject of ‘suffering’ arises (see *Searching Issues* chapter ‘Why Does God Allow Suffering?’).

1. What does the word ‘forgiveness’ mean to you?
2. Have you ever had to forgive anyone? How did you do it?
3. What does the word ‘sin’ mean to you?

Additional question (if needed):

4. What is your reaction to Jesus’ death?
Session 4

How can I have faith?
**ADMIN**

Introduce any new guests. Pass around the registration list and amend if needed. This is a good session to mention the Alpha weekend for the first time. Give the dates to the guests.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

You may find that guests have questions, for example, about other religions (see *Searching Issues* chapter ‘What About Other Religions?’).

1. What does faith mean to you?
2. What do you think about the evidence for Christianity?
3. How can you have faith in someone you can’t see?
Session 5

pray

Why and how do I
ADMIN
This is a good session to encourage guests to attend the Alpha weekend. Mention the cost and the possibility of bursaries.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever tried praying? How did you get on?
2. What do you think about the idea of God answering prayer?
3. Finish with a short prayer (if appropriate)

Additional question (if needed):

4. In the talk, various reasons for praying are given. Which of these do you relate to and why?
Why should I read the Bible and how should I read it?
ADMIN
Remind the group about the Alpha weekend. Ask someone who has benefited from a previous one to describe their experience. Take further names and collect payment.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Has anyone ever read any of the Bible? How did you find it?
2. How do you feel about the idea of God speaking through the Bible?
3. Has anyone got any practical suggestions about how to read the Bible? (at an appropriate point in discussion, you might recommend the Bible in One Year app: bibleinoneyear.org)

Additional question (if needed):

4. Have you read anything in the Bible that has challenged an aspect of your beliefs or behaviour?
Session 7

How does God guide us?
ADMIN
Arrange transport for the Alpha weekend if necessary.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Over the last few weeks, has anyone had a sense that God might be guiding them?

2. How do you feel about the idea of God having a plan for your life?
Session 8

Who is the Holy Spirit
There is no small group discussion following this session.
What does the Holy Spirit do
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.

1. What do you think each of these spiritual gifts refers to? (vv.8–10)

2. What is the gift of tongues? Does anyone have any experience of it?

3. How do you feel about the idea of God giving us supernatural gifts?

4. Does everybody have the same gifts? (vv.4–6)
   • Different gifts, works and service, but the same God

5. Why does God give spiritual gifts to people? (v.7)
   • For the common good
   • Not for our own glory

6. Mention that there will be an opportunity to hear more on this subject in the next session
How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit
This session is followed by a time of prayer ministry in a corporate setting. Spend time praying with any guests who would like prayer to be filled with the Holy Spirit (see Training 2).
Session 11

How can I make the most of the rest of my life
Ask each member of the group, starting with the person who will be most open, to describe their experience of the weekend. This will give permission for any others who want to, to share their experiences. If appropriate you may wish to offer an opportunity for the group to pray for one another.
Session 12

How can I resist evil
ADMIN
Start the small group time by asking guests to share their experiences of the Alpha weekend. (Start with the person who will be most open/positive.) This gives the guests the opportunity to express what happened to them. It can be a great encouragement to the group. Remember to include those who did not go on the weekend in the discussion by asking them what they think about what they have heard.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1. Feedback from the weekend (see notes above)
2. Why do you think bad things happen?
3. Where does temptation come from?
4. How do you resist temptation?
Session 13

How and why should I tell others
ADMIN

If the dates and details of the Alpha celebration do not come up naturally in the discussion, this is a good time to mention them. Invitations can be handed out too. If possible, aim to pray together as a group at the end of this session.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you told any of your friends/family/colleagues at work that you are doing Alpha? What was their reaction?

2. If you did not know anything about Christianity, how would you like to be told about it?

3. What do you think/feel about the idea of telling others about your faith?
Session 14

Does God heal today?
ADMIN

Remind guests about the Alpha celebration. Try to work out approximately how many people will be coming, including small group members and any guests they plan to invite.

PRAYER FOR HEALING

• If words of knowledge were given at the end of the talk, ask if anyone in the group thinks that a ‘word of knowledge’ may have been for them

• If not, ask your guests if there is a specific problem or illness for which they would like prayer for healing. At the same time ask if anyone would like prayer for any other issue. This is a good time to clear up any general issues about healing, so allow time for the group to discuss briefly before praying together

• Pray for guests according to the prayer ministry guidelines (Training 2). If there are lots of guests, divide into one group of men and one group of women at this stage

• Be prepared for someone who may want to give their life to Christ. Equally affirm those who do want to be prayed for and those who do not
How to Kill Alpha in 10 Steps

Father James Mallon & Ron Huntley

When setting up Alpha in the parish everyone starts with the best intentions but there are often common mistakes. Father James Mallon, priest at the parish of Saint Benedict in the Archdiocese of Halifax, Canada, and Ron Huntley, Director of Pastoral Ministries also at Saint Benedict parish, share how to avoid making those mistakes with their three-part podcast “How to Kill Alpha in 10 Steps”.

1) Don’t have a full meal, go straight into the talks

Food is the first thing people try to downsize because it can be hard work. “When you have a meal 10 weeks in row with perfect strangers they become great friends” says Ron.

Alpha is not just about delivering information and knowledge; it is about building relationships and belonging to a community. It is during the meal that relationships flourish and you build long lasting friendships. “As the relationships build and trust grows it allows people to be open to receive the content of the talks which then will impact their lives and result in changed lives” adds Father James.

2) Cut the Alpha weekend

Nowadays everyone is so busy that some parishes may feel it is easier to avoid running the Alpha weekend.

The Alpha weekend focuses entirely on the Holy Spirit and it covers almost one third of the entire course. “When I travel to speak at conferences and when I interview people who have had life changing experiences, 90% of the testimonies begin at the weekend away. This is where it all comes together for people. This is where people have a powerful experience of God’s love,” says Father James.

3) Don’t pray

Prayer needs to be intentional, and as hosts and leaders we need to acknowledge that we can’t transform lives through our own willpower. We have to pray and ask people to pray leading up to the course, during it and after it. If running Alpha in a parish setting, use the prayer ministries and networks within the parish.

“We have a team praying for guests even before we know who the guests are going to be” says Ron. “We always ask hosts and helpers to show up 30 minutes before Alpha starts so we can spend 15
minutes letting them know what’s important to cover that particular session and we also take some
time to pray for people.”

4) Teach in the small groups

Small groups are not for teaching! It can be hard not to say anything and to hold off from answering all
the questions. However, small groups are for guests to share thoughts and ask questions to each other.

It is recommended that an Alpha small group (8-10 people) has two hosts and two helpers. The goal of
the leaders is to facilitate conversation.

5) Be intense, skip all the fun icebreakers and go straight into the big discussions

Intensity turns people off. Joy opens the door to people growing in faith.

We shouldn’t talk about anything religious during dinner or skip the fun icebreakers. “We want to show
that Jesus came so that we can have life and have it to the full. I want my joy to be in you and your joy to
be complete (John 15:11). Joy is so foundational to the Christian life,” explains Father James. “That is
what we try to do at Alpha; to have an absolute blast!”

6) Talk Catholic

Language matters. Don’t assume everyone is Catholic or familiar enough with the Catholic culture. If
people don’t feel like they understand or can join the conversation, they won’t come back.

The goal of Alpha is to bring people to a close encounter with Jesus. Father James says, “Let’s bring
people to a relationship and then once they are in that and have had the life changing experience then
comes the whole question of what you do next. Let Alpha be Alpha and don’t try to stuff a whole
lifetime curriculum into 10 weeks.”

7) Choose group leaders who think they deserve to lead

Alpha is an evangelization tool predominantly to reach people who are away from the Church so it is
important to choose leaders whom guests can connect with.

When it comes to choosing your leaders, Father James says, choose “someone who is going to be
incredibly loving, non-judgmental, kind, patient, funny and not intense. In Evangelii Gaudium, Pope
Francis says that evangelization in our context today has to be non-judgmental, it has to be about
listening and that is really what the qualities of a small group leader are.”
8) Pick a team and keep the same team forever

“When it comes to Alpha sometimes we are so focused on the guests that we forget that there is an opportunity to raise up leaders. Alpha is also about raising up leaders,” explains Ron.

Alpha is like a pipeline and in order to not block the flow you want to have a high turnover, a constant movement. This is the key to growing leaders. You want to identify people, train them and send them out to other ministries or launch a new Alpha initiative in other contexts.

Ron explains, “We are not putting on a course, we are changing a culture. They are two very different things. We are raising people up, equipping them, helping them to encounter Christ and then we need to move them on.”

9) Pick songs that are hard to sing

Good music is important. We want to teach people to praise God. Worship can be very awkward for guests but it is also the part they can most relate to; everyone listens to music. You have to do it right so people feel like joining in.

You don’t need a big band, choose someone with a guitar or a piano and for the first couple of weeks choose one hymn that people from outside the church would recognize, for example ‘Amazing Grace’. As the weeks progress build to a couple of hymns but try not to introduce a brand new hymn every week and always repeat one from the week before.

10) Don’t have a plan post-Alpha

You have to have a vision post-Alpha. If you are running Alpha you should be expectant that people are going to be transformed and come to know Jesus, so ensure you have something in place for them to continue their journey in faith. Relationship is key so invite people to come back to help at Alpha and consider setting up on-going fellowship groups like Connect Groups.

Connect Groups are small to mid-size groups, 20-30 people, that meet to connect and to grow. They meet every week or every other week to continue growing in discipleship, teaching, ministry and most importantly continue growing in friendship and fellowship.

Ron says, “First task is to get people continuing small groups, mid-size groups and in communities where they experience relationships. Because if you get into that then you have got the rest of life to fill in the blanks. This is not a sprint, this is a marathon.”

Listen to the three-part podcast on How to Kill Alpha in 10 Steps here.
A Few Notes on Leading Table Discussions

1. What is a Facilitator or Table Leader?
   a. Your task is to make the meeting easy for the others, you are the host. You do not have to be the expert on the subject. Your key role is making the meeting flow for the others and making them comfortable. It is good to tell the members what your role is…they will help you.

2. Making everyone feel welcome and comfortable
   a. Self-Introductions
      i. Normal background information as in whether they are married, single, family, years in the parish, etc. The material should be whatever they feel comfortable sharing. It may work well for you to give a brief introduction to yourself. That can set the example for others to follow.
      ii. An icebreaker question (just one) can be used for the first meeting only
         1. What is something about you that is not well known?
         2. What is your favorite hobby?
         3. What was the best thing that happened to you this week?
         4. What is the most outrageous thing you have done for God?
         5. Add your own non-threatening question....

   b. For a new addition to the team, just do a quick round the room name sharing. Further introductions may take place for them informally at a break or after the meeting.

   c. Set up group guidelines that everyone wants to live by and write them down (First meeting only). It is best if they have the time to create their own guidelines. They will take ownership of them and will work to enforce them without you having to step in all the time. While these are their guidelines, some that need to be included are:
      i. What is said in the room stays in the room. This is critical for people to feel safe to share personal thoughts.
      ii. No one is forced to talk. On any given day or night, someone may just want to be present and listen.
iii. Respect everyone's opinion.

1. No comments like; “I disagree.” "I think you are wrong." "I'd never do that.".... You get the idea.
   a. Keep the comments positive; “I have another way of looking at this, …” “I see a different perspective here, …”

2. Watch the body language. Rolling eyes back, huffing and puffing or shaking your head in disagreement can have the same impact as verbal comments.

3. Don't interrupt, let them finish their comment.

4. Listen when someone is talking. Keeping eye contact, turning and face them, nodding your head in response to their comments all show that you are paying attention to them.

iv. Start on time and end on time. Remember the table leader/facilitator manages the clock.

If there is no time to set up rules, see attachment “Guiding Principles for Small Groups” which is attached. Make a handout for everyone and then ask if they can agree with these guidelines.

3. **Facilitating/Table Leading “Do’s”**.

   a. Welcome each individual, every meeting.

   b. Introduce the questions for discussion.

      i. If there are written questions, you may want to go around the room and have each individual introduce a question.

   c. Involve everyone

      i. Quiet members need to be asked for their thoughts (Keep in mind those members that don't want to share, you can skip them, but reaffirm that they can add their thoughts if they want.)

      ii. Talkers may need to be deflected at times. "Thank you Jerry that is an interesting comment. Marge what are your thoughts on....?"

      iii. Watch the body language, you can often spot someone that is hungry to say something, but too shy to step in.
iv. Ask a quieter person (not a totally shy individual) to read if appropriate. Asking someone to read something often helps them break the ice and become engaged in the discussion.

d. Manage the clock. Know where you are in the discussion and make adjustments to assure ending on time.

   i. ID the key discussion questions. You could skip the minor ones.

   ii. If it looks like it is going to run over, ask permission to go an extra 10 minutes. No More! If individuals have to leave, that is perfectly fine.

e. If questions come up, that no one knows the answer to, taking a guess is a bad idea. Ask one of the group leaders if they have any input on that issue. If no one knows, assure them that someone will get an answer for them the next time. Then you must follow up.

f. Silence is OK for a little while. Don't jump in too quick.

4. Facilitating/Table Leading “Don’ts”

   a. Don't get engaged in the topic and forget your role.

   b. Don't over control the discussion. It may be better to let a discussion roll a little longer and drop a future question.

   c. You're not the boss, you're the facilitator/table leader. Be a servant leader!

   d. You're not an expert, don't try to answer the questions if you don't know the answer. Turn them back to the team. Someone there may know!

   e. Don't discuss anyone outside of the room. Control the gossip.

   f. Don't repeatedly call on the same person to start the discussion.

   g. Don't allow sidebar conversations (should be one of the rules)

5. Know your members.

   a. Quickly review some tricky personality types. Point out handout on Personality Types.

      i. Interrupter

      ii. Intellectual

      iii. Shy/Timid
iv. Dominator

v. Skeptic

vi. Team player

1. These are the majority, good people, willing to be an active part of a team.

6. Here are some internet sites that you may find interesting as they relate to personality types.

   a. http://newsletter.stc-carolina.org/Don%E2%80%99t+Take+This+the+Wrong+Way%3A+Using+the+Myers-Briggs+Personality+Types+to+Avoid+Conflict


   c. http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/how_to_manage_difficult_personalities_in_your_meetings_a_few_facilitation_secrets
Guiding Principles for Small Groups

1. What is said in the room stays in the room.
   a. This is critical for people to feel safe when they speak.
   b. Even sharing personal information with your spouse when you go home has proven to be a breach in confidentiality.

2. No one is forced to talk.
   a. On any given day or night, someone may just want to be present and listen.
   b. It is OK to tell the table leader that you don’t want to be called on. That will help them and you.

3. Respect everyone's opinion.
   a. Others may have comments that you don’t agree with. That doesn’t mean they are wrong, they simply have a different viewpoint.
      Respect that.
      i. Refrain from negative comments like; "Well that is wrong."
         "I'd never do that."
         "You shouldn’t feel that way." .... you get the idea.
         1. Take a positive position; “I see your point. I had a little different reaction to that, I feel…”
         ii. Watch your body language. Rolling eyes back or shaking your head negatively can have the same impact as the comments noted above.
   b. Listen when someone is talking, really listen!
      i. As the prayer says, seek first to understand, then to be understood.
      ii. Don't interrupt.
      iii. Side bar discussions are disruptive for the entire team.

4. Be on time.
   a. We want to end on time and the first step in doing that is to start on time.
   b. If you do come in late, don’t disrupt the flow. You can catch up after the session is done through a discussion with the table leader.
Personality types; how to recognize and hints on how to work with them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Interrupter”</th>
<th>Tools to help Facilitator</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Has sidebar conversations</td>
<td>1. Bring them back if there are sidebar conversations, “John do you have something to share with the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Often changes discussion point, introduces another topic</td>
<td>2. Bring them back on topic, “We are getting a little off topic, can you hold that thought and we can talk about it after? Thank you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Asks unconnected questions</td>
<td>a. Now reintroduce the topic or question that was intended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Doesn’t let other people complete their comments. Will jump in and cut them off</td>
<td>3. To deal with unconnected questions, try asking for clarification, “Can you rephrase, I’m not sure I understand how that fits in here?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. If there is no tie in, ask to return to subject and offer to revisit their topic at the end.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. For an interruption, first try this, “I think Mary had the floor, can you hold that thought John?” If that doesn’t work, then try a more direct route, “John, remember the group guidelines, I’d like to let Mary finish her thoughts? Thank you.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Then come back to John after Mary is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. If problem persists week to week with this individual, talk to them on the side and point out what they are doing and ask for their consideration of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Intellectual”</td>
<td>Tools to help Facilitator</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Very knowledgeable and likes to show it. May cause others to shut down or feel inadequate.  
2. Has an opinion about everything.  
3. Is not shy and can dominate the conversation. | 1. Ask another for their opinion either first or as soon as this person pauses. “Mike, what are your thoughts on ….”  
a. May need to point out that this is not a right or wrong discussion, but a faith sharing discussion.  
2. Same as “1” above. Make sure you control the discussion, calling on others.  
3. May have to talk to this person on the side to ask for their help because they are so knowledgeable (play to their ego) in getting others engaged by taking a breather and listening. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Shy/Timid”</th>
<th>Tools to help Facilitator</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1. Body language may be a key, no eye contact, hands folded, rigid, quiet  
2. Offers nothing  
3. Gives the impression that they are removed. | 1. Open the discussion with the reminder that just listening is OK, but if you have a thought, please feel free to share it.  
a. You may want to talk to this person on the side, ask if they want to be called on or would they prefer to listen. Then respect that.  
2. Ask them to read something if they are comfortable with that.  
3. Ask, “John, what do you think of …?” Make sure you restate the issue as they may be disconnected. |
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>“Dominator”</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tools to help Facilitator</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Loves to hear their own voice</td>
<td>1. Call on others when they stop to breath. “Sue, you look like you have something to add.” (If Sue really does!)</td>
</tr>
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<td>2. Always has one story better than the other.</td>
<td>2. Ask for people to contribute in a systematic manner, i.e. going clockwise around the table. They then have to wait their turn.</td>
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<td>3. They are oblivious to other people’s comments.</td>
<td>3. Recognize other comments, “That is a good thought Tom.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Asks unrelated questions</td>
<td>4. If they ask unrelated questions, you can ask, “Can you rephrase, I’m not sure I understand how that fits in here?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. If it is off the subject, ask to place this on the side until the end, to allow team to keep on schedule. Then talk to them after the scheduled discussion is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Stay focused on how you invite others to speak, control the flow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Skeptic”</td>
<td>Tools to help Facilitator</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Questions everything, especially “churchy” stuff.</td>
<td>1. You can redirect them with a question like, “Sounds like you are not comfortable with this concept, for the sake of time, could we talk about this after?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Always offers a counter opinion, the devil’s advocate.</td>
<td>2. Try to diffuse a debate, “I don’t think we want to get into a debate situation that will eat up our time here. We can cover that at the end if we have time, is that OK?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Very leery about the “institutional” church, which may be off topic.</td>
<td>3. Challenging Church Traditions is not all that uncommon. Bring them back on the topic, “I understand you are concerned and have questions, but can we stay on topic so we can finish on time? Is that OK with you?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “I just have trouble believing that.”</td>
<td>4. Don’t be afraid of separating “knowledge or Understanding” from “faith”. Try comments like, “With faith, we should understand that ___ is more of a belief in the heart, not understood through logic in our brain.” Or “I am really not the expert on that, would you like me to hook you up with someone more knowledgeable on that subject?”</td>
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SHARE PRAYER
A Quick Guide to Intercessory Prayer

WHAT IS SHARE PRAYER?

“Share Prayer” is an easy way to pray with and for someone in a simple and non-threatening manner. It takes some practice but once you have done it a couple of times you will find it to be a comfortable formula that you can use with family, friends, or with someone you have just met.

PRAYER TRANSFORMS LIVES, WE JUST HAVE TO BELIEVE IT AND SHARE IT!

Regardless of who we are praying with, the value of intercessory prayer is that it connects us more deeply to the suffering of the other while at the same time encourages the Lord to take hold of their situation. Praying with someone is to extend the voice of Christ to another which brings healing and peace.

PICTURE THIS SCENARIO:

As you are out and about, you run into a friend that you have not seen in some time. After some conversation you notice that your friend seems to be worried and anxious. You ask them what is going on and they open up to you.

Your friend tells you that their beloved grandmother has had a mild stroke, that their family is fighting about whether she should be placed in a nursing home and as a result, the family is in turmoil. Your friend asks you for some prayers and you promise to remember them in your prayers.

At the end of the conversation you say, “I am sorry. I will pray for you” which is a fairly typical response. In the days and weeks that follow we remember our friend and their intentions in our prayers.

We know that prayer is good but we don’t realize that we can do something concrete to bring Jesus into the situation right there and then. What we can do is to “share a prayer” with them.

WHY SHARE PRAYER WITH OTHERS?

Jesus tells us to pray for others. The early witness of the Church tells us to pray. We want to pray, but we don’t always feel comfortable praying aloud with another person.

Our friend may or may not be a Christian, they may or may not believe in God or maybe they are seeking a relationship with Christ but do not know where to begin. Regardless, they need prayer and have reached out to you as someone they trust. Instead of praying for that person and their situation later in your day, why not stop and pray for and with them in the moment?

BENEFITS OF SHARE PRAYER:

- The Scriptures are clear - Jesus tells us to pray with others. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray so that they could deepen their love for Christ and for each other.
- It is a witness of the Gospel to the person you pray with and for.
- In a crisis, praying with someone unites us to their suffering and our suffering to Christ’s suffering.
- Praying for the living and for the dead is one of the spiritual works of mercy.
- In the words of Pope Francis when we rise from prayer our hearts are “more open and freed of self-absorption”.
- If we pray in the moment, we won’t forget to pray later.
HOW TO SHARE PRAYER:

In general, one would want to do share prayer after talking with someone who is having difficulties. At the end of the conversation, ask the person, "Would it be ok if I pray with you?"

If they say "no," that is ok and just move on.

If they say "yes," you may follow this template or improvise as the Holy Spirit moves you.

- You can call on God the following ways: God, Lord, Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Heavenly, Loving etc.
- Thank God for the person you are praying with and ask for God’s blessing upon them: "Thank you for my friend, your son/daughter of Christ. Please bless him/her and uplift them at this time."
- Then ask God for what the person needs for example: "We ask you to heal Francis’ grandmother or “We ask you to help Ann’s family to make the right decisions about the nursing home or “We ask you to help Jason who is struggling with debt at this time".
- Gratitude for all that God is doing, “Thank you Lord, Jesus etc for revealing yourself to us” or “Thank you for your blessings on this family”.
- Finish the prayer with a doxology: "We ask this through Christ our Lord." OR "We ask this in Jesus' name." OR "Through Our Lord Jesus Christ you Son, who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever." OR “Glory Be” etc

BIBLICAL QUOTATIONS:

"Again, [amen] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20).

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful" (James 5:16).

QUOTES FROM THE EARLY CHURCH:

"Pray without ceasing on behalf of everyone" (St. Ignatius, c. A.D. 110, Letter to the Ephesians 10).

"Pray for all the saints. Pray also for kings, for those in power, for princes, for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, so that your fruit may be apparent to everyone and that you may be perfect in Him" (St. Polycarp, A.D. 110-150, Letter to the Philippians 12).

QUOTES FROM POPE FRANCIS:

“One form of prayer moves us particularly to take up the task of evangelization and to seek the good of others: it is the prayer of intercession. Let us pray, for a moment, for the heart of Saint Paul, to see what his prayer was like. It was full of people: ‘...I constantly pray with you in every one of my prayers for all of you... because I hold you in my heart’ (Phil 1:4, 7)” (Evangelii Gaudium #281).

“This attitude becomes a prayer of gratitude to God for others. ‘First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you’ (Rom 1:8). It is constant thankfulness: ‘I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus’ (1 Cor 1:4. When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others” (Evangelii Gaudium #282).

“The great men and women of God were great intercessors. Intercession is like ‘a leaven in the heart of the Trinity’. It is a way of penetrating the Father’s heart and discovering new dimensions which can shed light on concrete situations and change them. We can say that God’s heart is touched by our intercession, yet in reality he is always there first. What our intercession achieves is that his power, his love and his faithfulness are shown ever more clearly in the midst of the people” (Evangelii Gaudium #283).
OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL PARISH, MI

HOW DOES THIS CATHOLIC “MEGA CHURCH” DO IT? WHY IS IT NATIONALLY KNOWN FOR ITS BEAUTIFUL LITURGY, HOSPITALITY, AND DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS? THE SUMMARY OF OUR VISIT MAY PROVIDE SOME NEEDED INSIGHTS FOR YOUR PARISH.
INTRODUCTION

Why the Michigan Trip?

As the Diocese of Green Bay journeys through the first two phases of the discipleship process of discovering and following Christ, many have asked: “How has Alpha worked for other parishes?” With good reason, many pastoral and parish leaders from the Diocese of Green Bay want to know what an Alpha-inspired parish looks like. They want to be able to see it for themselves!

Since our diocese has only begun to use Alpha, I, with two other parish leaders, decided to visit a parish community where they have been using Alpha for at least a couple of years. That parish happens to be Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish (OLGC) in Plymouth, Michigan. And if this town sounds like an East Coast town, it certainly lives up to the name of “Plymouth” by its
colonial charm. No less impressive is its growing Catholic church on the north side of town. It is the closest thing I have seen to a “Catholic mega-church”; that is, a big Catholic parish that seems to be operating on all cylinders.

Why OLGC?

Before the Diocese of Green Bay was considering its options for discipleship material, word got out that Fr. John Riccardo, pastor of OLGC, put every ministry in neutral in order to reassess the fruitfulness of what they were doing. In fact, Father Riccardo personally informed me over the phone that his quest was to put his parishioners through a retreat experience; one where the majority of his parishioners were most likely to encounter Jesus Christ.

To make a long story short, OLGC staff and volunteers invested their time and energy in the Alpha process with impressive results. A sizable percentage of the parish community had a transformative, life-changing experience; and a majority of them had a meaningful encounter with Christ. With this, the parish leadership began to think outside of the box by reorienting its entire ministry toward discipleship and conversion. Even social events, such as church picnics, were reoriented toward this end. And this realignment, no doubt, paid off. OLGC can honestly say with St. Benedict Parish in Nova Scotia (Divine Renovation Parish) that the level of “buy in” among their parishioners has substantially increased.
THE OLGC WEEKEND EXPERIENCE

Hospitality

First impressions are important. As we entered through the doorways of OLGC we encountered smiling greeters who were handing out flyers for the upcoming family event. Once we stepped in the narthex of the parish, there, facing us, was a welcoming counter which had a sign on it saying, “Got a question? We can help!” With this, there were two ladies behind the counter poised to answer questions and provide information.

This awareness is especially important for newcomers and seekers. By having a welcoming counter near the entrance of the parish, I had no doubt where to go if I needed to ask a question about what OLGC offers, or about the Catholic faith or if I needed to discuss with someone my pastoral or spiritual needs. In other words, I didn’t have to track down their pastor who may or may not have had the time to accommodate me. Nor did I feel as though I would be a burden to them if my questions or spiritual needs required extra pastoral attention.

Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish made it clear to me, as a first time visitor, that they were eager and ready to serve my needs. This was only made possible, however, by creating an expectation and invitational culture. In fact, OLGC hosts a “bring a friend to Mass” event and a “newcomers” Mass twice a year. Seasoned churchgoers are expected to invite, evangelize and welcome the stranger.

Promotions

As I mentioned, before I entered into the narthex of the church, there were greeters distributing flyers for their upcoming family event. This multi-layered approach of promoting their events is, I believe, the key to getting the word out. When, for instance, there was an upcoming Alpha event, OLGC had a number of promotional triggers at their disposal. Among them were the greeters (with flyers in hand), the Alpha banner, the PowerPoint image of the
event information in the worship area of the church (this was turned off when Mass began), mention of the event during announcements just prior to Mass, reference of it during the sermon, a welcoming station to answer questions about the event, and advertisement of the event in their bulletins and parish website.

It has been argued that people need to hear a message seven times before it registers clearly on people’s day-to-day radar. With the multiplicity of media messaging in today’s culture, the logic of repetition rings true. What stood out at Our Lady of Good Counsel parish was that the event being promoted was a “big deal.” I felt I was missing something if I choose not to go.

**Beautiful Liturgy**

The Catholic Church teaches, “Before men can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and to conversion.” (S.C. no. 9) Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish does just that. Mainly through the Alpha course (repeated twice throughout the year), they intentionally plug parishioners, who are at different places on their spiritual journey, into their discipleship process.

However, in the interim, OLGC celebrates a beautiful liturgy capable of evangelizing seekers, newcomers and even occasionally churchgoers. Their liturgy, as I experienced it, was accompanied by both sacred and contemporary expressions which made it easy for me to lift my “heart up to the Lord” in the preface dialogue of the Eucharistic prayer. To use Fr. James Mallon’s words, I experienced the “wow factor” of God’s intimacy and transcendence. Indeed, the liturgical music at OLGC was rich in its spiritual and emotional appeal. In fact, my two colleagues who accompanied me to this parish were moved to tears during the Communion hymn.
It doesn’t have to be this way, but the Mass can be a perfunctory or an impersonal experience for first-timers and churchgoers. After all, it is real easy to show up at Mass on autopilot by going through the liturgical motions without having a meaningful engagement with the community of believers. To offset this tendency, OLGC, before the liturgy commenced, had parishioners in the pews introduce themselves to the person sitting next to them. These intentions were then offered up to the Lord during the petitions.

By stating their name and their prayer intention to the person standing next to them, parishioners were reminded that our spiritual journey is not to be traveled alone. Indeed, this exchange added a personal touch to a beautiful liturgy. And for undisciplined churchgoers who had yet to begin the discipleship process, the liturgy, for its part, serves as an incentive to enter that process of becoming a missionary-disciple.

**Team of Intercessors**

The personal touch of the OLGC liturgy, occasioned by the introductions, was supplemented by a relationship ministry of intercessory prayer following the Mass. Broken on the inside, many are those who visit our parishes with a veneer of strength. But one would never encounter the broken or shattered lives of churchgoers by relying on appearances alone. Yet, OLGC created a safe place for such wounds and brokenness of their parishioners to be treated; not with medication, but with something far more important: love and prayers!

On most weekends, OLGC parish makes available a committed team of intercessors for anyone who needs to be prayed with after the conclusion of the liturgy. Not only can a hurting parishioner receive the prayers of fellow parish members, but he or she can be directed to other resources or ministries if the circumstances require it.

If truth be told, what is undermining the growth of many parishes in North America is the impersonal nature of attending Mass or registering newcomers. People who seek to join a parish, for instance, are often greeted with an envelope or a registration form. What follows is that newcomers are immediately expected to give their “time, talent and treasure” to the community before they have been loved and served as our guests.
As for Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, they make it a point to love and serve newcomers by going that extra mile of pastoral care. Jumping through administrative hoops (e.g. donating money to the parish, attending Mass so many times a month or signing up as a volunteer) is not their first priority when welcoming people; that comes later. Instead, the high expectation for their parishioners is one of discipleship and transformation in Christ before anything else. It cannot be stressed enough: Every ounce of OLGC missionary effort is ordained towards that end! It is only after a newcomer has had a meaningful encounter with the love of Christ and community- and after having entered the discipleship process -that they are expected to take on the responsibilities of stewardship and service. 

Again, first impressions are important. By having a welcome counter with sign on it saying, “Got a question? We can help!” and by offering prayer ministry after Mass, OLGC certainly gives the impression that it is ready to serve. And you know what? It is working. The parish is expanding and the weekends are effervescing with activity. In fact, Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish is the closest thing I have seen to date that resembles a “Catholic mega-church.” Clearly, it is a living model and beacon of hope of what a parish can be like!

To learn more about Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, please visit their website at https://www.olgcparish.net/!