

# THE ALPHA COURSE IN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT



## Why Alpha in a Catholic Context?

### The Call to a New Evangelisation

The Mission of the Church is summed up in the great commission:

**‘Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes to the end of time.’ Mt 28:19-20.**

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has been calling all Catholics to rediscover what it means to engage in these words of Jesus in the world of our time. Indeed, as Pope Paul VI said in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; **‘Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise ...’** (14)

Pope John Paul II, when reflecting on the experience of the Church in the contemporary world, said:

**‘In countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger churches as well ... entire groups of the baptised 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 evangelisation” or “re-Evangelisation.”’** *Redemptoris Missio*.

Pope Benedict XVI, in an in-flight interview on his visit to the UK, Autumn 2010, added his voice to his predecessors by saying:

**‘The Church is at the service of another: she serves, not for herself, not to be a strong body, rather she serves to make the proclamation of Jesus Christ accessible, the great truths and great forces of love, reconciling love that appeared in this figure and that always comes from the presence of Jesus Christ.’**

## What is Alpha?

Alpha is a tool which parishes can use for **primary evangelisation** to invite the lapsed and those outside the Church to explore the Christian faith.

It is also a tool to **bring growth and renewal to the parish church**.

**‘...the very name shows this. It is not called the “Alpha and Omega” course (as Revelation 1:9 might have suggested) but simply the “Alpha” course, because it doesn’t claim to lead people from the beginning to end in faith; only to help them get acquainted with it, to foster a personal encounter with Jesus, leaving it to other Church departments to develop the newly rekindled faith.’** Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher to the Papal Household, *International Alpha Conference, 2005*.

## What is so important about the Kerygma?

Alpha presents the ‘Kerygma’, the basic proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. **‘One of the advantages of the Alpha course is that it focuses on the “Kerygma”.** In the ancient church there was a clear distinction between the “Kerygma” and the “Didaché”, 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”.*’ Raniero Cantalamessa, *Alpha in a Catholic Context Introductory DVD, 2011*.

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## Bringing Growth & Renewal to the Parish

Alpha helps parishes to stay **outward-looking**. Those who have been evangelised through the Alpha Course in turn become evangelisers, inviting friends, family and work colleagues to come on the next course. This in turn helps to **build community**. Alpha also encourages people to **become more involved in the liturgical life of the parish**.

## What is the Priest's Role in Alpha?

The priest has a key role in Alpha, whilst not having to be too involved with the practicalities of running of the course. The most important thing the priest can do is to **make evangelisation a top priority in the parish**. He will also give vital **spiritual direction** to the Alpha team. The priest is the key person to **welcome newcomers into the Church**. And finally the priest can **liaise with other clergy and bishops** about Alpha.

## What Catholic Leaders say about Alpha

'An Alpha course is one of the great ways at the present time in which people can gather together to learn from one another, to share with one another, and to deepen in their knowledge and love of Jesus Christ himself.'

**Cardinal Keith O'Brien (Archbishop of Edinburgh and St. Andrews)**

'Alpha is the most marvellous tool for evangelisation. Alpha serves to bring faith alive and to me that is the most important thing in the world...'

**Bishop Thomas McMahon (Bishop of Brentwood)**

## What Guests say about Alpha

'I decided to do the Alpha course because although i have started my journey of faith in 2006, I lacked the basic knowledge and understanding about Jesus, the importance of the Holy Spirit, about being a Christian. There were gaps and I had questions...'

**Catherine De Leon**

'Alpha has allowed me to focus more on the day to day practicalities of trying to live my life like Christ... A highlight of the course has been the open, generous and heart-warming talks every week.'

**Andrew Jabbour**

## Please stay in touch!

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