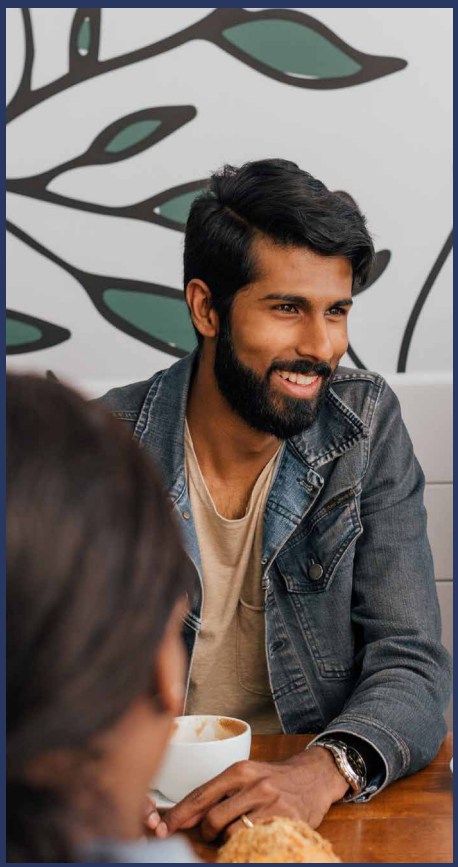
AN INTRODUCTION TO ALPHA

Catholic Context

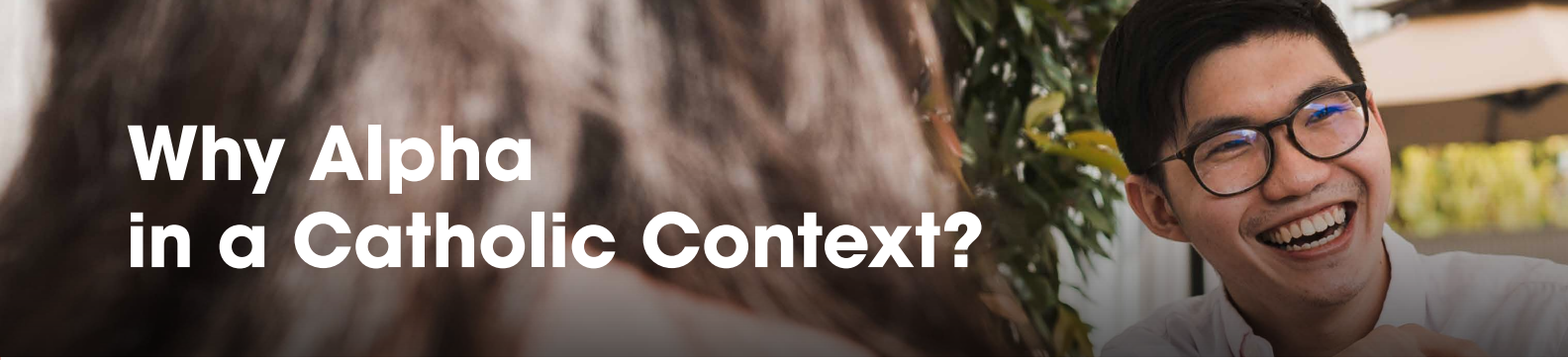


Equipping parishes in their mission to help people encounter Jesus

Alpha

Over **5,000** Catholic parishes and organizations around the world ran over **8,500** Alphas, reaching an estimated **200,000** participants.*

*2022



Why Alpha in a Catholic Context?

"In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach."

Evangelii Gaudium par. 28, Pope Francis

Many parishes are looking for simple and effective ways to share the gospel with their local communities. Alpha is a great solution as it provides a welcoming space for people of all backgrounds to have conversations about faith. Alpha will help your parish to develop a culture of hospitality and listening, to grow in dependence upon the Holy Spirit and to empower your parishioners in their unique callings and giftings.

Even more importantly, Alpha helps people to discover what it means to become a disciple of Jesus, and to do so at their own pace.

"Alpha is not a silver bullet; it's a tool. When used as part of a larger pastoral strategy, it is the best tool that I've found for jump-starting and sustaining parish renewal."

Fr James Mallon, Parish priest of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Canada and founder of Divine Renovation

"Alpha is having an impact all over the world. The strength of Alpha is that it attracts people who are not yet close to the Church. There is something so friendly and winsome about it that people are drawn to. Alpha proclaims the core message of the gospel with a clarity and a sharpness that is really unique."

Dr Mary Healy, Professor of Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, USA

What is Alpha?

Alpha is a series of group conversations that explore the basics of the Christian faith in a friendly environment. It's a place to connect with people, where you can say anything you like or nothing at all.

Everyone's welcome, no matter their background or beliefs. No two Alphas look the same, but they all have three key elements.

CONNECT

All sessions start with a time to connect, relax and build friendships.

WATCH

The Alpha talks explore a new question of faith each week and are designed to spark conversation.

DISCUSS

An opportunity to discuss the session's topic together in an open, honest, and friendly environment.

"Alpha helps draw people into an initial and ongoing encounter and rich relationship with Jesus and his Church. Alpha lays the foundation to go deeper and, in the power of the Holy Spirit become the missionary disciples the Lord calls each one of us to be."

Bishop Christian Riesbeck CC,
Diocese of Saint John, Canada

"Although I didn't realize it, there was an emptiness inside me that was filled as I experienced love and meaning in Jesus Christ, each Alpha session. I now want to be confirmed, serve in the parish and enjoy God's plan for my life."

Laysa Arantes,
Igreja Nossa Senhora de Fatima**,** Brazil

The Culture of Alpha

If you run Alpha like a program that's all it will be – but parishes that have committed to running Alpha regularly, making it an essential part of their plan for evangelization, have seen their parish move from maintenance to mission. Alpha embodies certain cultures that are essential to the pastoral renewal of parishes in our time:

1 Culture of Invitation & Hospitality

Alpha helps the parish to become an evangelizing community. Those who have experienced Alpha naturally want to invite their friends to the next Alpha.

The Alpha small groups help the parish remember the importance of hospitality, and in particular the importance of the synodal practice of listening to those who come to explore life and faith.

2 Culture of Encounter

"Open yourselves docilely to the gifts of the Spirit! Accept gratefully and obediently the charisms which the Spirit never ceases to bestow on us! Do not forget that every charism is given for the common good, that is, for the benefit of the whole Church." St John Paul II, Pentecost 1998

Alpha intentionally creates space for the Holy Spirit to lead people to a personal encounter and relationship with Jesus. People are invited into a personal experience of God's love through the working of the Holy Spirit through a simple model of prayer ministry. Over time, people learn how to pray for one another, which then becomes an integral part of life in the parish.

"One of the reasons that Alpha is phenomenal is because, as Catholics, there are not that many things you can invite a person to. You can invite them to events at church like bingo or theology on tap, but you don't know if it will lead them to Jesus. But when you take them to Alpha, you know it will propose Christ, and it will be fun."

Fr Michael Schmitz, Chaplain at University of Minnesota Duluth, USA and Presenter of The Bible in a Year podcast

3 Culture of Missionary Discipleship

"Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus." Evangelii Gaudium, par. 120, Pope Francis

Alpha empowers lay people to play their part in the mission of the Church by releasing them to share the impact that their encounter and relationship with Jesus has had on their lives. Sharing their story becomes normal, demonstrating to others that evangelization isn't just for "experts" but for everyone.

4 Culture of Leadership

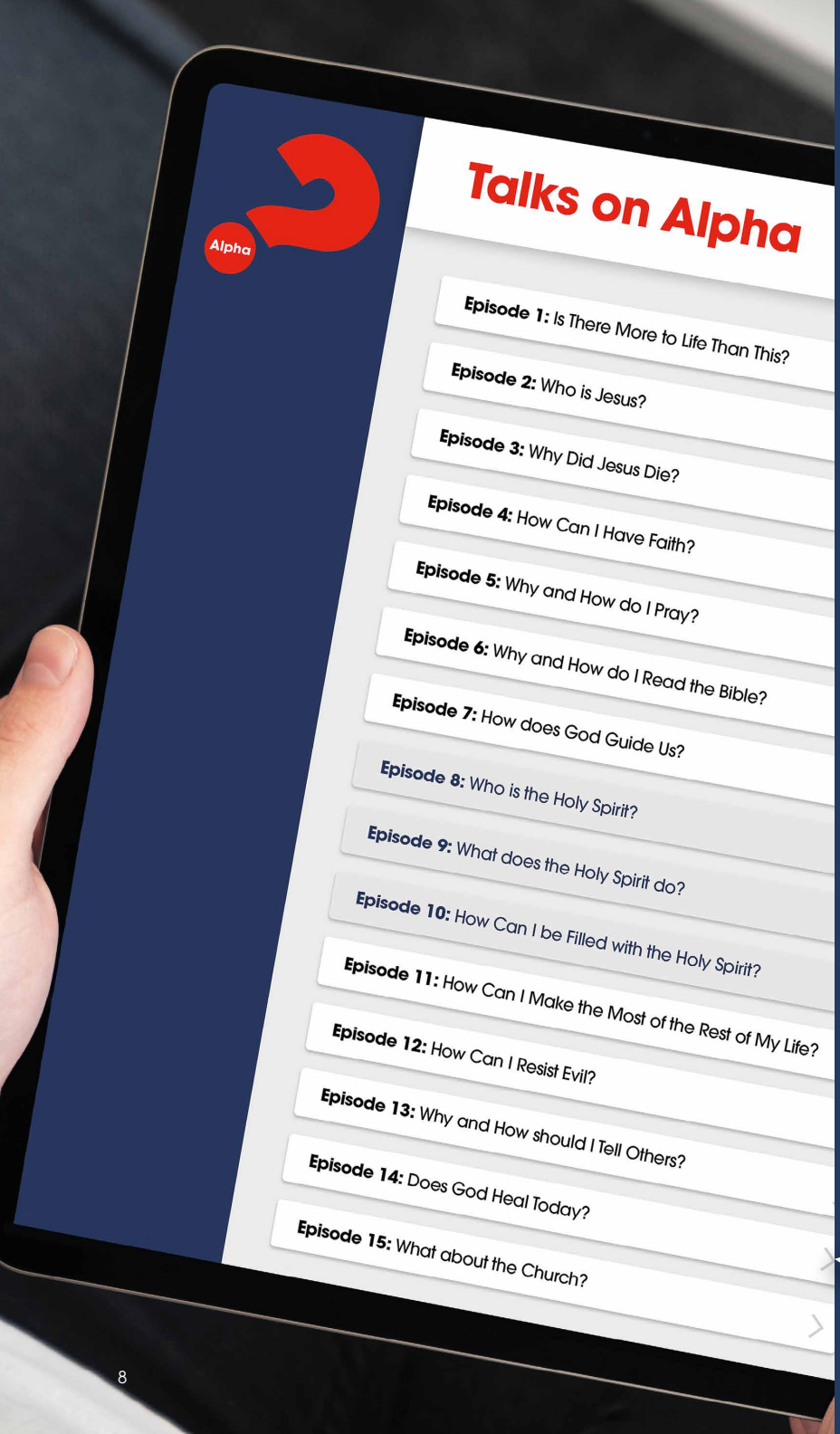
In the process of developing missionary disciples, Alpha can help a parish establish a "leadership pipeline" where Alpha guests are invited to return to Alpha as helpers and then as hosts. Training is essential at each stage to help hosts and helpers learn how to accompany others in their journey of faith exploration and discipleship.

Eventually they might run Alpha on behalf of the parish or move on to serve in other parish ministries. The desire for co-responsibility for the mission of the Church then becomes grounded in service and ministry.

Suggested further reading:
Divine Renovation
by Fr James Mallon

"Alpha shifts the wider parish into mission and builds leaders. Leading Alpha at my parish has really set my heart aflame for evangelization. Being able to witness God encounter a variety of people from different backgrounds and beliefs has allowed me to personally encounter God in a new way."

Alina Geagea, St Raymond's Maronite Catholic Parish, Australia



"The only thing we need to do is to get the food together. Apart from that, Alpha does everything for you. The videos are fantastic, for the group discussion you just need to train leaders and that's all – Alpha has even created the training videos for us. It's so simple."

Fr Joseph Owusu-Ansah,
Parish priest of the Holy Family Parish, UK

Everything you need to run Alpha well can be found on **MyAlpha: alphausa.org/run**

Alpha talks

Alpha Film Series

Fifteen video episodes featuring expert contributors, including Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, as well as inspiring stories from around the world of lives being transformed by the love of Jesus. This series is designed to engage young adults.

Alpha Youth Series

Twelve video episodes filmed around the globe, designed to engage teenagers in youth groups and schools, in conversations about faith, life and Jesus. The series features insights from various leaders, including Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle. Discussion time is interspersed throughout the short talks to make it simpler to share thoughts and questions.

Ricky Grinstead, Director of Youth and Young Adult Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, USA

"Alpha Youth Series is perhaps our greatest tool for evangelizing young people today. It helps to create a culture that fosters both head and heart knowledge of the Lord. It has helped create an inviting and welcoming community of young believers who love their Catholic faith."

Raising Up a New Generation

Upcoming generations are fundamentally open and curious about faith, life and meaning.

In a first-of-its-kind study, we partnered with other organizations to research the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of young people around the world. This study, The Open Generation, found that young people:

- Have a positive view of Jesus and are generally open to entering a journey of discipleship
- Are oriented toward social justice and are ambitious to make a positive impact in the world
- Are open to the gospel, with a respect and curiosity in how they approach it but aren't sure how scripture can impact the world around them

In parishes, schools, and universities, Alpha is used to create spaces for open, honest conversations, offering young people the opportunity to encounter Jesus for themselves and to explore how the timeless message of the gospel is relevant to their lives today. Find out more about Alpha Youth: alphausa.org/youth and The Open Generation: barna.com/the-open-generation

"Alpha has changed me. Before, I believed Catholicism was rules and stories. My faith was weak and I had doubts if God was even there. Now I know that faith is more than rules, that God cares about me and He wants to be my friend. When they prayed for me, the Holy Spirit came to me and I cried tears of joy. I felt complete and happy."

Gianna, 13 year-old student, USA

"God loves questions; in a way, he loves questions more than answers. Why? Obviously, because the answers are closed, while the questions are open. A person who only lives on answers is a person used to being closed, closed, closed. A person who lives on questions is a person used to being open, open, open."

Pope Francis address to teenagers at Alpha Youth Camp in Italy
5 August 2022

Photo used with permission:
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What do Catholic leaders say about Alpha?

Sr Nathalie Becquart
Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops
"Apha plants fruitful seeds of missionary renewal around the world. As we journey towards a more synodal Church calling to foster communion, participation and mission, Alpha's proposal is more vital than ever, bringing people together in a spirit of Synodality and opening spaces for listening and dialogue, with God and with one another."

Archbishop Allen Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit
"Many parishes in the Archdiocese of Detroit have found Alpha a great tool for helping men and women hear the initial proclamation of the gospel. I am pleased that our use of Alpha with the archdiocesan staff has invited a recommitment to the basic truths of the gospel."

Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle
Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples
"Alpha offers a very human, nonthreatening door for everyone to enter. Everyone eats and when we eat it is not just an exchange of food. The table becomes also an exchange of stories. Alpha is bringing the experience of the faith and even the episodes in the Bible in ordinary meals, ordinary conversations and ordinary encounters. And in their ordinariness, they are really extraordinary. I encourage people to try this model of evangelization."

Archbishop J. Michael Miller
Archbishop of Vancouver, Canada
"Alpha has not only helped us introduce unchurched people to Christ but it has also provided an excellent way for Catholics to live out their baptismal call to evangelize."

Further endorsements can be found at **alphausa.org/catholic**

Archbishop Eduardo Martín
Archbishop of Rosario, Argentina
"I can say that Alpha is a very necessary instrument for the evangelizingtask of the Church, mainly because it emphasizes the kerygma. That is why I strongly recommend Alpha."

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa
Preacher to the Papal Household
"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 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."

Archbishop Gintaras Grušas
Archbishop of Vilnius, President of the Lithuanian Bishops Conference and President of the Council of European Bishops Conferences
"I very much enjoy the fact that people who finished the Alpha course are then brought into the community of the parish to take an active role which they didn't have before."

Cardinal Kurt Koch
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
"Through Alpha, and the testimonies of those who participate in their sessions and groups, faith is renewed, rekindled, takes root."

Archbisop Zolile Mpambani
Archbishop of Bloemfontein, South Africa
"Alpha, as a tool for evangelization, has the potential to equip people for the work of mission. The power of a people walking together, listening to one another and sharing their gifts means that dioceses come alive!"

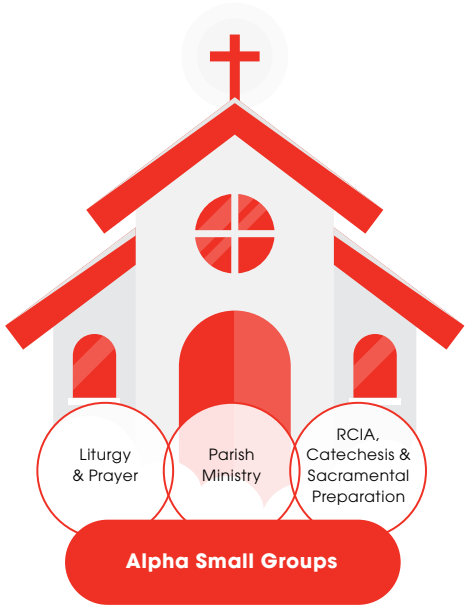
Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Archbishop of Canberra & Goulburn, Australia
"Alpha is great. It radiates the gospel to a world that is desperately in need of a spiritual dimension. Falling in love with Jesus and getting involved in parish, that's music to a Bishop's ears."

What happens after Alpha?

Once a guest has finished Alpha, online or in person, it is essential that there is an intentional process of ongoing formation in place, to help people continue to grow as missionary disciples.

A lifelong process

The most important thing a parish can do to facilitate people's growth as missionary disciples is move from a program-based model of mission to a process-based model of mission. Whatever form this might take – groups, praise and worship events, in person or online – creating and normalizing a culture of lifelong evangelization and disciple formation is vital if the post-Alpha journey is to be effective and long lasting.



"Small Groups are critical to Saint Benedict Parish. If we don't continue to fan those flames, the light will quickly die out and you will lose most of the guests. After Alpha we encourage people to join a small group (online or in person) and continue to experience authentic Christian community and be exposed to the beauty of our Catholic faith."

Bill Scollard, Life Groups Coordinator at Saint Benedict Parish, Canada

"After two sessions (at Alpha), I felt like we were family so when they invited me to continue the journey at a Life Group I jumped at the opportunity. Life Group helped me keep the flame lit and it has become almost as important as Sunday Mass. It is so wonderful that we can learn about faith and share life together."

Manie Chiasson, Saint Benedict Parish, Canada

What about the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults?

Alpha is not intended to be used for catechesis, but to introduce the message of the gospel. At Alpha, guests get the opportunity to ask their questions, get introduced to Jesus, prayer, and what it means to live life as a disciple. For some, this will mean a journey towards joining the Catholic Church. Many parishes choose to run Alpha as an inquiry phase at the beginning of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

We encourage parishes to carry over the culture of Alpha into their RCIA program so that people can transition smoothly from inquiry to more formal catechesis in a familiar environment of hospitality, openness and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

'"A friend invited my wife and me to Alpha. The fellowship and open discussion created a bond with the community. Alpha was the reason we chose to join the RCIA and become Catholics. We were baptized at the Easter Vigil."

Patrick Wong,
Minor Basilica St Anne Bukit Mertajam, Malaysia

Supporting Dioceses

Just as Alpha helps to establish new cultural values within parish life, so it can help bishops and dioceses to cast a wider vision for parish renewal.

Through the sharing of stories and hosting reflective conversations about diocesan and parish culture, the Catholic Context team in your National Alpha Office can help diocesan leaders intentionally cultivate the values of hospitality, listening, prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, making disciples and raising leaders. This enables leaders to experience them first-hand and encourage their application at all levels of church life.

Connect with your National Alpha Office at **alphausa.org/catholic**

"As Catholics we can struggle with the 'how' of evangelization. In my opinion, Alpha provides the best resource I know for helping share the Good News; empowering Catholics to fulfil their mission. Alpha's resources and support, combined with flexibility of use and quality of presentation have provided an excellent resource I have used for over 10 years. I highly recommend Alpha as a powerful way of introducing people to a life changing encounter with Jesus."

Bishop Michael Gielen,
Diocese of Christchurch, New Zealand

How do I get started with Alpha in my parish?

1

Have a look around

Head to **alphausa.org/watch** to preview the Alpha episodes and discover the series format that will work best for you and your guests

2

Get in touch

If you have any questions or if you just want to connect, your local Alpha team would love to hear from you. Say hello at **alphausa.org/contact**

3

Create your course

Once you're ready to go, visit **alphausa.org/run** Simply create an account to plan your course, access resources, training, and all the episodes

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

Matthew 28:19

For more information

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