

An Introduction to **Alpha—Catholic Context**



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

St. John Paul II

Alpha

Over **29 million** people
have experienced **Alpha**.
84,000 courses are running
in **112 languages** in **169**
countries worldwide.*

*2015

A photograph of Pope Francis waving from the open rear window of a dark-colored car at night. He is wearing his white papal attire, including a zucchetto and a pectoral cross. The background is dark with some blurred lights, suggesting an outdoor setting at night. The car's interior is partially visible, showing the back of a person's head in the driver's seat.

**“How many important things unite us!
If we really believe in the abundantly
free working of the Holy Spirit, we can
learn so much from one another! It is not
just about being better informed about
others, but rather about reaping what
the Spirit has sown in them, which is also
meant to be a gift for us.”**

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 246

Alpha is run throughout the world by Christians of all traditions, providing a common expression of “proclamation, service and witness” (EG, 246).

Evangelization

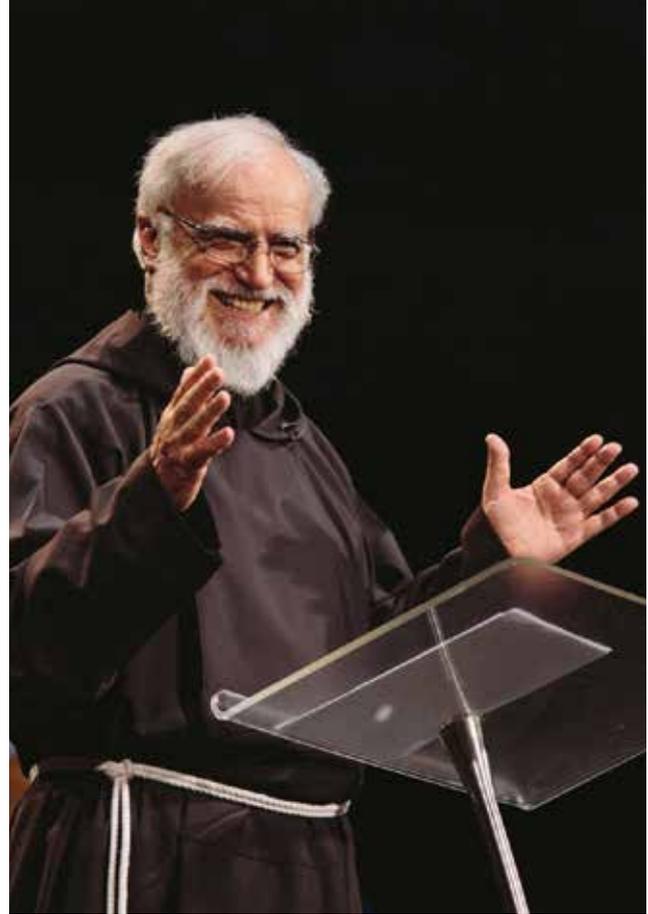
Alpha is a tool to introduce people to an initial proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ—the kerygma. As Pope Francis says, “Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful, and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation.” (EG, 165).

Encounter

Alpha takes people on a journey often leading to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It enables people to ask their questions, share ideas, build friendships, and experience the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Everyone

Alpha is for everyone; all backgrounds, all contexts, all ages. Alpha is particularly attracting many young people who are asking the question, “Is there more to life than this?”



“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.”

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa
Preacher to the Papal Household

What Is Alpha?

Alpha is a series of interactive sessions exploring the Christian faith. Alpha runs all around the world in cafés, churches, universities, homes, bars—you name it. No two Alphas look the same, but they have three key things in common: food, a talk, and good conversation.

Meal



Offering a meal or snack is an essential part of Alpha; eating food together is great for building community. Most sessions start with food and a chance get to know each other.

Talk



After the meal, a short talk is given—either live or played as a video. The talks, which explore the big issues around faith, are designed to engage and inspire conversation.

Small Group Discussion



The small groups provide the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas on the topic, and to build trust and friendship. The role of the host (leader) is to facilitate discussion, inviting guests to share openly and honestly, without any criticism or judgment. The groups often develop into small Christian communities within the parish.



"Alpha provides a communal context where people can once again ask the fundamental basic questions about life:

'Why are we here, who are we, what's our purpose?' It is a fantastic way to begin to draw people into a deeper communion with the Church."

Matt Maher

Catholic Worship Leader, USA



"As a young adult living in a multi-racial and plural society, what I like about Alpha is its simplicity. With interesting short videos and plenty of group sharing, young people are able to explore on what Christianity really means to each other and, in the midst of exploring, come into a relationship with Christ."

Karen Tan

Student, Malaysia



Topics Covered on Alpha

- Session 1 Is there more to life than this?
- Session 2 Who is Jesus?
- Session 3 Why did Jesus die?
- Session 4 How can I have faith?
- Session 5 Why and how do I pray?
- Session 6 Why and how do I read the Bible?
- Session 7 How does God guide us?
- Session 8 Who is the Holy Spirit?
- Session 9 What does the Holy Spirit do?
- Session 10 How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- Session 11 How can I make the most of the rest of my life?
- Session 12 How can I resist evil?
- Session 13 Why and how should I tell others?
- Session 14 Does God heal today?
- Session 15 What about the Church?



"Love to use Alpha with young people because it takes them on a journey into the heart of God and it lays down foundations that they can build the rest of their lives upon. The easy-going 'come and see'

approach is perfect for teenagers, often encouraging them to making a decision to follow Jesus, while launching them into a relationship with Him that is real and honest."

Will Desmond,

The Ascent, Catholic Youth Discipleship Process, UK

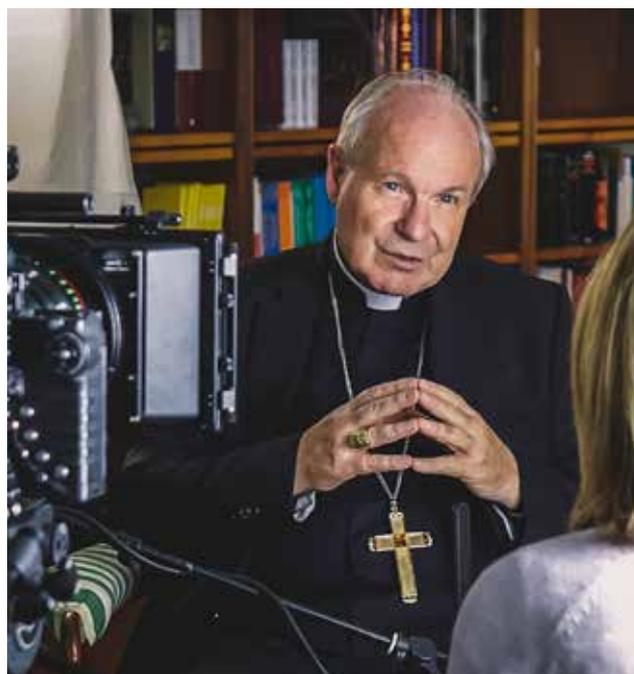
Download transcripts to deliver the talks live and access all the resources for free at alphausa.org/run or alphacanada.org/run

Online Videos

Alpha has been filmed in different formats, so you can find the one that works for you. Here are three suggestions:

1. ALPHA FILM SERIES

This new product includes fifteen video episodes that explore the basics of the Christian faith in a thought-provoking, relevant way for the next generation. It features stories from around the world, engaging visual illustrations and motion graphics to take the audience on an epic journey that is innovative and interactive.



2. ALPHA YOUTH FILM SERIES

Twelve video episodes filmed around the globe, designed to engage teenagers, in youth groups and schools, in conversations about faith, life, and Jesus.



3. ALPHA WITH NICKY GUMBEL

Fifteen video episodes featuring the pioneer of Alpha, Nicky Gumbel, giving the Alpha talks at Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London.



"I was very impressed with Alpha with Nicky Gumbel. The talks were well thought out and full of memorable stories, jokes, and testimonies. Nicky uses personal experiences and illustrations from contemporary

culture to present the kerygma in an engaging and relatable way. His humble approach resonated with me to the point that I felt I truly wanted to share the Alpha experience with as many people as possible."

John MacMullen,

Associate Director for Parish Youth Ministry,
Archdiocese of Toronto, Canada



What Do Catholic Leaders Say About Alpha?



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

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



Archbishop Rino Fisichella
President of the Pontifical Council for
Promoting the New Evangelization

"Alpha is without doubt a great experience of New Evangelization."



Cardinal Gérald Lacroix
Archbishop of Quebec, Canada

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



Archbishop John Ha
Archbishop of Kuching, Malaysia

"The focus of Alpha is Jesus Christ, Lord, and Savior. The goal of Alpha is to lead people to Him so that they will relate with Him personally and with others in community."



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

"I recommend Alpha; an excellent method for the first proclamation of the gospel."



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

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



Archbishop Buti Tihagale
Archbishop of Johannesburg,
South Africa

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



Cardinal Christoph Schönborn
Archbishop of Vienna, Austria

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



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."



Archbishop Mark Coleridge
Archbishop of Brisbane, Australia

"For many years now and in various parts of the world, Alpha has shown itself powerful in bringing faith alive in all kinds of people. Its focus is on Jesus, its method is simple, and its appeal is wide-ranging. It is also well adapted for use in Catholic communities looking to provide the kind of ignition we need if we are to become a more missionary Church."



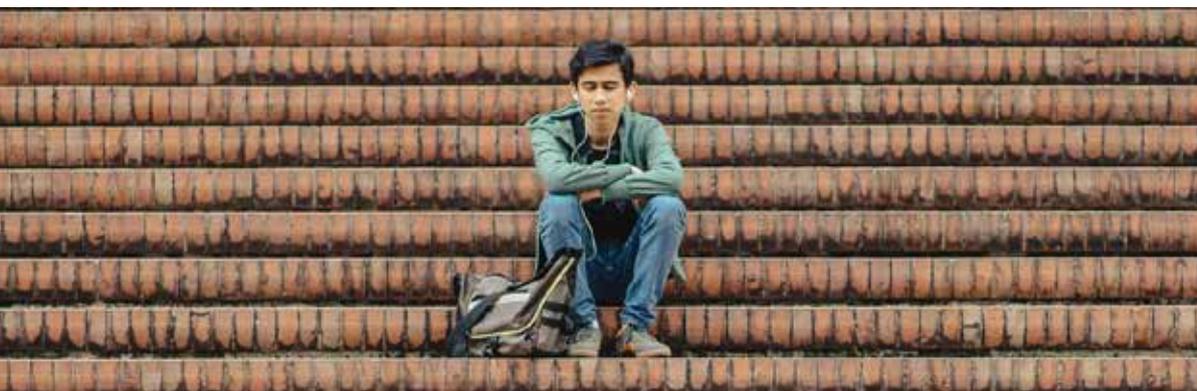
Archbishop Allen Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit

"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."

Further endorsements can be found at alpha.org/catholics

Who Is Alpha For?

Alpha is designed primarily for those with no experience of the Church, which is why Alpha keeps it simple. It also means that anyone can benefit from Alpha, because no assumptions are made about a persons' level of knowledge, understanding, or engagement with Christianity.





Bishop Michael Byrnes
Archdiocese of Detroit, USA

"It is wonderful to see that many Catholic parishes are using Alpha. Alpha is meant to reach those who have never heard of Jesus. It is time for us to put out into the deep, and to cast our nets further out, that we might bring in those farthest from Jesus."



Yann
Student, France

"I did not know what to expect when I was invited, and I went from one surprise to another. The other guests had the same questions I did, and I was really impressed by how freely they shared. I never felt judged, and that feels like such a change. Alpha was a foundation for the rest of my life."



Bishop Xavier Novell
Bishop of Solsona and Head of Youth for the Bishop's Conference of Spain

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



Teresa Valero
Director for Evangelization and Lay Apostolate, Diocese of Solsona, Spain

"I've always felt called to bring the gospel to the most hopeless of society, those that nobody cares for, or wants to understand, such as prisoners. Alpha is a magnificent method of evangelization in prisons."

The Impact of Alpha in the Parish

"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 center of constant missionary outreach." (EG, 28)

Alpha is most effective in parishes that run it as part of an ongoing process of evangelization (2–3 times a year). Parishes that run Alpha in this way have found that it helps the parish to develop three essential missionary cultures for the long term:

1. Culture of Invitation & Hospitality

"An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, He has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast." (EG, 24)

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 welcome and hospitality for those who come to explore life and faith.



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

Aima Lijadu,
St. Charles Borromeo parish,
Lagos, Nigeria

Suggested further reading:

Divine Renovation by Fr. James Mallon

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 helps the parish to foster a personal encounter and relationship with Jesus through the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Through the simple model used in Alpha for prayer ministry, people learn how to pray for one another and it becomes a normal part of life in the parish.

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." (EG, 120)

Alpha engages lay people in the life and mission of the Church. With the blessing of the parish priest a core team takes ownership and hosts Alpha in the parish. Often guests who have experienced Alpha go on to become effective and confident evangelizers themselves as they share the impact that their encounter and relationship with Jesus has had on their lives.

Leadership Pipeline

In the process of developing missionary disciples, Alpha can help a parish establish a “leadership pipeline.” The pipeline works as Alpha guests are invited to return to Alpha as helpers and then at the following Alpha as hosts. Training is essential at each

stage to help hosts and helpers grow in confidence. Eventually they could become Alpha leaders and run Alpha on behalf of the parish. They could then move on to serve in other parish ministries.



“Alpha lit a spark of faith that has grown into a fire. Hearing that Jesus would have died for me even if I were the only person in the world, melted away my objections and I began a personal relationship with

God, which has been necessary for personal transformation. I am more patient, more kind, more tolerant, and especially more interested in how I can help others.

Prior to Alpha, I attended Sunday Mass about 75% of the time but I was asleep in the pew. It was a duty I inherited. After Alpha, I was drawn to Mass and confession as never before; the desire was just there. Now I attend Mass a few times a week and confession very frequently.

I have been a small group leader for fourteen Alphas in parish settings and in the work place. My passion to tell others the good news propels me forward and I am not afraid to lead, guide, and instruct. The Holy Spirit is my mentor and coach!”

Pauline Maher,

St. Mary Moorfields parish, London, UK

What Happens After Alpha?

Once Alpha has led people to the door of the Church, it is essential that there is an intentional process of ongoing formation in place. Many parishes have found introducing small groups

an effective way of helping people to move from Alpha into the life of the Church and continue in the development of missionary disciples.



Small to Mid-Sized Groups

Small to mid-size groups retain the key ingredients of Alpha such as worship, food, friendship, teaching, discussion, and prayer. They are a unique place for people to be able to build friendships within the parish and grow spiritually, especially for those

who are not already involved in one of the parish ministries or activities. The groups work best when there are between 15 to 25 people and meet every other week, either at the parish or in a home.



"It would be almost impossible to overstate the transformation that has taken place at Our Lady of Good Counsel as a result of offering every person in our community a life-changing

encounter with Jesus through Alpha. Almost overnight, we went from being an alive and active parish, but one that was very much focused on ourselves, to a parish that is more alive and active, with a new focus and sense of urgency for those who are not part of our community.

I severely underestimated how much Alpha would help make a very large parish seem smaller and more intimate. People drawing closer to the Lord, and each other, becoming brothers and sisters in a new and more intimate way. Alpha has focused us on the task of evangelization and disciple making. We are forming discipleship groups as a means to help people who encounter Jesus through Alpha, to begin to grow more intentionally as His disciples."

Fr. John Ricardo,

Our Lady of Good Counsel parish, Michigan, USA



"I had been a lapsed Catholic for more than a decade when my wife and I did Alpha at the parish of Sainte Blandine in Lyon. At Alpha we were able to rediscover faith. We quickly felt at home in our small group—the

atmosphere and depth of the conversation were amazing. We were then invited to join a parish small group. There the formula was very similar to Alpha with worship, prayer, and time for sharing. I was able to talk about things in my life with others in a non-judgmental, intimate setting but, more importantly, I realized I was able to help others and that gave me great joy. I felt a call to serve the parish and we are now helping as Eucharistic Ministers and with marriage preparation. I feel part of the parish community now; I have developed close friendships and really look forward to our Sunday evening masses. I often invite friends to come and if they are touched by the joy and hospitality of the service then I encourage them to do an Alpha just like I did!"

Giles Chanson,

Sainte Blandine parish, Lyon, France

Visit alpha.org/catholics for suggestions of different resources available to help people grow in their faith.

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

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 15

For more information

In the USA

1635 Emerson Lane
Naperville, IL, 60540
844-225-7422
catholics@alphausa.org
alphausa.org/catholic

In Canada

230 - 11331 Coppersmith Way
Richmond, BC V7A 5J9 Canada
800 743 0899
catholics@alphacanada.org
alphacanada.org/catholics

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