

Stories from



Alpha



About Alpha

Who is it for?

The Alpha course is designed primarily for people who aren't churchgoers and each course is open to everyone who would like to attend.

People attend for a wide variety of reasons - some want to investigate whether God exists, others may have attended church occasionally but feel they have never really understood the basics of the Christian faith. People come from many different backgrounds and hold many different viewpoints.

How the course works

The course is based around small groups of people and includes refreshments – a chance to get to know others in the group.

Each week, the talk looks at a different aspect of the Christian faith, followed by a discussion in the small groups. The emphasis is upon exploration and discovery in a relaxed and informal environment

The Alpha course lasts for 10 weeks, with a weekend away in the middle. Typically each session lasts 2 hours.

There is no charge for attending the Alpha course,

You can find out more about Alpha at www.alpha.org



My First Alpha

I was first invited to Alpha at St John's by my neighbour Margaret Jenkins. Every Wednesday I would be eager to get to St John's for the Alpha session. I really couldn't get enough of the knowledge of what Jesus is all about. It was so interesting to me and not a bit boring. I remember the group I was in, with others, the questions asked and the answers given by the leaders of the group. The best thing was that the questions and answers were debated by our group and everyone had an interesting opinion on the talk given by Mick Woodhead, the Vicar at the time at St John's. Each week there would be something different to discuss all about Jesus. I learned a lot because even though I considered myself a Christian I really had no knowledge or understanding of God's word and that's what Alpha gave me. A one to one with Jesus that I didn't know I could have and it's for all.

This is called my first Alpha because I did quite a few more.

Not only did I find our Lord and Saviour but also met many friends who I still have today. My first Alpha was February 1998. On my second Alpha my daughter came and loved it.

Mal Cunningham



As a youngster, my family had taken me regularly to a fairly traditional Anglican church where I'd been baptised as a baby. Later as a teenager at a Christian school, where Sunday chapel was compulsory, I was confirmed in the Church of England. Not much more happened after leaving school church or faith-wise. I didn't continue going to church.

Then when I was 29, I was living in an annex flat at the house of a Christian family in Buckinghamshire. Having finished university as a mature student, I was disappointed at the apparent trajectory of my career to date, although I had a steady job, and was in the Royal Navy Reserves too. Relationships with girlfriends hadn't been terribly successful either. Worse was the fact that I seemed to be lacking in moral direction, and felt pretty empty inside. I drank more than I'd have liked to have admitted. My father had died of a sudden heart attack when I was 19.

I'd met a girl on holiday who lived in the North East, and we'd started talking about living together, so out of courtesy I asked the family if it would be ok for her to join me in the flat until we could get something more appropriate sorted. To my surprise, they said 'No' and explained their principles as Christians. That was ok with me, but then that relationship didn't last long in the end. I started wanting to go to church again (probably

in hope of finding a virtuous nice girl, truth be known.), but something was definitely stirring in me. I started to ask the family why Christians felt it was wrong for unmarried couples to co-habit, and Richard, the landlord, wisely passed the buck to his wife who suggested I go on an Alpha course that was starting nearby soon. I liked the sound of that, as it involved food, and happily went along. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and it answered many of my questions. More profoundly however, what came up was the whole issue of having lost my father, and the emptiness inside. Richard and Rosie told me that it was really important that I went on the weekend away as it is pivotal for many people. I was intrigued with that, but there was a bigger problem. I'd been selected to represent my RN Unit at a sailing regatta in Portsmouth and didn't want to let them down. Eventually, tempting as the regatta was, I decided that I could sail any time, but the Alpha away weekend was probably a rarer opportunity, so with trepidation, I delivered the news that I wouldn't be going to the regatta. He was absolutely fine about me not going so that was that.

That was the weekend that God really touched me. I realised that I needed to give my life to Christ in a way that I hadn't previously, and He filled me with the most amazing sense of peace, and a sense of the painful loss of my father being replaced with having a new

Father in heaven. The Lord's prayer starting 'Our Father' took on a new meaning, and all that hurt and pain was washed away. I felt like a new person, and the changes have lasted ever since. I have since worked in some fascinating areas, I have a wonderful family (I've been married nearly 10 years now to an amazing Christian lady), I've done a degree in Theology, and I have constantly been amazed at the ways in which God has guided and directed my life. I've also found that my relationship with God has grown deeper and matured. It can only be said that I am deeply grateful for the opportunity that Alpha gave me to learn about God, Jesus, and the Christian faith in a way that I hadn't previously.

David Whitehead



My Experience of Alpha

The Alpha course material provides a thoughtful walk through the basics of Christian teaching, of itself it is unlikely to make many converts to Christianity.

Its life and meaning comes from the salt and vinegar of good committed singers of the song, plus people

(young and old) called by God to hear and learn and in some cases accept the song. When these ingredients come together they show the course can become the beginning of something very very special in peoples lives and this applies to both singers and called.

This is my experience of having attended several courses in various capacities. Its hard on everyone but wonderfully fulfilling – neither the singers or the called provide the “OOFLE DUST” (as I call it)which brings people to an acceptance of Jesus as their Personal Saviour. Being there on a course however and surrounded by it can place one very very close to the Rock Cleft specially for each of us.

So give it a try, pray about it, then come and be welcomed.

Alan Moxon



My Story

Why did I go on an ALPHA course? I was already well into my walk with Jesus, and had recently left a church at Grenoside. This was only because I thought it best to go to the local Parish church of St> JOHN's at DEEPCAR, where I live. I had never even heard of ALPHA course..... well I may have heard the name, but I had no idea what it was about, or what was to be expected of me. I thought that I knew it all,..... YES! EVERYTHING there was to know about God, Jesus, and the HOLY SPIRIT.....how wrong I was.

So, just arriving as a new member of St.John's, I already felt like a "FRESHMAN>>>>>" knowing, what I thought was a lot,.....BUT there was more.

I called it "MY AFFIRMATION".

I went on ALPHA , and Oh Boy! was it great.... all the new people I met, all the questions I could ask....and I mean anything! and all the encouragement I received from everybody. Each week was different, and I could not wait to go to the next one the week after.

At the end of the discussion sessions, there was "HOLY SPIRIT" week end. This was at another church, again with leaders of the ALPHA course .

I was a bit nervous, ... but it was then, that week-end,... all I had ever learnt,all that I ever dreamt christianity was like , all those promises that were made by God in the scriptures, were brought to me, again, only MORE....much MORE, than my expectations...;...if you like that week –end

HOLY SPIRIT week-end.... was.... the icing – on the – cherry- on the CAKE.

That's it really, it made me come alive ... more than just living.... it made me WHOLE and the person I am today....

Don't just THINK about going on ALPHA.... DO IT!>>>>>>

IT's THE BEST THING I EVER DID.... (apart from enjoy being fed on ALPHA.... the food is good too,)

TRY it... youv'e nothing to loose, ... and everything to GAIN.

GOD BLESS YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY...

Cindy Law



Alpha Comments

I have been part of Alpha many times, as a participant and as a small group leader.

Each Alpha brings along new people and new views and opinions and I can honestly say that I always learn something new. I have enjoyed listening to other peoples opinions and questions and it is a great place to ask even the most basic questions. I would recommend Alpha to anyone who wants to know more about Christianity.

I have been a Christian for over 20 years, but I would still do Alpha as each group is different and I love to talk about the things of faith.

Kath Allott



Having managed to avoid the Alpha course for several years, I was finally talked into it by my neighbour. However, it was on the understanding that I didn't have to talk, ask questions, appear at Church on Sunday or hold my hand in the air saying 'Praise the Lord!'. And so, after extracting a legally binding document from said neighbour confirming that I could just appear,

drink tea and eat food I arrived at my first meeting, hands in pockets making a beeline for the back row!

Now, don't misunderstand me, I am a very sociable, outgoing kinda gal with 'chatty' being my middle name but, put me in a situation where I am not in control or feel out of my depth then I am totally the reverse, sitting quietly on the edge, observing everything and generally using my Wonder Woman powers of invisibleness! As I sat listening to Mick the Vic (a well loved Vicar with a sense of humour that did not befit a Man in a frock!) I gazed around the assembled crowd and, to my surprise, recognised several faces. Well, I thought, this might not be too bad. At least I know a couple of people and can attach my self to them like glue if required, and checked my back pocket for the tube of UHU Glue I had put there for just this kind of situation!

Mick explained what would be happening during the next few weeks, the subjects we would be chatting about, what we could expect and then announced the most important fact of the evening – that food was available during the break. After which, we would be split into small groups so we could ask questions, chat and generally feel at ease. Cool, thought I, as the aroma of pizza, garlic bread and sausage rolls wafted around the room! We were introduced to the helpers

who, despite being members of the Church looked relatively normal and did not appear to have anything sprouting out of their ears, wings on their backs or talk in bible quotations.

Break was announced and after heroically working my way through the food table I grabbed a cuppa, got out my UHU glue and sat down with one of the recognisable faces. We chatted and caught up on local news, how the world was progressing and what we were going to do about global warming i.e. we gossiped and begrudgingly admitted how enjoyable the evening was turning out to be. The groups were announced and off I now waddled (too much pizza) to join my fellow victims, sorry, group members.

There were 5 of us on our group (including a recognisable face, phew!) and two group leaders – Elisabeth Coyne and Mick Flannagan and from that moment on I was hooked. We could ask anything we wanted about the Bible, Jesus and religion. Nothing was out of bounds and Mick and Elisabeth took our machine gun speed questions like troupers. I was amazed at how quickly we all felt at ease, knowing that nothing would be repeated outside of our groups and that all our doubts, questions and disbeliefs were received with genuine interest and answered with their own understanding and interpretation of the Bible. The evening flew by and I spent the next few weeks counting down the days in between meetings and

thoroughly enjoying every minute of them. Friendships and bonds were made during that Alpha course of 2000 that still remain now. Not only have I discovered the closest, wisest and most special group of people I am honoured to call my friends, I also discovered one of the most interesting history books I have ever read and a true gentleman who will always be my guide – Jesus and The Bible.

Paula Stuart



I remember back in 1998, feeling as though life was at a real low point. We lived in Chapelton at the time and were experiencing some really difficult times with our partying neighbours. We were desperate to move house for our own sanity and had many people come and view our property but each time no further interest was shown. We could not see a way out of our situation. We had started to look at other houses ourselves and one of the places that caught our eye was Deepcar, mainly because we found the “link detached” properties an attractive option given our “semi-detached” difficulties!!

Around this time, I was visiting a Manager at a GP surgery as part of my job, who was a Christian and started to talk to me about where we lived and our situation. She spoke about the Alpha Course that was

starting at her church in a few weeks time, gave me a leaflet and asked me to think about coming. I discussed it with my husband, Paul and we agreed that we would go to it, thinking that we needed something to get us through what was happening to us and if nothing else, it would be an evening away from the noise!

We had both attended a church in Chapeltown for some time but despite having that foundation, we still felt we had unanswered questions about our faith. The course was structured in such a way that you did not feel at all uncomfortable. There was an initial talk from the Vicar on the evening's topic followed by the opportunity to sample some fantastic food prepared by one of the church's congregation! We then split up into small groups to discuss what we had listened to, ask any questions and be prayed for.

Our small group really helped us explore our questions and at times there were some heated debates but the group was a safe environment to say anything without fear of judgement. The small group leaders really got to know you and they provided so much support, as they found out about our home situation. Unbeknown to us, they prayed for us regularly as the weeks went by.

Towards the end of the Alpha Course, we had a breakthrough and we were able to part exchange our

house for a new house in Deepcar, which had lovely neighbours and a new church family waiting for us at St John's.

What did Alpha mean to us? Well, it definitely deepened our faith and our relationship with God, it gave us the privilege of sharing time with some really special people and when I say "It moved us", I mean that quite literally!!

Claire Martin



I was thinking the other day about how far I had come in my Christian walk. You won't know how far but God and I do. When I walked through the doors of this church on Easter Sunday 1998 I had no idea what changes in my life would be brought about. I had been invited to come to the church by Lesley Longstone who Alan my husband and I had met in the pub by accident a couple of days before.

We had moved to Deepcar and I was looking for a church to go to. As I remember it was Alan – a non Christian – who had said to Lesley that I was looking for a church to join. This conversation took place in the first five minutes of meeting up! Alan and I had known Lesley and her husband Paul since they were teenagers through Alan's coaching. Both played Table

Tennis and Alan coached them both. We had not seen them for about 10 years. Lesley was very enthusiastic about St Johns and the following Sunday I found myself in a packed church sitting at the back with Beatrice Wadsworth who I vaguely knew through a third party joining in the most wonderful service ever. And so began my journey.

I had been going to church from the age of 5 years and thought myself a Christian with a sound Christian faith. On that Easter Sunday morning at the age of 44 I knew there was something else, something I was missing – the last piece of the jigsaw.

I kept coming to church, not wanting to miss anything. I was encouraged, impressed and inspired by people around me – Lesley and Paul, Linda and Mick Flanagan, Brian and Kath, Enid, Elisabeth, Mick and Trisha Woodhead to name a few. What examples of Christian faith they showed to me.

And then came along Alpha. I was invited to go and off I trotted thinking it might be ok but not expecting much. Wrong again!! Fellowship, plenty of talk, food and questions. Oh the questions!! What I didn't ask someone else did. What I thought I was sure of was sometimes turned on its head, other times confirmed, renewed.

Thought provoking, spanner in the works, insecurity, warm feelings, excitement, knowledge, understanding,

misunderstanding, support, freedom all spring to mind. The course came to an end with what was called 'the Holy Spirit' weekend something I was really looking forward to. An evening and day asking the Holy Spirit to be with us, fill us up to overflowing, prayer, fellowship and more food! I recall I spent most of the time in church and at home crying. Why I don't know but I was so full of God I wanted to tell the world. I witnessed people being filled with the Holy Spirit in all sorts of ways – laughing, crying, fainting, boldness to speak out, singing, quietness – no one way for all. When Mick Woodhead put me on the spot and asked me how I had found Alpha I stood up in church on Sunday evening with tears of joy running down my face and said I didn't think I had found Alpha but Alpha had found ME.

Pat Lowe



My thoughts of Alpha

The memory of Alpha makes me smile

Its where I met my very best friend. A friend for life who never lets me down and who is always there to listen and help. The friends name? – Jesus.

I thought I was a Christian until I went to Alpha

Alpha taught me how to handle difficult situations

Jackie Eckles



This story was told to me on Sunday and Judith wanted me to include it in our stories. She has moved churches but is still a Christian.

Jackie and Judith were friends – good friends. Jackie was a Christian and went to St John’s Church. Often she spoke to Judith about ‘her church’ and invited her but Judith would have none of it.

Then the church ran an Alpha course and before the course began church folk were invited to an Alpha supper and to bring along a friend. Jackie tried again. ‘You don’t have to do anything just, come’, she said to Judith. Reluctantly Judith agreed to go with no intention of any follow up!

They went to the Alpha supper, had great food and then a man called Mick, the vicar spoke. Judith listened and decided she wanted to know more. The rest is history.

Judith wrote to Jackie in May 2001.

To Jackie

On the day of my confirmation.

Thank you for taking me to your church. I went not meaning to stay and never left.

Things have changed so much for me since that first Alpha Supper and God is working in my life and also in the lives of my family, all because of you.

Thank you

May God bless you and keep you safe always.

Love Judith



This was written by Enid at Alpha Supper 3rd May 1997

I've been on my 3rd Alpha, it's been simply great
I cannot get enough of it – and oh! I simply hate
The day Mick says – well that's it – Alpha's over now
I feel so sad, but I'd be so glad – if there was,
somehow
A way that it could run forever
But Mick would say No! –never!
We all must have a break
So when at last we wake
On that day in September
When we will all remember
That Alpha starts again

Come hail, or sun or rain
We'll be refreshed
And do our best
And I'll shout Hip Hooray
Alpha starts today!!
And tho' I know Mick's right
I'm still in the same plight
I miss the folks
Mick's talks and jokes
The food is just superb
But I know I'll have to curb
My ever growing need
To help plant the seed
Of God's great love in many hearts
But, we still have many parts
To play, until that day
We all can greet, or say
To all who we may meet
God's love is oh so sweet
Do come along to our church hall
Where we will tell you, one and all
We'll chat to you
And laugh with you
And if you're feeling blue
We'll try to cheer you too
So do please come
Don't stay at home
When Alpha starts again
Then you will see quite plain
Why I always shed a tear
When Alpha's end is coming near
So join the happy throng
Come along and sing a song

Then you will all depart
With God's love in your heart



Saint John's Deepcar

"a church for all the community"



About St. John's



St John's Deepcar is a welcoming Church of England local church.

We have a wide age range of people from a few months old to one or two in their nineties! We have thriving groups for children and young people, and several midweek groups for people wanting to grow in their Christian faith.

On Sundays we have a fairly traditional service of Holy Communion at 9.00 am. At 10.45 am we have a service with more contemporary music – this is the service which has the groups for children and young people. On the second Sunday of the month we have an informal service of contemporary worship and reflection at 7.00 pm.

Our congregation varies from those who have been involved with church all their lives to those who have only recently come to faith. We accompany one another on our journeys of faith, seeking to know God better, seeking to follow Jesus Christ, and seeking to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us and to change us.

We would love you to join us in our journey!



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