

Alpha and the Catholic Parish of Hastings

Parishioners will notice that the Alpha course is about to be run in the Catholic Parish of Hastings. Some of you would have attended Alpha before and may even be sceptical of it or any new programme that comes along. If our running of Alpha was to be as a programme alone such scepticism would be justified. This is because, in facing up to the weaknesses of pastoral strategies of the last decades, we can see there has been a failure to reach out and engage with our children, grandchildren and the wider community. This is despite all the wonderful and committed work by teachers in our Catholic schools, catechists in our parish sacramental programmes for children and parents striving to pass on their faith to their children.

Why is that?

It is because so many of the recent generations have encountered the Church but have yet to encounter Christ.

Alpha is one step in renewing and reinvigorating our own joy in the Gospel and sharing it with others so that they may encounter Christ. Alpha does not teach people how to be Catholic. It is a method for preparing **ALL** people, including practising Catholics of all ages, to renew their encounter with Christ through the fundamental teachings of Christianity and at the same time renew their conversion experience with the energy and joy it brings.

It does not end there. Alpha opens us up to the dynamic of missionary discipleship taught by Pope Francis. In this way all Christians, including those yet to be baptized, journey together in faith. The aspects of their Catholic experience which are always present: encounter with Christ, conversion, discipleship, communion and mission, underpin all our catechesis and training in faith. As fellow disciples we accompany one another throughout our lives as we grow in knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The key to the success of our parish depends on ALL of its members being open to faith renewal and inviting others, especially lapsed Catholics, to come along with them to experience Alpha. To do this we will need to become an invitational parish. Invitational means that we are not only welcoming at Sunday Mass but also inviting people to Alpha. Once the journey is begun it will continue through discipleship, connect and faith sharing groups which will maintain the momentum and bring about a wonderful renewal of parish life as has been seen in many parishes around the world. If you are interested to know more I encourage you to look up the work of Pope Francis and that of Fr James Mallon on YouTube where he speaks about parish renovation.