

Running Alpha in the Context of Your Catholic Church

Alpha is the basic message of Jesus Christ. *Its content never changes, but the context in which it runs is constantly changing.* Typically, the most fruitful churches are those who fully embrace Alpha's Best Practices, but also develop ways to make it their own within the time-tested framework. We encourage you to prayerfully consider how the unique context of your Catholic Community can play to their strengths and make the most of what Alpha has to offer.



Who is Alpha's Audience?

Alpha is for everyone, but the primary audience is the unchurched, those who are not Christian and have little or no familiarity with Jesus. That being said, we often find many people in our pews who have been *sacramentalized without ever having been evangelized*. If you are running Alpha in the context of a Catholic parish, such individuals may very well be a part of your initial audience. Here are a few keys to keep in mind.

Key 1. Run Alpha for those furthest from God, even if they are not in the room. It is important to stress right from the beginning that Alpha is a place where anyone is welcome to come with their questions and concerns, regardless of their commitment level to the Church or to God. Because of this, some of your more established parishioners may feel that the concepts are more introductory than they need. If they express this, affirm their knowledge and then encourage them to think of this as a refresher for their hearts as well as their heads. If they do not feel inclined to stay, that is alright. No one should experience Alpha because they have been pressured to participate. Such an experience may tempt us to adjust Alpha to be deeper or more catechetical. However, if we give in to that temptation, Alpha will never reach those furthest from God, those who are not in your churches. Likewise, the movement towards deeper and more catechetical content will reinforce the idea that this Alpha is just a class. In so doing, it will decrease the likelihood that those who have been *sacramentalized but not evangelized* will even experience a life-changing encounter with the person Jesus on Alpha.

Key 2. Handling Small Groups

In the context of running Alpha with those who are already committed to the Church, there will inevitably be small group participants who bring up deeper catechetical concepts like the theology of the Church, the saints, or the sacraments. If this happens, it is important to affirm and support their experience without letting the conversation alienate those who are unfamiliar with deeper concepts. In such instances, we affirm their participation such as *"That's very interesting!"* or *"Thanks for sharing."* *"Then we redirect with, "What does anyone else think?"* The goal of this is not to hide from deeper theology, but rather to make certain that sufficient time is being spent on the more introductory questions. Remember, the small group leaders are not trying to teach or catechize. Rather, they are hosting thoughtful conversation that helps everyone personalize the concepts and wrestle with what they really believe and feel.

Key 3. Follow Up Well

Of course, Alpha is not meant to bring people all the way to a fullness of the understanding of the Catholic Faith. It is after all, Alpha, the beginning. That being said, it is important that we do lead people towards an ongoing journey of conversion after Alpha. It could be involving them in a small group. It could be connecting them to a men's or women's group. It could even be another course on Sacraments or some deeper concept of faith. Regardless, we need to be encouraging them that Alpha is only the beginning of a life-long journey!

The content of Alpha may always be the same, but by understanding the context of who is coming to your course, you can be better prepared to lead them towards God the Father through Jesus Christ in the working of the Holy Spirit. To learn more, we invite you to visit alphausa.org/catholic.
