

Alpha and 'The Joy of the Gospel'

The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus (EG, 1).

The Exhortation title reveals how contagious a joyful encounter with Jesus can be. Joy is at the heart of the experience of Alpha: in welcoming others, eating together, friendship, simple prayer, the warmth and humour of the talks and in people sharing their own stories.

1. EVANGELISATION THROUGH THE PARISH

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. (EG, 28)

Alpha is a tool for evangelisation at the service of the local parish. It is not a movement; no one joins Alpha. Alpha helps develop parishes into 'communities of missionary disciples', initiating a renewal for the Christian community that desires to be transformed by evangelisation.

2. FIRST PROCLAMATION

Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the significance of every subject which the latter treats. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart. (EG, 165)

As its name suggests, Alpha introduces people to the initial proclamation of the Christian faith. It speaks to the whole person, mind, heart, will and conscience and invites them to respond to this proclamation through a decision to follow Jesus.

3. MISSIONARY STYLE

Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes

all the more forceful and convincing. (EG, 35)

Everything in Alpha is done with sensitivity and simplicity. In concentrating on the person of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection, Alpha is both 'forceful and convincing.' It is designed to reach our present generation beginning where they are and does not seek to propose answers to questions that are not being asked.

4. NON-JUDGEMENTAL

All this demands on the part of the evangeliser certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental. (EG, 165)

A non-judgmental and non-threatening approach is at the heart of the Alpha methodology. Alpha is based on welcome and hospitality. The ten week process is essentially dialogic. Guests are welcomed to a meal. They listen to a short talk on the Christian faith and then they talk and the Church listens.

4. FOCUS ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. (EG, 261)

A central aspect of the process of Alpha is the experience of the Holy Spirit. Guests are transformed by the experience of God's love being poured into their hearts and by experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. Team members are strengthened in their faith by ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit, and a local Church is slowly transformed by this experience.

5. COMMON TOOL

If we [all Christians] concentrate on the convictions we share, and if we keep in mind the principle of the hierarchy of truths, we will be able to progress decidedly towards common expressions of proclamation, service and witness. The immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot leave us indifferent. Consequently, commitment to a unity which helps them to accept Jesus Christ can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelisation.

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.

(EG, 246)

Alpha is used throughout the world by Christians of many different backgrounds. It is one of the most 'common expressions of proclamation, service and witness' to be found among believers. It creates unity at a grassroots level.