

# ALPHA NEWS



SPRING 2006

THE ALPHA COURSE

An opportunity to explore the meaning of life

USA

## INVITE Your Colleagues to Lunch—It Could Change Their Lives!

Today, the Alpha Course is running in diverse working environments ranging from factories to multi-national corporations. Listen to what these individuals have to say about Alpha in the Workplace:

- “It works. I can testify to that. Indeed it worked for snobby old me.” — Susan Lee, *Forbes*
- “Alpha [is] catching the mood of spiritually hungry young professionals.” — Stephen Overell, *The Financial Times*
- “I have seen many colleagues come to faith in Christ through participating in the Alpha Course in my boardroom.” — John Mackay, Strand Corporation

## Workplace Resources

If you desire to see your workplace transformed by the power of Jesus Christ, Alpha has a number of new, customized resources available:

- Alpha Course DVD with Alpha Express (see page 3)
- Alpha in the Workplace Leaders Guide—a step-by-step guide for planning, promoting and running your course.
- Introductory Brochure—a tool to encourage fellow believers to host a workplace Alpha Course.

To order, call (800) 362-5742 or visit our Web site ([www.alpharesources.org](http://www.alpharesources.org)).

## YOUR WORKPLACE?

*How Alpha brings faith to work*

LEADERS OF DISNEY'S ALPHA IN THE WORKPLACE COURSE, INCLUDING TAMARA KHALAF (SECOND FROM LEFT)



COURTESY TAMARA KHALAF

“Wherever we are right now in our lives,” Tamara Khalaf says with passion, “that area is our mission field. Rather than view the mission field as only something ‘out there,’ like India, Africa and the like, the mission field is right where we are today. Our audience is everyone we come into contact with.”

Tamara not only believes that passionately, but she lives it out in her own unique mission field: Walt Disney Studios, in Burbank, Calif.

Tamara had been working for Walt Disney Feature Animation for eight years when she learned about Alpha from someone at her church—Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, Calif. The course dovetailed perfectly with Tamara’s heart to see the gospel penetrate the entertainment industry.

“From my first Alpha evening, I was blown away by how well Nicky explained the gospel, and

*Continued on page 3*

### Alpha Churches Touch Katrina Victims

*Living out the Alpha message in word and deed. PAGE 9*

### Commonly Asked Questions

*“Should I deliver the Alpha Course talks live or use the tapes?” Hear responses from experienced Alpha practitioners Bobbi Good and Steve Wood. PAGE 5*

### Global Impact

*Hear news of Alpha’s impact in China, South Africa, the Netherlands and elsewhere. PAGE 11*

# ALPHA IN THE WORKPLACE

## *Introducing Jesus in your communities*

It happens to all of us: You're going about your daily routine of walking, driving, riding a train or sitting at your desk, and a random thought pops into your consciousness. Isn't it strange how we remember haphazard bits of information? One snippet I recall from my teenage years is from Jesus and found in the Gospels. To modern ears it is an awkward phrase: *Occupy until I come* (as King James put it).



by Todd Hunter,  
National Director

The Greek word that is translated *occupy* means something like “keep busy.” The phrase, in this sense, does not mean to live maniacal lives of frenzy. Rather, it more accurately summons up the good feeling that parents get while watching their children contentedly at play.

It refers to a more holistic reality—something like “invest your whole lives.” Jesus was telling His disciples to

continue partnering with Him in kingdom activity until He came again.

I tell this story of chance thoughts because it highlights the fundamental ideal behind Alpha in the Workplace

(see our cover story, “**Your Workplace?**”).

Alpha in the Workplace gives us a template to use to “take our everyday ordinary lives—our sleeping, eating, going-to-work lives—and place them before God as an offering” (Romans 12, The Message).

I envision Alpha in the Workplace groups in every aspect of human endeavor. Consider the possibilities in the box to the right.

Use your own imagination. See Alpha in the Workplace in every situation where people have natural community. Let yourself dream about how something similar could happen in *your* life. Let Jesus’ command to “occupy” or “keep busy” pull you into living generous lives of joyful goodness as ambassadors of His kingdom. ■

**...THREE LADIES** work at the same hospital in town. They have decided to spend some of their free time every week praying for the sick as they are directed by the Holy Spirit, comforting families and doing practical deeds of kindness. In short, they have “adopted” their place of work and made it their “parish.” They have found real missional meaning in the place where they spend most of their waking hours and in the place where they *already* have community. They then invite that community to lunch on an Alpha Course.

**...TWO FAMILIES** live in and manage an apartment complex. They live lives of creative goodness as the cooperative friends of Jesus in the context of the normal routines of life. In doing so, they help the aged in their complex to clean house,

watch the children of single parents and invite their colleagues to “lunch, a brief movie and stimulating conversation.”

**...TWO POLICEMEN**

have made the police force their “congregation.” They work with the divorcing, the depressed and the anxiety-ridden while embodying the “peace and joy of the kingdom” in any way that makes practical sense . . . especially during an after-shift Alpha Course.

“take our everyday ordinary lives—  
our sleeping, eating, going-to-work  
lives—and place them before God  
as an offering”

— ROMANS 12, THE MESSAGE —

## ALPHA NEWS SPRING 2006

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### Subscriptions

Individual hard-copy subscriptions: \$5/year  
Bulk hard-copy subscriptions (pack of 5): \$15/year  
Order at: (212) 406-5269 or 1-800-DO-ALPHA  
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*Workplace, continued from page 1*

I knew this was something I could support with my whole heart. I wanted to find *my own way* to be a light in Hollywood. I knew that God was leading me to bring Alpha to my workplace.”

Tamara is not the only one with that conviction. Since 1996, a special branch of Alpha called *Alpha in the Workplace* (AiW) has helped believers carry the course into their own personal mission fields. The talks have been shortened to fit a workplace lunch hour without short-circuiting their power (see “Alpha Course DVD With Alpha Express,” below).

The format has worked extremely well, reports Shaila Visser, AiW director, “for the same reasons that it works in the church: People [find] community. We often heard the comment, ‘I can’t believe I get to do this.’ It was as though it was a privilege for them to come and take time out of their week to look at the spiritual side of life.”

“The Alpha Course is an excellent way to introduce the Christian faith to business associates,” agrees David C. Bentall, a personal life coach in Vancouver, B.C. “It is nonthreatening but clearly gets the issues of truth on the table.”

**N**ow, Alpha in the Workplace courses are running in 38 countries and with a variety of work colleagues: from Deutsche Bank employees in Germany and Ford Motor Company employees in the United Kingdom, to factory workers in Zimbabwe, hair-salon staff in Russia and Exxon Mobile staff in Singapore. Some are held at lunchtime, others in the morning before work and still others at the end of the workday.

The workplace timeframe makes Alpha possible for many people who would miss the experience otherwise. “I’m an employee and mother at home—my 24/7 job,” says Monica Wooten, a participant in AiW at Continental Airlines. “I was able to focus on the program, and a lot of my questions were answered without interruptions. Ever since, I have been able to minister to family and friends.”

Back at Disney, Tamara not only orchestrated a successful Alpha Course among her colleagues in 2005, but she also watched God multiply her efforts: In 2006, two separate AiW courses are running, one with live talks and one using Alpha Express.

To get started in 2005, Tamara contacted the local Disney Christian Fellowship group and began sharing her vision. From there she found a local pastor with Alpha experience who was eager to help.

When the course launched in October, 20 people attended—a group that fluctuated in size before stabilizing at about 12. The size was perfect for the conference room on-site. To save on costs (covered entirely out of their own pockets), course leaders decided not to cater meals but encourage the group to brown-bag it. For the Alpha getaway and talks on the Holy Spirit, participants met at a local restaurant in a private room.

“My personal hurdle involved fear,” Tamara says honestly. “Since the entertainment industry is a hip place, the Christian way of life is not stereotypically the most popular of spiritual avenues. I was incredibly afraid of bringing my faith into the workplace, yet at each step, God met me and continues to do so.”

The course itself generated a variety of emotions, perhaps especially for fellow believers who attended. “One lady just seems stunned to be in fellowship with other Christians in a place like Disney,” Tamara says. “Her husband is not a Christian and does not allow her to attend church. Alpha has become literally a sanctuary to her soul.”

The Rev. Doug Folsom agrees. Doug is an Anglican priest and chaplain to professionals in the entertainment industry. He agreed to do live talks at that first Disney Alpha Course, as well as at one of the two courses being held in 2006.

“Alpha in the Workplace provides a respite for people in the entertainment industry,” he says, “because it is a lonely environment for Christians. It also provides a beautiful contrast for seekers as they feel something ‘strangely warm’ during that hour in comparison to the rest of their workday.”

As far as the future, Tamara, Doug and the other leaders are dreaming big, even beyond the next AiW Course at Disney: “We hope that with a few of these under our belt, we can suggest some modifications and get other local studios (ie: Dreamworks, Warner Bros., Universal, etc.) to take up the Alpha Course too.”

At Disney, as well as in other workplaces around the world, a giant mission field awaits. ■

## ALPHA IN THE WORKPLACE CONFERENCES

**Ready to plan your course but don’t know where to start?**

**Attend our next Alpha in the Workplace conference.**

**There you’ll gain valuable tools and motivation to equip you to run an effective course at your workplace:**

**Minneapolis, November 2, 2006**

**For more information, call (604) 837-2000 or register on the Web at [www.alphausa.org/conferences](http://www.alphausa.org/conferences).**

**You can also gather other interested individuals and schedule a training conference in your own city. With assistance from Alpha USA, you can organize a conference that will have a lasting impact. Contact us to get started ([workplace@alphausa.org](mailto:workplace@alphausa.org)). ■**

## ALPHA COURSE DVD WITH ALPHA EXPRESS

Order Alpha Express for \$179.99 as part of a package containing the full-course DVD set—available in both an English-language edition and a Spanish-language (Latino and European) edition. The new edited versions, Alpha Express, have been shortened to 20-25 minutes per session. This is about half the length of standard Alpha and makes this version perfect for use in Alpha in the Workplace, Alpha in Prisons and Alpha on Campus courses. For more information or to order, visit the Web site ([www.alpharesources.org](http://www.alpharesources.org)) or call toll-free (800) 362-5742.

## OPENING HEARTS, STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES

**W**hile searching for a spiritual-growth program for his church in Cleveland, deacon and pastoral minister David Pecot thought he'd need to develop his own. That is, until he heard about Alpha. He audited one session at a neighboring parish and knew this was what he wanted. "The program made people reflect on what they said they believed," he explains, "and challenged them to live what they profess."

With the blessing of his head pastor, David brought Alpha to St. Basil the Great Catholic Church. Now, five years later, the church has grown from 2,800 families to 3,300—in part, due to Alpha.

"We began to see an increase in participation in the life of the parish by people who had gone through the Alpha Course," Dave recalls. "A review in 2002 showed that of the people who attended Alpha, 28 percent became active in other ministries of the church, whereas prior to Alpha, they only attended Sunday worship."



While Alpha was growing individuals spiritually, David began to see how another Alpha program could grow families: The Marriage Course. "I do a fair amount of marriage counseling and marriage preparation, and a lot of annulment work," he says, "and I wanted to get on the front end of [strengthening] marriages."

After benefiting from The Marriage Course himself, he decided to pilot a course at St. Basil.

"More and more," he says, "other couples are telling me they want to join the next course because of how it has impacted their friends' relationship. When I started to hear this from *men*, I knew we had found a key to developing strong relationships and lasting marriages."

Conversions of different sorts happen in both the Alpha and Marriage Courses at St. Basil. And David believes they complement each other well.

"The Marriage Course is one where the thrust is not a conversion to Christ but a conversion in the attitude of love. Still, many times one spouse will go through Alpha and have a deepening relationship with God and want to share that with their spouse. The Marriage Course allows them to share what they have discovered."

The presence of the regular Alpha Course at St. Basil's offers a platform for asking those questions raised in The Marriage Course, particularly questions about faith and its impact on relationships.

"I love the challenge to help people understand who Jesus is and how the gift of the Spirit transforms us into the people of God we were always intended to be."

Whether discovering that transformation in The Marriage Course or the original Alpha Course, St. Basil is providing tools to make faith something not only believed, but also lived. ■

### «SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US»

Has the Alpha Course changed your life? It is helpful and encouraging for us to know how the Alpha Course and materials are having an impact. To share your story with us, please go to [www.alphausa.org](http://www.alphausa.org) and click on the "Share Your Story" link at the bottom of the page. Answer a few questions, and we will gladly send you a gift as a thank you for your time.

## Commonly asked questions, with responses from experienced Alpha practitioners

To this issue's question, two Alpha leaders respond out of their experience and perspective: Bobbi Good is risk manager of 2,000-member Rose Drive Friends Church in Yorba Linda, Calif. She has also served as Alpha director for all 11 courses that the church has hosted since 2002. Steve Wood is senior pastor of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Mt. Pleasant, S.C. He has been instrumental in leading Alpha Courses since 1997, including several years as regional advisor. The Alpha team at St. Andrew's has helped launch 10 other courses in the Charleston area.

# SHOULD I DELIVER THE ALPHA COURSE TALKS LIVE OR USE THE TAPES?

**BOBBI.** When we initially started Alpha, we were concerned that our guests might not be able to relate to Nicky because of his accent and the stories he tells, using unfamiliar names and terms. We went ahead and used the video, though, because we had heard that some American

churches had had good results. And we didn't feel we had time to get live speakers ready; we didn't want to postpone launching our course for only that reason.

We found that most people are delighted by Nicky's teaching and stories, and many have commented that they prefer the Nicky talks.

We began adding in live talks over time, and

we now do both. At the weekend away, which we call our special event, we do two or three of the four talks live. This allows our guests to be exposed to various pastors and, hopefully, feel some connection to them and our church.

Let me share one romantic tale: Dan O'Leary did not attend church until a new friend, Karen, invited him to attend Alpha at Rose Drive Friends Church. He says he came because, if he didn't, he would have an *ex-girlfriend* named Karen.

Dan was intrigued by the title of the first taped message: "Christianity: Boring, Untrue and Irrelevant?" He didn't notice the question mark at first and thought, *Good, they know that Christianity is boring, untrue and irrelevant!*

Then he noticed the question mark, decided to stay for the evening anyway and found himself intrigued by the guy with the English accent.

Everyone was friendly, the food was good and he didn't feel threatened, so he continued coming. He was determined not to get anything out of the talks, but because of Nicky's accent, he found himself listening more intently to understand the message, and he began to learn. (Continued on page 6)



## Commonly asked questions, with responses from experienced Alpha practitioners

*Live or Tapes, Continued from page 5*

Dan gave his heart to Jesus during the special event, finished the Alpha Course and has come back to serve on following courses. He and Karen are happily married, they attend church together, they're involved in a small group, and he says his life is fuller and more rewarding than he ever thought possible!

So we can say we've seen incredible fruit from using the taped talks *and* from giving them live. [See "Live or Taped Talks?" for some questions to consider as you plan for your Alpha Course.] The majority of guests love to listen to Nicky. He is very natural and friendly and really knows how to tell a story. Several of us as leaders have heard Nicky's talks during each of our 11 courses, and we look forward to hearing him again, because we pick up new nuggets of wisdom each time.

**STEVE.** When I arrived at St. Andrew's, we were using the video talks. The length and British cultural references created a bit of a hurdle for my

American audience. So, one basic reason for the switch was simply pragmatic. In addition, at one of the training conferences, we were encouraged to try giving live talks.

Now, I'm the primary speaker on our Alpha Course, and I enjoy the interaction between myself and the participants.

I have found there to be at least two benefits to the live talks. First, participants begin to establish a relationship with me. And so, when I see them around the community—in the bookstore, at coffee or at church—a certain rapport has been established. One of our church's staff members came to faith through our Alpha Course. Liz would say that one of the significant factors was her ability to relate to me as the speaker.

Second, there's the "what you see is what you get" factor. People who come to Alpha hear our worship team and our speakers. Then, God willing, when they begin to attend St. Andrew's, they have already experienced who we are and know the stories of the church and some of the life of the speaker. So, from day one, people are disciplined into the body they may become part of. ■

## Live or Taped Talks?

Questions to consider as you plan your Alpha Course:

- » ***Are you just starting out?*** If so, consider using the videos/DVDs simply to relieve the pressure of developing your own talks. Instead, concentrate on other course details. A leader who is thoroughly familiar with the course is much more prepared to give talks on future courses.
- » ***How much time have you allowed for the presentation?*** Taped talks are 45 minutes long, unless you have purchased the 30-minute version (see "Alpha DVD With Alpha Express" on page 3).
- » ***Do you have the necessary equipment and a technician on hand?*** Alpha participants can be distracted by poor sound or video quality. Make plans for the rare occasion when your equipment might fail. Ask a speaker to serve as backup.
- » ***Do you have a strong speaker available***—someone who is warm and engaging, who can speak to a seeking audience without using Christian jargon, and who can share a number of personal examples? A live speaker is powerful if he or she is well prepared, knows the course inside and out, and verbally and nonverbally communicates with conviction and accessibility. When in doubt, go with the taped talks. A strong message is pivotal to a successful Alpha experience.
- » ***Is pastor/guest connection a high priority?*** If so, asking a pastor to serve as speaker might be a helpful personal touch. In other cases, guests have voiced being more comfortable with the taped talks because there is some distance and anonymity, leaving them free to criticize or disagree with Nicky Gumbel in a way that they would not with a live speaker.

### «WAITING FOR YOUR QUESTIONS»

Are you serving on or leading an Alpha Course? We'd love to hear what questions you've wrestled with, or questions you have received from other church leaders when you've talked about the course at your church. Send us your questions at [questions@alphausa.org](mailto:questions@alphausa.org).

*Practical resources and encouragement for Alpha leaders*

# PASTORING YOUR SMALL GROUP

**H**ave you ever found yourself swept up in the details of holding an Alpha Course? Counting heads for an accurate meal count . . . making notes to remember to order more materials for the booktable . . . wondering if you should add another table for dinner?

Details matter, because the entire ambience of a course conveys that each guest is important and warmly welcomed.

But your role as an Alpha leader on your course goes far beyond the details. Especially if you are a small-group leader. “Alpha is not about shuffling paper,” says Tony Kaiser. “When I train my teams, I try to instill in them that while they don’t wear a clerical collar in the name of Jesus, they’ve just been deputized to pastor that group.”

Tony knows about clerical collars. He’s associate pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Long Island, N.Y., where he’s helped hold Alpha Courses for the past seven years. He’s also Alpha’s tri-state regional representative, providing oversight and help to 100-some other courses in the Northeast.

As part of equipping Alpha leaders, Tony and colleague D’Arcy LeClair host semi-annual training and fellowship meetings in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. Volunteers throughout the region help host a combined annual Alpha Conference as well.

With each team of Alpha leaders, Tony emphasizes that Alpha is all about personal ministry. “The more personal you can make it,” he says, “the more effective the ministry is.”

“What I love about Alpha is when people take seriously that it’s Jesus who does the ministry. We’re called to be vessels, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to help make the connection.

“If you really believe God wants you to run Alpha, you have to have prayer support. You need to have prayer that lives will be touched and that people don’t get overwhelmed by all the administrative details—by all the things that never get done that *you* want to do.

“Remember: It’s Jesus’ ministry; it’s His church and His people. We’re honestly trying to do the best we can do with what He reveals to us and with His grace.

“I’ve been [in ministry] for 30 years, and Alpha is about the best I’ve seen come down the pike for evangelism involving the whole church, where all parts of the body can do something. If you want to pour yourself into something, Alpha is really worth pouring yourself into.”

From his vantage point as a pastor, Tony has seen the benefits of Alpha spread even further than the course itself. “The ministry of Alpha is training for a lifetime,” he says simply. “I’ve had a number of leaders do Alpha for one, two or three years, and now they’re doing other things in the church. Some of the things they learned, being an Alpha leader or helper, they’re now carrying over to other ministries of the church. This is a built-in benefit.”

So, remember that *you* are a minister, Tony would say. Love the people in your small group, and keep in mind that it’s Jesus’ ministry first and foremost. ■



**TONY KAISER  
WITH HIS WIFE,  
MAUREEN**

*For more ideas on building community among your leaders, contact the regional office nearest you (see page 14) or go online ([www.alphausa.org](http://www.alphausa.org)) and contact others who are running courses nearby.*

## FINDING A REAL RELATIONSHIP

**M**y life used to be greatly influenced by frustration, anger and daily temptations. I thought that going to church on a regular basis would help keep my life in balance. However, even with that, plus a loving wife, three wonderful sons, a great job and a nice home, I still found myself searching for more, wanting more.

I watched how Alpha had changed my wife, Melissa. And I wanted what she had. When Alpha was offered last January at our church, Christ United Methodist, I went.

There, I began to question myself: *Where am I in my faith?* I didn't understand my relationship with God. To be honest, it wasn't much of a relationship. Once a week, I'd show up at church, try to incorporate the pastor's message into my life, and usually by Tuesday or Wednesday, I was back in my own world.



At Alpha, I found I wasn't alone in my struggles to live a Christian life. I developed deep friendships—people who became supporters, brothers and sisters. Alpha answered a lot of questions for me and my new friends.

Our group discussions provided me with an understanding of my faith and my relationship with God, and I saw where I wanted to be: I wanted a real relationship with God on a daily basis. And I've found it. As a result of Alpha, I have become a much calmer person; the world has slowed down for me, and it is an incredible feeling.

Alpha also helped prepare me for tragedy. I cannot begin to explain the panic and tremendous pain my wife and I experienced last May when we discovered that our 8-year-old son, Ryan, had died in his sleep. We still don't know what happened. One day, he was playing baseball and riding his bike. The next, he was gone.

Without Alpha, I do not know if I would have been able to recognize God's love and comfort in my continued sorrow and grief. Without Alpha, I would not have had the ongoing support, prayer and love of some truly wonderful people who have been at my family's side and have not left. Alpha clarified for me what our pastor refers to as our "living church"—their support and prayers have carried us and continue to carry us.

Through Alpha, I have learned that a relationship with God is so much more than believing in Him and going to church. I truly feel God's presence every day in my life, even in tragedy. ■

*Chuck Cartwright and his wife, Melissa, are members of Christ United Methodist Church in Houston.*

### «SUBSCRIBE TO ALPHA NEWS»

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## ALPHA CHURCHES TOUCH KATRINA VICTIMS

In one small corner of New Orleans this past February, a man walked into an unfamiliar church. He'd been a regular in churches all his life, but never this one. His motivation for visiting came from an unusual incident a few weeks before.

Like many, he had lost everything in Hurricane Katrina. One day, a few strangers approached and handed him a hot meal in a white box. Each day they returned with another meal while he dug through the lifeless piles of wet rubble that had once been his home.

**"I desire to know more  
about a God like that."**

—KATRINA VICTIM HELPED BY ALPHA MEMBERS—

One day he asked where these people came from. The next Sunday, he followed them to their church. "I decided to come and see who this God is who does such a thing," he said. "I have such a desire to know more about a God like that."

Again and again, members of Alpha churches in Louisiana have donned gloves and mud boots, carrying shovels in one hand and a meal in the other, and have reached out to strangers. After all, that's what Alpha is all about: creating an environment where someone is served and can learn more about a God who gives.

Continue praying for the many Alpha churches that are reaching out to those who still need so much. And for the seven Alpha Courses that launched in January 2006 in hurricane-stricken areas. ■

## JOIN THE MOVEMENT ALPHA'S LOCAL CHURCH NETWORK

After a decade in the United States, Alpha recently launched the Local Church Network, to build community and synergy among those who love and do Alpha.

The result? "Instead of being simply end-users of a wonderful product," explains Kim Swithinbank, director of the Local Church Network, "the churches will be partners in a missionary endeavor. This ministry endeavor is not just about *life* transformation but about *church* transformation."

The network will offer more support for those starting and running courses, while integrating the strengths of Alpha more fully into the way its practitioners "do church."

The network's first priority is to establish a core leadership

team of senior pastors committed to Alpha. The second priority is to strengthen the synergy between these senior pastors and the Alpha local offices. Then, third, the network will invite any church that loves and does Alpha to join.

As part of the network, churches will receive practical tips for running better Alpha Courses and access to special deals on materials and conferences. More important, they will be linked with other churches in their sphere of influence, so that it will be easier to see where Alpha is being done well.

Stay tuned for more information on the power of the Local Church Network for *your* Alpha Course. ■

## CANADA HOSTS CHINESE ALPHA CONFERENCE

Why listen to only one language, when you can hear three at the same time?

Last November, Alpha Ministries Canada hosted the first-ever Chinese Alpha Conference for Mandarin, Cantonese and English speakers in the United States and Canada. Conference talks were offered in simultaneous translation for 129 participants—all excited to learn more about reaching their fellow Chinese for Christ.

The conference featured talks from speakers such as Tim MacIntosh, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Richmond, B.C. (the host church); and Eddie Ma, senior pastor of Shaukeiwan Baptist Church in Hong Kong (pictured below).



"I was a church growth consultant, but our church wasn't growing," Pastor Ma said in Cantonese about his ministry experience before Alpha. "We knew a lot of the theology and arguments, but when we came before God and

chose to minister in obedience to Jesus and with the guidance of His Spirit, everything changed.

"If you start working with the Holy Spirit, your ministry will not be the same. Alpha uses holistic evangelism and the power of the Holy Spirit to help the church enter the power of the gospel."

The challenge of running a conference in multiple languages was quickly surmounted. "I was on the edge of my seat waiting for the translation," says Karla Mercaldo, Alpha regional director for western Canada. ■

# LONDON'S "ALPHA IN PRISONS"

## CONTINUING THE CARE OUTSIDE PRISON WALLS



OCTOBER 2005  
CARING FOR  
EX-OFFENDERS  
CONFERENCE

For 11 years, London's branch of Alpha in Prisons has been working with men and women behind bars who want to pursue new life. When these individuals are released, Alpha in Prisons takes one more step with them—linking them with churches and other faith-based groups, who then help those men and women build new lives on the outside. The after-prison follow-up effort is a separate charity, called Caring for Ex-Offenders.

The charity's goals are to help released prisoners by linking them with believers who:

- meet them at the prison gates upon their release;
- help them in the search for accommodation and employment;
- welcome them into a church community.

Cabinet Minister Paul Boateng praises the work of Caring for Ex-Offenders, saying, "All the evidence about re-offending demonstrates the importance of what goes on beyond the prison gates.

"I think it's very important that we fight to preserve, within the prison system, places where people can find faith.

"And if you don't have people outside who . . . have something to offer of that love in which we all believe, it won't work."

Paul Cowley, director of both Alpha in Prisons and Caring for Ex-Offenders, says, "In the last three years, we've been able to place over 530 men and women into those faith-based communities. Not all have stayed there—I wish they would and I pray they would—but we've linked a lot of them. And that has an impact, not only on the prisons, but it has an impact on the churches and it's starting to have an impact on society."

"Stephen" is an ex-offender who has benefited from the work of Alpha in Prisons. "I was a burglar—known to a lot

of different police stations in London," he says. "I went to a prison called Blundeston in Suffolk, and I done an Alpha Course in there. Nothing else had worked for me—prison sentences hadn't worked for me, all sorts of rehabilitation courses hadn't worked for me.

"I done the Alpha Course. I saw real people, and I changed through their love to me and honesty and truth. Now I'm a new man. This is the longest I've been out of prison since I was 16. I'm 29 now."

Alpha is now registered in 80 percent of the prisons in England, according to the Bishop of Kensington, the Rt. Rev'd Michael Colclough.

Caring for Ex-Offenders emphasizes the important role of mentoring for those recently released. "Dave" is one moving example. Peter Kraushar, a former magistrate, has been mentoring Dave for the last three years. Dave had spent 15 years in and out of prison for armed robbery—never out of prison for more than three weeks at a time.

"Well, he hasn't been in prison now for the last six years," Peter says. "It's been absolutely amazing to me to share with him on a completely equal basis and to love Jesus together and to share his ups and downs. So long as you understand that one needs to be patient, the rewards are enormous."

In enthusiastic support of Alpha for Prisons is Chief Inspector John Sutherland of Scotland Yard: "The thing about effective Christian involvement in community life is that it works. It works!" ■



## THE NETHERLANDS

The country celebrated its 100,000th participant on Alpha. The head chaplain in the prison system invited Alpha into all prisons as an official program. ■

# NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

## GERMANY

Alpha was invited to take part in a gathering of 1 million young Catholics from around the world in Cologne, Germany, last summer. This World Youth Day event marked the first time Pope Benedict XVI had visited his homeland since his election. Alpha was invited to hold seminars for groups interested in running the Alpha Course in their churches. Young people from Malaysia, Italy, Canada, America, Sri Lanka and India attended the seminars. ■

*Both Alpha and Pope Benedict XVI attended World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany, in summer 2005.*



## CHINA

Alpha training events have now been held in Shanghai and Beijing. "It is amazing how Alpha fits into Chinese culture," said Alpha adviser Robert Glover. "I think it was made for China. The Chinese love to eat and talk." ■

## SOUTH AFRICA

Sixty prisons are now running Alpha Courses; overall, 100 Alpha Courses are active in this country, as well as 36 Alpha Marriage Courses. ■

## HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, before the kickoff of fall Alpha Courses, more than 100 churches and Christian groups distributed 250-some posters and banners on buses and outside churches, at tram stations, underground stations and the city's pier. Other media advertising included a spot on a Christian TV station and secular radio station. ■



## SWITZERLAND

Under the name "Inviting the Nation to Supper," hundreds of sites around the country hosted simultaneous dinner parties on September 9 to introduce Alpha to some 15,000 guests. Almost 8,000 went on to attend an Alpha Course. More than 700 churches now run Alpha in Switzerland. ■



## SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS

54

Countries represented at the first regional Alpha conference for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, held in November. As one of the 350 delegates declared, "If this is what Heaven will be like, I can't wait to get there."

61

Languages into which Alpha publications are translated

154

Countries running Alpha Courses (most recently added: Tajikistan and Armenia)

1,400

Delegates (representing 22 countries) who attended the first regional Alpha conference for the Asia Pacific region, held in November (photo above).

7,786

Alpha Courses running in the United States

31,260

Alpha Courses running worldwide

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# REVERSING A TREND

## YOUTH ALPHA MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**T**here were definitely problems with materialism,” Krissa Webb says about her hometown high school in Orlando. “Our school was known as the ‘rich kid’s school,’ yet a lot of kids were struggling with alcohol and drugs.”

“There was a lot of depression,” adds Amanda Reddy about her high school in Glasgow, Mont.

Both are now freshmen at The King’s College, a Christian school located in New York’s Empire State Building. Together, they co-lead a Youth Alpha Course, sponsored by St. George’s Episcopal Church. With their volunteer help, St. George’s has connected with a nearby high school to offer Youth Alpha

in one of the church’s meeting rooms.

Recently out of high school themselves, both girls bring fresh insights and an ability to relate to young people in the city, although they grew up in far different environments. The problems seem strikingly similar everywhere.

“I appreciate a program like Youth Alpha,” Amanda says, “because kids need something with enough

structure to help them go deeper. You can’t just tell kids to read the Bible. They need a course that helps them understand.”

Krissa and Amanda are trying to reverse a trend—the shrinking proportion of teens who draw their spiritual and moral values from the church instead of from popular culture and the school environment.

With more college-age people like Amanda and Krissa actively presenting the gospel to younger teens, the spiritual future of America can be expected to turn out quite different from what the current trend is suggesting. ■

*For more information about connecting your church (legally!) with a nearby high school, contact John B. Donovan at [johndonovan@alphausa.org](mailto:johndonovan@alphausa.org).*



KRISSA WEBB,  
LEFT, AND  
AMANDA REDDY



# STRENGTHENING MILITARY MARRIAGES

**WITH DIVORCE RATES RISING** among military couples, military chaplains are looking for new ways to help sustain marriages.

Military marriages often face unique challenges. Deployments can result in long periods of separation that leave one spouse functioning as a single parent. Couples find themselves miles away from other family and friends, and they may move every few years.

Major Ken Godfrey was preparing to take the Alpha Course—in its fifth year at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas—when he noticed materials for The Marriage Course. As Family Life Chaplain, he focuses on couples counseling and education and was looking “for a wise way to plug a marriage-education program into life at the base.”

Ken liked The Marriage Course for both its content and its length: A nine-week course is more manageable than longer training options for busy couples with unpredictable schedules.

At Fort Leavenworth, The Marriage Course runs simultaneously with the Alpha Course, sharing both the meal and participation in the children’s program. The shared meal helps create unity among couples on the base. After eating, the courses split for the evening. Couples taking The Marriage Course move into a more intimate setting to participate in exercises geared toward improving communication, resolving conflict and practicing forgiveness.

Randy Singletary, a former participant and now leader in The Marriage Course, learned to approach situations thinking of how his wife would feel first. “When we both practice this,” he says, “there is greater communication and fewer disagreements over small issues.”

Since spring 2004, 54 couples have completed The Marriage Course at Fort Leavenworth. Often, couples decide to go through the Alpha Course as well.

Marriage is never easy, and The Marriage Course gives couples at Fort Leavenworth the tools to sustain a lifetime commitment to each other amid an ever-changing military lifestyle. ■

# A PRISON, AN INMATE, THE ALPHA COURSE AND YOU

## WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

**T**wo million people in our prisons, and more than 600,000 of them will be released this year to return to our communities.<sup>1</sup> To *your* community. In what condition would you prefer they be when they move next door? Most, when released, do not want to return to prison. But the alarming fact is that more than two-thirds *will* be re-arrested within three years, with over 50 percent returning to prison.<sup>2</sup>

Just as alarming: Children of offenders are six to eight times more likely to be involved in the criminal-justice system than are children of nonoffenders, unless there is meaningful intervention in their lives.<sup>3</sup>

**“Seeing people’s lives change makes our hearts glad.”**  
— Marleah Baird

We don’t have to ask the question, “What Would Jesus Do?” because He tells us in Matthew 25:31-36. Correctional facilities across the country are opening their doors to Alpha, making it even easier to follow Jesus into that environment.

Do you perhaps live within an hour of a prison or jail? Would you consider joining with others to take the course to inmates who are spiritually searching?

In the Houston area, Alpha coordinates two in-prison programs, one for men and one for women, in which the inmates who volunteer for the program live together on the same unit within the prison. Volunteers are allowed to conduct the courses on the living unit.

Marleah Baird is a long-time Alpha Course leader who now coordinates these two programs. “Seeing people’s lives change and seeing their very countenances change from angry and depressed to full of joy just makes our hearts glad,” she says.

“It’s scary, at first, to go into the prison environment. But when you realize the inmates are just hurting people like you

would find in any church, you lose your fears and get to the business of sharing the gospel.”

More than 100 prisons across the country are hosting Alpha Courses. The challenge is: There are more than 3,000 prisons overall—a huge mission field right in our own backyards.

The Idaho State Correctional Facility in Boise has given permission for an Alpha Course with a *very unique leadership team*. The chaplain’s wife had attended a course years before when the couple was on the mission field in China. They believed that Alpha would be a great opportunity for the men at Idaho State Correctional Facility, so the chaplain contacted Alpha’s director of Prison & Re-Entry, Jack Cowley.

With Alpha’s national headquarters located right there in Boise, Jack thought, *What better way to practice what you preach than for our Alpha leadership to conduct the course?* The leadership team agreed to do so, including Todd Hunter,

Alpha national director. The course began in March 2006.

The prisons are here, the inmates are ready and the Alpha Course—along with much valuable assistance—is available. Where are the volunteers? If you are interested, be assured: You will not be alone in this effort. And you’ll play a pivotal role in helping prisoners start on an entirely new path in *your* community once they are released. ■



**MARLEAH BAIRD  
(STANDING, FIRST ROW,  
SECOND FROM LEFT)  
WITH INMATES AT  
PLANE STATE JAIL IN  
DAYTON, TEXAS**

<sup>1</sup>“Prisoners in 2004,” by Allen J. Beck and Page M. Harrison, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*, October 2005. <sup>2</sup>“Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994,” by Patrick A. Langan and David J. Levin, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*, July 2002. <sup>3</sup>“Services for Families of Prison Inmates, *Special Issues in Corrections*,” *National Institute of Corrections*, February 2002; “Characteristics of Children Whose Parents Have Been Incarcerated,” by Gabel and Shinkledecker, *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, July 1993.

For more information on Alpha in Prisons, contact Jack Cowley, U.S. national director for Prisons & Re-Entry, via e-mail ([JackCowley@alphausa.org](mailto:JackCowley@alphausa.org)) or phone (918-231-8847), or find us on the Web ([www.alphausa.org/prisons](http://www.alphausa.org/prisons)).

*Alpha's community of local offices and advisors can help you start, strengthen and successfully run your Alpha Course. Our experienced and enthusiastic network of people provide practical advice, guidance, training and support, as well as link you to many other services and resources. Please contact a local office or advisor to get the specialized assistance and attention that you need for your Alpha Course.*

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To locate additional regional advisors near you, for help in running an Alpha Course, go to [www.alphausa.org](http://www.alphausa.org).

# How to reach The unchurched when you're **overbooked**.

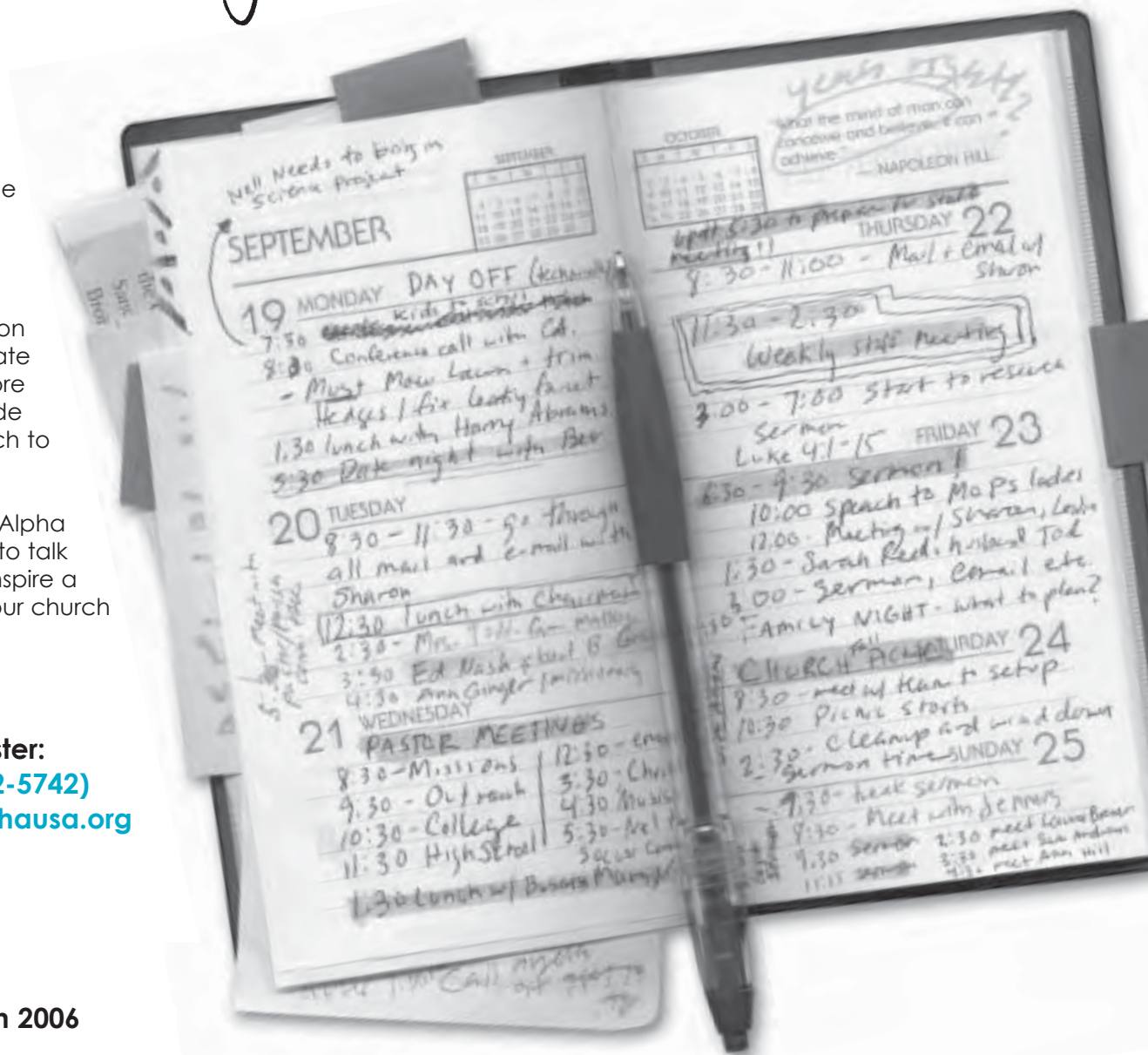
Alpha. Pastor inspired. **Lay led**.

As a busy church leader, do you feel like what you really care about most—reaching the unchurched—always gets put on hold?

Alpha can help. The Alpha Course is a 10-week introduction to Christianity that pastors initiate but lay leaders implement. More than 30,000 churches worldwide have used this simple approach to touch millions.

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For information or to register:  
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Or go online at: [www.alphausa.org](http://www.alphausa.org)



## **Alpha Conferences** in 2006

|             |                  |                  |                  |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| April 20-21 | RALEIGH, NC      | July 27-28       | PHILADELPHIA, PA |
| April 27-28 | CHICAGO, IL      | July 31-August 1 | HOUSTON, TX      |
| April 27-28 | PHOENIX, AZ      | October 12-13    | NASHVILLE, TN    |
| May 5-6     | SEATTLE, WA      | October 16-17    | PITTSBURGH, PA   |
| June 19-20  | INDIANAPOLIS, IN | November 3-4     | TWIN CITIES, MN  |
| July 6-7    | ST. LOUIS, MO    | November 13-14   | DALLAS, TX       |

"Alpha is a well-designed, implementable program that addresses the basic questions of life for the church and unchurched alike. Through Alpha, Jesus Christ is capturing the hearts and minds of an ever-growing number of persons."

George Gallup Jr.  
Chairman

The George H. Gallup International Institute

# FROM GUILT TO GOD

I was raised Jewish and took it very seriously, although I had many questions about where we go when we die and who God is. I was the first girl in my family to have a Bat Mitzvah, and I insisted on it.

If anybody talked to me about Jesus Christ I was offended. If ever I heard that a Jewish friend had read the New Testament, I was mortified.

But things started to change. One of my half-brothers converted to Christianity, so I tried reading the New Testament, but I didn't understand it.

When I moved away from home I stopped going to synagogue. I became very engrossed with my job in the fashion industry.

Friends who were opening a restaurant outside Chicago asked me to help with part-time waitressing. In

my first week a man walked in, and I told my friends, "That's the man I am going to marry." Gary was 45 and divorced with three children. There was a 17-year age difference between us. And he was also a churchgoer.

A year and a half later, we married at a Christian and Jewish service. For the first year, Gary and I went to the synagogue on the high holidays. As a Jew, I felt that I should be there, and I wanted my husband to experience it with me. But I realized how far away I'd drifted from Judaism. I didn't want to belong to a religion simply because it was a cultural process. So I decided to go to Willow Creek Church with Gary.

Still, I felt guilty that I wasn't going to the synagogue. At the same time, I was obsessed with religion: I read book after book—Buddhism, Islam, the New Age, tarot cards, horoscopes.

One December, a nearby Presbyterian Church put up an "Alpha is here" sign. I had no idea what Alpha was. On Christmas Eve we went to



*Heather Hanson lives outside Chicago, where she attends Willow Creek Community Church.*

the church and talked with a woman about Alpha. She said to come to one night, to listen and see what we thought.

So we went. And I loved every second of it. Our discussion group was boisterous and loud, with people from all different backgrounds. Everybody was involved.

I remember explaining to the group that comprehending the New Testament was like learning the sky was purple when I had known my whole life that it was blue.

At night, I'd get into bed with my teaching Bible and read something. I even asked God to make it OK for me to become a Christian, because I was afraid of disappointing my parents.

After the healing night of the course, I had a long conversation with God: *I am sorry. I want to be forgiven for my sins. And I want to give my life to Christ. Show me now how You can use me.*

The following week I went back to the Alpha group, and in the middle of our group discussion said, "I have an announcement to make. . . ."

Kathleen, our leader, started crying. Gary was crying too.

Gary and I try go to church every Sunday now. For Gary, Alpha was a spiritual workout. It helped him get his spiritual muscles back. And I've felt a weight lifted from my shoulders. I know that Jesus died for me, and I feel unconditionally loved.

My prayer used to be, *God, why won't You help me with this?* But now, I ask God what I can do for Him—that's the difference. He's in charge of my life now. He gives me the tools and I get to be the vessel. ■

## What church leaders are saying about Alpha



"This is the first time that the very same course is being used by every Christian church in pretty well every country in the world. That is an incredible achievement. It's very hard to think that it is other than a work of the Spirit in which we should rejoice.

"The course is simple, direct, illustrated by wonderful stories. . . . It doesn't contain anything contrary to the Catholic doctrine. What's more, it provides in wonderful form the basis of Christian belief which many Catholics have never cottoned on to. . . ."

*Bishop Ambrose Griffiths, Order of Saint Benedict (retired)  
Roman Catholic Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, England*



"Alpha is a strategic tool for Christians of all stripes—be they Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. Alpha does three things that all effective evangelism training must do. It models how to Get the Story Straight, how to Get the Story Out, and how to Take the Story In. I recommend it highly!"

*Rebecca Manley Pippert  
Author, Out of the Salt Shaker*



"I count it as a privilege to endorse the Alpha Course, a gift to us from Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in London. The Alpha Course is a superb vehicle for seeking and evangelizing non-Christians, the unchurched and the nominally churched. Would that every Episcopal Church had an Alpha Course, for we would be truly embracing the Great Commission of Jesus our Lord."

*The Right Reverend Herbert Thompson Jr.  
Bishop of Southern Ohio (Episcopal)*



"It's great to see how Alpha has been used to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ, who wouldn't normally come to church. This resource is very complementary to helping seekers connect with *The Purpose Driven Life*."

*Dr. Rick Warren  
Senior Pastor, Saddleback Church  
Lake Forest, California*



How can we be married to one person for our whole life?



How do we resolve conflict?



How can we discover and rediscover intimacy with our spouse?

To learn how to run The Marriage Course and The Marriage Preparation Course in your home, church, or community come to:

## THE MARRIAGE CONFERENCE

WITH NICKY AND SILA LEE, COURSE AUTHORS

30% DISCOUNT off regular registration rates for 2006 Alpha Conference attendees! You must call to take advantage of this offer. (Note: Discounts cannot be combined.)



NICKY AND SILA LEE, the authors of The Marriage Course and The Marriage Preparation Course, are both on staff at Holy Trinity Brompton in London, the church where the Alpha course originated.

### 2006 CONFERENCE LOCATIONS

New England . . . . . June 21, 2006  
Twin Cities . . . . . June 23, 2006  
Austin . . . . . June 26, 2006  
Bay Area . . . . . June 28, 2006

For more information or to register, call (866) 872-5742  
or visit [www.marriagecourseusa.org](http://www.marriagecourseusa.org).

## PORK-CHOP PRAYERS

**W**hen Teri Cross saw what Alpha did in her daughter and son-in-law's church in Indiana, she wanted that renewed zeal in her own church. Teri and her husband, Paul, also wanted their church to better reach those outside its own walls.

So the Crosses flew to Colorado for an Alpha training seminar, to get more information. The course material seemed a perfect fit with what they hoped to offer at their own church, Montgomery Church of Christ in Albuquerque.

They knew, though, that they might have to convince others. Alpha would be a new ministry, and the church already had quite a few. But after several conversations, church leadership decided to give it a try, for one course.

Participants in the first Alpha Course were all members of Montgomery Church of Christ. "It was like having your mom say she loves you," Teri says about reaching out to their own

church family. While Teri and Paul were glad that people liked the course, they really wanted to attract the unchurched community.

"I actually considered not hosting a second Alpha," Teri says. "And the morning I was struggling with the decision, I read from Romans: *How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?* I knew we had to continue."

So they tried again, encouraging church members to invite more people outside the church. Using a Sunday-morning PowerPoint presentation describing Alpha, and counting on deliberate word of mouth to those in the community, the Crosses and their Alpha

leadership team saw positive results: More people interested in exploring faith began to sign up.

As the meal preparer, Teri would often pray for meats to go on sale so she could cook for the large numbers showing up for Alpha evenings. "Although we'd pray for a sale of \$1.19 for pork chops, they would go on sale for \$.89. We called them our pork-chop prayers."

Those pork-chop prayers extended far beyond the Alpha meals. As God answered prayers over seemingly small details or huge life issues, participants could see that God was indeed real. And that His love for them was great.

At the end of their last Alpha Course, five people were baptized and four of those five joined their church. "We are humbled by how the Holy Spirit has worked in our lives," Teri says.

Not only has Alpha enlarged their own church body, but Montgomery Church of Christ is now also training other churches in its denomination to lead Alpha Courses.

"Alpha," Teri believes, "fits with any church's mission statement. In our own—to glorify God, imitate Christ and make Christ known—all three goals are met with Alpha."

"We do a lot of Bible studies," she explains. "But Alpha explores the questions of life that so many people are longing to visit. People cannot become interested in the Bible until they become interested in God."

In between the meals and rich fellowship, it's the "pork-chop prayers"—the handiwork of a very present God—that change lives at Montgomery Church of Christ. ■



*Teri Cross and her husband, Paul*

# Alpha Resources



## Just Beginning Kit

83082 US \$479.00

All you need to start and run the Alpha Course for 25 guests. Contains:

1 Alpha Course including Alpha Express DVD, 25 Manuals, 1 Leader's Training DVD, 4 Leader's Guides, 1 Director's Handbook, 50 Why Jesus, 4 Alpha-Questions of Life, 2 Searching Issues, 3 Searching Issues booklets, 2 Smiling Man posters, 2 Multiple Face posters, 1 Multiple Face Invitations/Pack of 100, 1 Multiface Postcard Invites/Pk of 50 and 1 Alpha Cookbook.

## Course Material



### New! The Alpha Course including Alpha Express DVD

15155 US \$179.99

The 15 Alpha Course talks in both full-length and edited versions (Express). Comes with English and Spanish language tracks as well as subtitles and English closed captioning.



### Alpha-Questions of Life Book

105022 US \$9.99

The Alpha Course in book form, by Nicky Gumbel. Contains the 15 talks given during Alpha.

## Administration Material



### How to Run the Alpha Course: The Director's Handbook

17160 US \$19.99

A guided tour through every stage of setting up and running the Alpha Course. Contains: reusable checklists, forms for recording and organizing information, tips on booking venues for the weekend and day away, advice on organizing guest services.



### How to Run the Alpha Course: Telling Others

16620 US \$9.99

Recommended for course directors and leaders, this book imparts the vision, excitement and challenge of Alpha. Includes the main talks given at an Alpha conference as well testimonies, endorsements from leaders and practical tools for running the course.

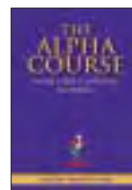
## Training Materials for Group Leaders and Helpers



### The Alpha Course Small Group Leader's Guide

15388 US \$3.99

A "must-have" for all small-group leaders and helpers on the Alpha Course. To be used in conjunction with the Small Group Leaders' Training DVD. Contains sample questions for leading each session of the course.



### Revised! The Alpha Course Small Group Leader's Training DVD

DVD 25606 US \$38.99

Training for the entire leadership team. Two of the sessions, Leading Small Groups (84 min.), and Pastoral Care (65 min.) should be held before the course starts. The third, Praying for Others (67 min.) should be held just before the weekend away. Designed to be used with the Small Group Leader's Training Guide. Includes English/Spanish language tracks and subtitles.



### Searching Issues

105023 US \$9.99

Answers to the seven questions most often asked during the Alpha Course. This book includes chapters on suffering, other religions, sex before marriage, the New Age movement, science and the Trinity.

## Guest Material



### The Alpha Course Manual (for each participant)

15305 US \$3.99

A manual designed for use by all participants on the Alpha Course. Contains space for notes and enables guests to easily follow the talks.



### Why Jesus?

20073 US \$9.99

Evangelistic booklet by Nicky Gumbel. Corresponds to the second and third talks on the Alpha Course: Who is Jesus? and Why Did Jesus Die? Ideal to give away to participants during an Alpha Course.

For more Alpha resources, check out our Alpha Resources Catalog, visit us online at [www.alpharesources.org](http://www.alpharesources.org) or call 1-800-DO-ALPHA

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# LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

**G**rowing up in Hawaii, I was part of my church youth group and played bass in our praise team. We would do everything together; they were my extended family.

After graduating from high school, I went to college in California. My motto was “study hard and play hard.” Therefore, I would study during the weekdays and party on the weekends. However, I would go to church on Sundays with my brother.

When I graduated in 2005, I did not know which direction to go in my life. When my brother left for his third year of law school, I took it very hard. For my whole life, I had had family around me. And now for the first time, there was no one to run to when I was having a difficult time.

Consequently, I fell spiritually. I would not go to church, and I drank every day. One day, I looked in the mirror and did not like who I saw. I did not like where my life was headed. Around this time, a friend who had the same questions about life suggested Alpha. We decided to take the class together.

Alpha was such a nonthreatening and friendly environment, it was easy to build relationships. It was more than a class—each week, I wanted to see the people there. The talks were engaging. The weird thing was that whatever I had gone through that week, the talk would address it for me. After the fourth Alpha meeting I realized what I had been missing out on all of this time. There was no question about whether I believed in God or not; I always had faith, but it was on “empty.” Alpha helped me get back to the person I really want to be. After finishing the course, I asked God to show me what route to take in my life. I want Him to take me and form me into what He wants me to be. ■



*Jen Ku Lee (at right, with a friend) helps with Alpha at his church, Young Nak Church in Los Angeles.*

ANEWS508

## THE DA VINCI CODE, a response By NICKY GUMBEL

One of the bestselling novels of all time is *The Da Vinci Code*, and on May 19th, Sony Pictures will be releasing the film of the same name in theaters across the United States.

How do we as Christians intelligently answer the damaging assertions about our faith that *The Da Vinci Code* makes?

Nicky Gumbel, pioneer of the Alpha Course, has written a short response to *The Da Vinci Code* that can help.

Nicky addresses the following questions:

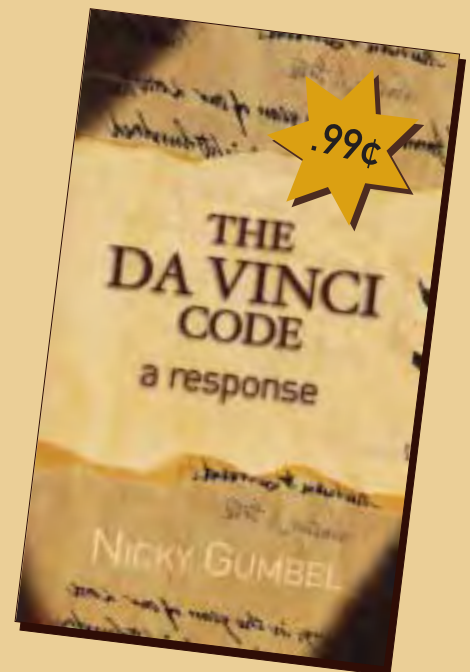
Where does the truth lie?

What is *The Da Vinci Code* about?

Did an earlier form of Christianity exist?

What does Dan Brown himself believe?

Is there any evidence that Jesus married Mary Magdalene?



These booklets are useful to have available for guests and leaders during spring Alpha Courses that coincide with the movie's release, as well as during any other outreach events your church has planned.

Available in English 8002, French 5008002 and Spanish 58002 .99¢

For more Alpha resources check out our Alpha Resources Catalog, visit us online at [www.alpharesources.org](http://www.alpharesources.org) or call 1-800-DO-ALPHA

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