

Things that churches do

The Alpha Course

AIM

This is part of a series of documents giving concrete examples of evangelistic activities which other churches have been involved in. It aims to offer inspiration for others who may wish to look at similar activities

INTRODUCTION

It is Wednesday night at St. Andrew's.

PREPARATION

It is 6.30 p.m. and there are three small groups of people already beginning to assemble at the church.

There's the group looking after the food. They aren't providing the food. That's coming from members of one of the home groups. A different home group provides the food for each evening. It evens out the work load. The food is uncomplicated – shepherd's pie and crumble on this particular night and its brought in hot just before 7p.m.

There is the group who are back room boys. They set out all the tables and chairs, table cloths, crockery, candles, flowers etc – they turn the hall into an attractive café. They ready the front of the church for a video – chairs in a semi-circle, video projector and all that. They make sure there are additional small circles of chairs for group discussion (8 in each). There are usually about 30 people present.

There is the group of leaders for the discussion groups – eight in all plus the minister. Except that all the group leaders can't make it for 6.30 and some dribble in up to 7 p.m. These people are there to pray, to take last minute instructions and to remind themselves about the purpose of the evening - and to check out they all understand the discussion questions.

PRESENTATION

It is now 7 p.m. and the rest of the clientele is arriving. The group leaders are smiling and welcoming. There is a buzz around the place. The place is filled with the aroma of good food and people are talking to each other. The church folk make sure that everyone is welcome and comfortable. People take their places at the tables. People sit in sixes and they go up to be served by the home group members who have brought in the food for that evening. Its the fifth week so that the initial strangeness has gone and people are simply enjoying each other's company.

It is now 7.45 p.m. The food has been eaten and people are taken through to the church for the next teaching session. Nicky Gumbel – on DVD – is speaking about "Why and How Do I Pray" Everyone listens well. They laugh at some of his jokes and are genuinely interested in what he has to say. The talk lasts about 45 minutes.

It is now 8.45 p.m. and people are finishing their coffee and moving through into their groups. Group leaders are just beginning to ask, "What did you make of that then" and some people are beginning to question and discuss what has been said. Everyone is given chance to air their views, ask questions and discuss. The group leaders sometimes have to use their prepared questions when the discussion flags. They have been trained not to talk too much themselves, how to draw the quieter people out and how to shut up the ones who are too opinionated. Some groups progress better than others but all are ok.

It is 9.30 p.m. and time to stop. The minister calls a halt. Despite this some people go on discussing and have to be persuaded to stop and go home.

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Everyone is encouraged to be there next week.

PURPOSE

The purpose is simple. To introduce the Christian faith to interested parties and to give them the chance to discuss in a none-threatening environment. The emphasis is on fellowship as well as teaching and everyone's opinion is valued whether they agree with what is taught or not. There are only two points in the course at which people are asked to make any kind of personal commitment. (In this church there are 11 weeknight sessions and 3 day-conference sessions.) At the day conference people are invited to pray and to be prayed for. There is no pressure so it is easy to decline. At the end of the course people are also asked to consider the/their future. However there is no "altar call" and no undue pressure is applied.

- IT IS THE ALPHA COURSE

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more material for evangelism year please revisit the website.

Acknowledgements

This material has been provided by John Hall who chairs the Vision4Life Evangelism team.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

Website issues can be dealt with through web@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:
Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk