

CELEBRATING ALPHA SUNDAY

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Next Sunday we shall be celebrating as 'Alpha Sunday', and we shall be plugging Alpha as hard as we can. In the morning we are beginning a new series of the so-called 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah – in the context of speaking of the one who was called to be "a light to the nations" (Is 42.6) I shall certainly have an opportunity to hook into Alpha. As for the evening service, one of my colleagues will be preaching on 'Networking for Jesus' and on the basis of Mark 5.19 will challenge the congregation to encourage their friends and family to come to Alpha and learn more about Jesus.

Yes, we are an Alpha church. Outside the church there will be a massive Alpha banner, advertising the fact that in October we will be beginning another Alpha course. And if past experience is anything to go by, then a number of people, with no Christian connections whatever, will come in off the street and register for Alpha. What's more, these people will not be 'cranks': they will be perfectly ordinary people wanting to know more about Jesus. If anybody had told before that a banner would have such an effect, I would not have believed them. But such is the profile of Alpha, that many non-church people know that an Alpha course is a non-threatening place to learn about Jesus.

It is this 'recognition' factor which has caused me to back Alpha, even although there are other courses which I find more theologically appealing. For instance, I have looked at 'Christianity Explored' and 'Emmaus', and have actually run a 'Y' course, but good as they are, they are unknown as far as the wider public is concerned.

Although it is possible to use video tapes, like many churches we have opted for doing the presentations ourselves. In the first place, the video tapes are too long – 40 minutes of listening, even if it is to Nicky Gumbel, is too much at the end of the day. But in the second place, not using the tapes it gives us an opportunity to tailor some of the material to where we are as a church. The fact is that we are not a committedly charismatic church, so some of the teaching on the Holy Spirit needs 'tweaking', if we are to retain our own integrity. In terms of the general structure, for the most part we follow the HTB outline. However, in one respect we depart from this outline: because I believe that the resurrection of Jesus deserves a session of its own (as distinct from being covered on the same evening as the person of Jesus) we have put together two later sessions on Christian discipleship – one advantage is that our guests have more time to focus on the specifically evangelistic aspects of the Alpha course.

Alpha is now our chief evangelistic tool. Indeed, a good number of people have come to faith through Alpha. For that reason I shall happily plug Alpha on Sunday.