Alpha Host and Helper Guide

**St. Gabriel Catholic Church**

**Concord Township, Ohio**

**Evening Session, Fall, 2021**

**September 7, 2021 through November 16, 2021**



**The ‘Basics’ for Alpha Hosts & Helpers**

As an Alpha Host/Helper, you have been chosen to lead your group through an exciting adventure to discover Jesus. While there are many aspects to this task, there are a few basic ground rules that will ensure a rewarding outcome for your Guests during this Alpha Course:

* Review the weekly Step by Step ahead of time.
* Please make sure you login ½ hour before the start of the session. We will review the session and pray together as a group.
* Always remember that the relationship is Host/Guest, not Teacher/Pupil. Treat the Guests at your table as if they were honored Guests in your own home. Hospitality is key.
* Remember that everything said in a session is confidential to the group. The group is intended to be a “safe” place for all Guests.” time. This should be a time for fellowship and getting to know the Guests and you don’t want your Guests to feel pressured or judged about their faith.
* Pray for your Guests by name on a daily basis.

**Typical Alpha Session Timeline**

* Guests arrive and are seated.
* All are greeted by the session leader, and invited to share a small meal
* Guests spend the next 30 minutes sharing dinner and getting to know each other and their host and helper.
* Promptly at the starting time, the Session Leader will give a brief welcome, introduce the evening topic and tell a joke.
* Film presentation (25-30 minutes).
* Session leader will provide brief comment about the film, then instruct groups to begin discussion.
* End promptly at stated time.

**Alpha Small Group Ground Rules**

* No one has to talk.
* Show mutual respect for all.
* No such thing as a dumb question.
* Only one person talks at a time (no side discussions).
* Confidentiality matters.
* No cell phones.

The Alpha Ground Rules card will be provided for each table. You will go over it for the first few weeks and leave it visible on the table during discussion.

**Tips for Hosts & Helpers**

**BE ENCOURAGING:**

* Affirm every person and their contribution to the group, even if you don’t agree with them.
* Help a Guest feel welcome by listening with acceptance to what they have to say.
* Every point of view is a view with a point. The best response… “How interesting!” or “Thank you for sharing that!”
* Avoid giving your opinion; rather, ask the group… “What does anyone else think?”
* Refrain from pressuring a Guest to speak or pray. Never directly ask a Guest to participate or answer a question.
* Be attentive to the Guest who seems to be progressing at the slowest rate and make every effort to make them feel safe, cared for and loved.
* Use open questions. Not: “Do you think Jesus is God?” Rather: “Who do you think Jesus is?”
* Set the bar low. Not: “How often do you pray?” Rather: “Has anyone ever prayed before?”
* People process information in different ways. Try “What do you think about Jesus (or prayer or the Church, etc.)?” and “What do you feel about Jesus?”

**BE YOURSELF:**

* Explain your role in the group as a Host or a Helper.
* If you don’t know an answer, don’t pretend to! Get back to them.
* Befriend the Guests, particularly early in the session. Be yourself. Be friendly.
* Draw others out by making them feel comfortable and showing genuine interest in them.

**BE PREPARED:**

* Pray throughout the week for your Guests, Alpha co-workers, and the Alpha ministry.
* Stay spiritually strong. Be attentive to the Holy Spirit and remember that it is His job to reveal the love of Jesus to your group.
* Model humility. An effective small group leader will resist giving the ‘right’ answer or a ‘biblical’ answer and instead, allow the conversation to develop rather than control it.
* Don’t be afraid of silence. Resist the temptation to fill the silence or answer your own question. Silence may be necessary for some Guests to open up. If necessary, rephrase the question.

**BE RESPECTFUL:**

* Never slander any opinion, religious view, denomination, or person.
* Resist arguments. No one is won into the Kingdom of God through an argument.
* Refrain from using Christian jargon or references that may be unknown to the Guests.
* If someone is too talkative and dominates the conversation, ask what others think.

**BE HOSPITABLE:**

* Cultivate a safe and comfortable environment.
* Be friendly and welcoming.
* Be aware of your environment and background. Participate on-line as you would in person.
* Practice radical hospitality!!!

**Handling and Redirecting Responses from Guests & Other Tips**

It is important that we as table Hosts and helpers help each of our Guests to feel an important part of this Alpha experience. When a Guest is speaking during our small group discussions, we can do that by maintaining a relaxed, open body posture, making eye contact with the speaker, acknowledging what is being said and thanking him/her for sharing

**Possible general responses to statements from the Guests:**

“Thank you for sharing that…” / “That took a lot of courage to share that…” / “I never heard that before ….” / “That was really powerful...”

As the Alpha course progresses, situations may arise at the table that require additional attention. Below are some suggestions that have been helpful for Hosts and Helpers. Any time you have a concern, please feel free to discuss the issue with the Session Leader.

**When general redirection is needed:**

“Thank you, (Name), that is a wonderful observation you made/experience you had/feeling you shared/thought you volunteered. What do the rest of you think about that?”

**Possible responses for “difficult” table Guests:**

* Always affirm the person without pronouncements or judgments on the content of statements.
* Simple redirection toward the whole group is typically easy and useful.
* A Host’s joyful and peaceful attitude is contagious and mitigates any negativism in the group.

Outright aggression toward others in the group should be very rare and is not acceptable. Aggression toward the Church, however, may not be that rare, but can be handled easily by redirection.

**If a Guest calls on others at the table:**

“(Name), thank you for your kind interest in everyone's opinion; that means a lot. We value everyone’s opinion and insights, but in order to make everyone comfortable we don’t call on people directly to answer a question. These are deep and profound questions, and some people are more comfortable silently contemplating. That is acceptable.”

**If someone is preaching:**

“(Name), I am so happy that you feel so close to Jesus/so strongly about your faith, etc. Not everyone has that friendship/strong faith, etc., and there may even be some here who doubt Jesus exists. Let’s remember that we are not here to argue but to share our thoughts without demanding that others feel or think as we do.”

**If someone appears angry:**

“I am sorry you feel angry, (name). What can we do to help you?”

**If someone appears sad:**

“I am sorry you are sad/hurt/embarrassed, etc. I am very sorry if I made you feel this way. Please accept my apology. Know that my intentions were not to make you feel this way. I want you to feel safe here.”

**When the discussion goes off-topic:**

1. Keying in on an emotion, word, or topic of the person who is off-subject, guide them back using the list of questions for the week. “That leads me to our next question…”
2. If a Guest repeatedly answers questions by discussing his/her children, grandchildren, or other family members, steer him/her back gently. You may offer a polite reminder that the group discussion should be focused on the faith journeys of the Guests in attendance.

**When the Guests ask your opinion as the Host in the early sessions:**

Ask the rest of the group for their thoughts. Tell them, “let’s see if we can figure it out together,” then gently steer them to the answer if possible by asking other questions. If the question will be covered later, tell them you believe that answer will come in a later session. If necessary, answer briefly and simply, enough to keep the conversation moving.

**When a Guest wants everything done “Catholic”:**

Depending upon the topic, look ahead in the manual because many of the topics will be covered as the course progresses. (Prayer, the Bible, the Holy Spirit) Explain that the Alpha Course is not about denominations, but about Jesus Christ. Courses that delve into the details of Catholicism are offered as follow-up after Alpha. Explain that the Alpha Course is being offered with the blessing of our pastor.

Talk to the person privately about the goals and process of Alpha. If this does not work, bring this up with your Session Leader for further instruction.

**When Guests want more explanation or are worried about the Retreat:**

Encourage the Guests to ask any questions they may have about the Retreat. The more information they have, the more likely it is they will feel at ease. Inform them of the elements of the Retreat—three DVDs on the topic of the Holy Spirit, small group discussion, breakfast, lunch, and an opportunity to receive prayer from the Alpha prayer teams. Allow the Guests to see and feel your genuine love for God and your excitement about this opportunity for them. This goes a long way to encourage them and give them confidence.

**Other ways to overcome challenging small group situations:**

1. **The dominant member:**

* Try not to make eye contact with the person.
* Sit next to them rather than opposite.
* Politely interrupt the person with statements such as: “What do the rest of you think?” “Let’s hear from some other people, too.”
* Look directly at and gesture toward the other Guests.
* Talk to them privately about giving others a chance to share.
* Be affirming when talking with them.

1. **The eager Christian who “shares” too much**:

* Question their answers by saying: “That’s a great answer for a Christian, but what would we say to someone who didn’t believe the Bible?”
* Clarify texts and language used.
* Express the fears/reactions other group members may be experiencing.
* Talk to them privately after the session (or by phone) and affirm their knowledge.
* Explain the Alpha philosophy and ask them to help draw people out.

1. **The quiet member:**

* Talk to them at meal times. Ask, “What do you hope to get out of the course?” “What sorts of questions do you have?” “Are we meeting your expectations?”
* Make use of a comment or question they told you at supper and ask them for permission to repeat it in the group discussion.
* Affirm them and their contributions.
* Show love and genuine interest in the person.
* Remember that sometimes quiet people are so used to being quiet that they just accept it. If the Host asks their opinion, it may show that the group values their input.
* Accept people where they are.

1. **The quiet group:**

Be proactive;

* Get them to write questions down (take home a question sheet).
* Have an icebreaker every week.
* Don’t be afraid of silence.
* Don’t fill silence with your voice; then they’ll always stay quiet!
* Ask if your question makes sense (rephrase if necessary).
* Avoid right/wrong questions or “threatening” questions.
* Ask questions to which you don’t know the answer.
* Ask questions that allow or encourage “negative” responses:
  + “What do you find the hardest about praying?”
  + “What is the thing you fear most about sharing your faith?”

1. **The chaotic group:**

Remind the group it is best to have only one conversation going at a time.

* Address topics that are raised, but don’t stay off the topic too long.
* Suggest some outside reading and come back to the subject over the next meal.
* Be aware of topics coming up later in the course.
* Continue having fun; don’t clamp down on the group too much.
* Aim to ensure a degree of helpful discussion and information.

1. **The person who concentrates on personal problems:**

Be interested, sympathize and listen to them, but after a while:

* Steer the conversation back to the topic or toward others.
* Offer to meet, talk, or pray with them during the week
* Direct them to counseling or an appropriate small group.
* Don’t sit opposite them.

1. **The person who becomes the group “project”:**

* Deflect attention from the person to their question/issue. Rephrase if necessary.
* Find ways to affirm his/her contributions: don’t let them always get “corrected” or “straightened out.”
* Direct questions to other people.
* Take the more enthusiastic Christians in the group aside and explain the situation and the Alpha philosophy of no pressure.

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 1: Is There More to Life Than This?**

Please arrive **at least 30 minutes** before the session begins. It is essential that we meet together as a team before the Guests arrive to go over any details and to pray together.

After the Team Meeting, take a seat at your tables and make sure everything is set up for your guests.

You will meet your Guests for the first time at this session. Remember, this is a great opportunity to form new relationships. These relationships will be the basis for the next eleven sessions of learning about who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

Building new relationships through fellowship means doing your best at creating a welcoming environment for those who will be at your table. Relax and focus on getting to know your Guests.

**Helper:** Assist the Table Leader where needed:

* Greet Guests when they arrive at your table.
* During Group Discussion only speak if the conversation needs a jump start. You want to be relatively quiet or just ask a few questions to try to draw people into the conversation.
* Assist the Table Leader in the first few weeks with updating the Group Contact List
* Pray silently during discussion for each participant.

Session 1: Is There More to Life Than This?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer, then go to your tables to be ready to greet your Guests. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will be arriving between 6:00 and 6:30. While arriving, hosts and helpers welcome guests to their tables and make sure they have water, etc. At 6:30 the session leader will announce guests can help themselves to their meal. Guests dine with hosts & helpers, use ice breakers to get to know each other. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will introduce the evening and tell a joke. |
| 7:15pm | VIDEO presentation, **“Is There More To Life Than This?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  **Host**- Review **Small Group Ground Rules** with your Guests. It may seem trivial but it is important to go over each point and use examples if necessary. This makes it easier to get the group back on track if one of the rules is broken because you can jokingly hold up the card or point to the rules to correct yourselves rather than directly correcting the offender.  **Host**- Familiarize yourself with the following questions ahead of time so it doesn’t seem like you are reading them out of a manual. Make it natural, let the conversation flow. Move on if any of the questions are not sparking conversation. Feel free to pose other questions. Remember the relationship is Table Host/Guest not Teacher/Pupil.  **Helper**- Remember to stay relatively quiet during discussion so the quietest person doesn’t feel pressured to talk. Jump in if the conversation is stalling out or to help the Host by rewording the question. Pray silently for the people at your table during the discussion time. |
|  | 1. What stood out in the video for you?  2. What made you decide to come on the Alpha Course?  3. If all your personal possessions in your house vanished, what would you miss most?  4. If it turned out there was a God after all and you could ask him one question, what would it be? |
| 8:10 pm | **Session Leader** will announce that groups have five minutes to wrap up.  End your discussion on time.  Be sure to encourage Guests to come back next week. No pressure, just encouragement.  Please make sure the tables are all cleared. |
| 8:15 pm | Session Leader will reconvene the large group, thank everyone for attending and encourage attendance for next week. Guests are dismissed. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts and Helpers remain to review session. End with prayer. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 2: Who Is Jesus?**

During the last session we spent time exploring what life is all about and why Jesus should be the center of our lives. We met some new friends and spent time learning their names and something about them.

We may have new faces this week so be mindful of any new Guests and make it easy for them to learn names.

**Reminders:**

* Remember to arrive 30 minutes early to attend the pre-session meeting to review administrative matters and to pray together with your Session Leader.
* **Are you comfortable with silence**? Remember as a Host you are a facilitator, not a teacher. Allow your Guest to toss the “ball” among one another. Only if the silence is a recurring “feature” of your group should the **Helper** assist.
* There is no prayer before meals this week. If Guests ask, explain that they can pray individually. Remember we may have those in the group who don’t know how to pray.
* If you have any non-Alpha event information to share, please give it to the Session Leader rather than distribute it at your tables. There should be no pressure on Guests to attend outside events but we will make the information available.

Please review the **Alpha Ground Rules**. Put the Ground Rules card on the table for all to see.

* No one has to talk.
* Show mutual respect.
* No such thing as a dumb question.
* Only one person talks at a time.
* Confidentiality matters.
* End promptly.
* No cell phones.

Session 2: Who Is Jesus?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer |
| 6:30 pm | Guests should all be present and at their seats. Session leader will welcome everyone briefly and allow guests to begin the meal. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will introduce the session and tell a joke. |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“Who Is Jesus?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  **Host**- Review Small Group Ground Rules with your Guests.  **Host**- Familiarize yourself with the following questions ahead of time so it doesn’t seem like you are reading them out of a manual. Make it natural, let the conversation flow. Move on if any of the questions are not sparking conversation. Feel free to pose other questions. Remember the relationship is Table Leader/Guest not Teacher/Pupil.  **Helper**- Remember to stay relatively quiet during discussion and pray for each Guest. |
|  | **Ice Breaker Question** : If you could talk to anyone past or present who would it be? What would you ask?  1. What makes you happy?  2. What stood out for you in the video?  3. Who do you think Jesus is?  4. If you had a chance to meet Jesus, how would you feel and what would you say to Him?  5. What aspects of the evidence presented today did you find convincing or not convincing? |
| 8:10 pm | **Session Leader** will send out five minute warning that it is time to wrap-up.  End your discussion on time.  Be sure to encourage Guests to come back next week. No pressure, just encouragement. |
| 8:15 pm  8:20 pm | Session Leader to reconvene whole group, thank everyone for coming and dismiss.  Hosts and Helpers to remain for quick meeting to review the session. End with prayer. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 3: Why Did Jesus Die?**

Last week we explored who Jesus is, which may bring up some new questions this week as Guests begin to think through what was seen, heard, and discussed in last week’s session.

There are more discussion questions now and you will most likely not have time to go through them all. Look through them ahead of time and decide which ones will be most relevant for your group and start with those questions rather than going through them in the order on your Step by Step guide.

**Reminders:**

* PRAY FOR YOUR GUESTS EVERY DAY
* There shouldn’t be many changes to the small groups at this point.

**Scripture References:**

As scripture references are introduced into your notes beginning next week, feel free to bring them up in your small group discussion. We have plenty of questions listed to get your conversation rolling but you may want to spend time on the scripture passages if the questions are not sparking conversation in the group. This is up to you and will depend on the dynamics of your group.

Encourage Guests to get a Bible for personal prayer and use.

Session 3: Why Did Jesus Die?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived and meal will begin. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke. |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“Why Did Jesus Die?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break |
| 7:50pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. Was there an illustration or story from the video that stood out to you?  2. Have you ever heard of Maximilian Kolbe?  3. What does forgiveness mean to you?  4. Have you ever had to forgive someone and how did you do it?  5. What is your reaction to Jesus’ death? |
| 8:10 pm | Session Leader to send five minute warning for discussion to end. |
| 8:15 pm | Session Leader will reconvene whole group then dismiss. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & Helpers to remain to review session. End with prayer. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 4: How Can I Have Faith?**

This week is about how Christians can be changed by their faith in God into new persons. In this video, Nicky talks about faith as three legs of a tripod: The Word of God, the work of Jesus, and the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us an experience of God's love.

Our call to “go and make disciples” often involves creating opportunities for “shallow entry points” into the faith where others can encounter Christ. While we can’t make an encounter with Jesus happen, we can set the stage for such an encounter.

This is really what Alpha is about—creating opportunities for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of our Guests. In Alpha, we are encouraging people to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Thank you for everything you are doing to help facilitate this encounter.

**Reminders:**

* Go through the discussion questions ahead of time and choose the ones that will be best for your group.
* ***Are you comfortable with silence?*** Remember as a **Table Host,** you are a facilitator, not a teacher. Let the Guests toss the “ball” among each other. Only if the silence is a recurring “feature” of your group should the **Helper** assist.
* Talk about the “Day Away” and the importance of this day. The “Day Away” will be held on **Saturday, October 23, 2021, 9:30am to 1:00pm.** Both morning and evening sessions will be together. Make sure everyone knows how to RSVP.
* At the end of discussion time invite your Guests to ponder the scripture passages (Romans 6:23 & Revelation 3:20) at home on their own and to ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in how these words apply to their lives.

**Scripture References:**

**Romans 6:23**

“But now that you have been freed from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit that you have leads to sanctification, and its end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, *but the gift of God is eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**Revelations 3:20**

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.”

Session 4: How Can I Have Faith?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer, then go to your tables to be ready to greet your Guests. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Meal will begin. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Introduce music. Host to play: Chris Tomlin - Amazing Grace My Chains Are Gone  <https://youtu.be/2R1c20IXPYk> |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“How Can I Have Faith?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. Was there an illustration or story from the video that stood out to you?  2. Consider Jesus at the door with no handle on his side. How do you feel about this?  3. What does a ‘relationship with God’ mean to you?  4. What does faith mean to you?  5. How can a person have faith in someone they can’t see? |
| 8:20 pm | Session Leader will announce a five minute warning that discussion is to end. |
| 8:25 pm | Session Leader thanks everyone and dismisses. |
| 8:30 pm | Hosts & Helpers meet to review session. End with prayer.  **Please pray that God will use the Day Away to transform many lives.** |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 5: Why and How Do I Pray?**

The upcoming “Day Away” is for everyone; Hosts, Helpers and Guests, past and present, so please invite people from your past groups. Please complete your RSVP. The “Day Away” is scheduled for Saturday,October 23, from 9:30 to 1:30. Both morning and evening sessions will be together.

**Reminders:**

* There should be no side discussions going on in the Group Discussion time. **Hosts** and **Helpers**, if you find this happening, begin your discussion time today by reviewing the Small Group Ground Rules. Mention specifically that now that the Table Guests are getting to know each other, it may be tempting to have side discussions, but that it is best for everyone if the discussion remains a Group Discussion.
* If you have dominant personalities in your group, please feel comfortable to take them aside and encourage them to let others share their experiences first during the small group discussion.
* **Host to introduce prayer at the end of this session**. The Host should explain that he/she will begin with a short prayer and add his/her own intention, then there will be an opportunity for Guests to add their own intentions but be clear that no one needs to pray out loud, we are just offering them the opportunity to do so. Explain that it can be as simple as saying someone’s name that they wish to pray for. After an appropriate time, the Table Host or Helper should conclude the prayer, so that everyone knows that the time for prayer has ended. Remember to keep it simple. There is beauty in simplicity. Here are a few examples for opening the prayer: “Dear Jesus, thank you for a lovely day;” “Dear Lord, thank you for every member in this group.” If you have someone who couldn't be with you at the session, lift them up in prayer by name. It’s good for group members to see that when they are absent, the group misses their presence. Do not end with the Our Father or Hail Mary or you could make people feel uncomfortable.
* **Hosts will dismiss their guests from the Zoom rooms starting today.**  We will not reconvene the whole group after the discussion period. Hosts & helpers are to remain on line to reconvene five minutes after dismissal for session review and prayer.

Session 5: Why & How Do I Pray?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer, then go to your tables to be ready to greet your Guests. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Meal will begin. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Play the song “Trust in You” by Lauren Daigle <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cL4mTVpP73o> |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“Why & How Do I Pray?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. What stood out for you in the video?  2. If you pray, what was it like when you first began to pray?  3. Have you ever seen coincidences happen when you pray?  4. Other than possibly a prayer prior to a meal, do you feel comfortable praying out loud in front of other people? Would you like to feel comfortable praying in this way?  5. Have any of you had prayers that you thought were not answered, and yet later found they were? |
| 8:10 pm | Session leader will send out five minute warning. |
| 8:15 pm | Hosts to wrap up their discussions, lead their guests in prayer and dismiss. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & helpers meet with session leader to review evening. End with prayer.  **Please pray that God will use the Day Away to transform many lives.** |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 6: Why and How Should I Read the Bible?**

During the second week, we looked at the heart of Christianity, who Jesus is. The third week, we looked at why Jesus died. The fourth week, we looked at how it is possible for us to come into a relationship with God. Last week, we explored prayer as a way to build a relationship with God. This week, we start to look at how we communicate with God and how God communicates with us as we listen to Nicky's talk, **“How and Why We Should Read the Bible?”** The Bible is a book that comes alive to believing Christians, but lacks impact to those who don’t believe. This week, we will also look at how to read the Bible.

Encourage your Guests to purchase a Bible that is accurate to the original text if they don’t already have one. You may recommend the Ignatius Bible, The New Jerusalem Bible, The New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), or one that you prefer to use. Which version is best to use depends upon whether you want it primarily for prayer, for study, or to take to church to follow the readings.

**Reminders:**

* Now that the groups have started to gel, it’s easy to get off track in discussion group. Just keep directing your Guests back to the video content or to the discussion questions.
* Go through the Discussion Questions ahead of time and pick out what you think will work best for your Group and start with those.
* Don’t forget your simple prayer during the session. Invite the Guests to offer a simple prayer themselves if they feel comfortable. Remember:
  + please don’t force anyone to offer a prayer;
  + offer a simple prayer yourself, leaving opportunities for additional simple prayers, for others who may be inexperienced in prayer. For example, you may offer a prayer like this one, “Dear God, please protect us as we drive home”;
  + lift up any Guests who are absent or who are ill.
* Remind everyone that the Day Away Retreat, truly the best part of Alpha, is quickly approaching. If you are asked what the Retreat is about, feel free to let your Guests know the Retreat is about learning more about the Holy Spirit and how He acts in our lives.

**Scripture References:**

**1 Samuel 3:10**

Then the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for Your servant is listening.”

Session 6: Why & How Should I Read the Bible?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Begin meal. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Play song “Mercy Me” by Word of God Speak <https://youtu.be/EqsnGE3_dsg> |
| 7:15pm | VIDEO presentation**, “Why & How Should I Read the Bible?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. What stood out for you in the video?  2. Has anyone ever tried reading the Bible? If so, how did it go?  3. Can you identify anything that keeps you from reading the Bible?  4. How do you feel about the idea of God speaking to you through the Bible?  5. Does anyone have any practical suggestions on how to read the Bible (i.e., Bible in one year)? |
| 8:10 pm | Session leader to send out five minute warning. |
| 8:15 pm | Hosts to end discussion, lead group in prayer, then dismiss their guests. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & helpers meet with session leader to review session. End with prayer. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 7: How Does God Guide Us?**

The talk at this session is important and comes before the Retreat. Since hearing from God and being guided by God is one of the ways the Holy Spirit moves in our lives, having a grasp of this talk can make the Retreat talks easier to understand.

Through the video message and our discussion today**, we really want to convey to the Guests that God really does have a beautiful plan for their lives.** Try to create ways for people who feel like they have “messed up” in life to see that our God is a God of second, third, and fourth chances.

**Reminders:**

* Retreat FAQ’s
  + *Do I have to come*? This day is a way for you to listen to three consecutive talks on the Holy Spirit, the Consoler Jesus promised to send to us. If you attend, many of your questions about the Holy Spirit will be answered.
  + *How important is the Retreat?* The Retreat is important enough that many of our Guests continue to talk about it long after the course is over. Many have indicated that it impacted their lives in very significant ways.
  + *Will we be with our groups?* Yes, the Zoom rooms will be consistent, but some may be combined depending on how many attend.

* Remember to end your session with prayer that lifts up the group, including anybody absent, and the success of the upcoming Retreat. Keep encouraging your Guests to pray and continue giving prayer opportunities through silence and simplicity.

**Scripture References:**

**John 10:27-28**

My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.

**Luke 1:38**

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

**1 John 4:1**

Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

**1 John 4:16**

We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the Day of Judgment because as he is, so are we in this world.

Session 7: How Does God Guide Us?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Begin meal. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Play the song “How Great is Our God” by Chris Tomlin <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBD18rsVJHk> |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“How Does God Guide Us?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. What stood out for you in the video?  2. Has anyone had a sense in the last few weeks that God has been guiding them?  3. How do you feel about the idea of God having a plan for your life?  4. What should we do if we believe we have made a mess of our lives?  5. What do you think about the comment that God will guide those who are willing to follow Him, those that listen to His voice? Jn 10:27, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” |
| 8:10 pm | Session leader sends out five minute warning. |
| 8:15 pm | Hosts to end discussion, pray with their guests, then dismiss. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & helpers to meet with session leader, review evening and end with prayer.  **Please pray that God will use the Day Away to transform many lives.** |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 8: How Can I Resist Evil?**

Thank you for your presence at the Alpha Retreat. We are sure the Holy Spirit touched the hearts of many of our Guests. God bless you and thank you so much for all that you are doing.

Be aware that for those who had a powerful experience at the Retreat, the evil one will often strike hard to discourage them in the days and weeks following. You may want to pray for protection in your closing prayer time. Make sure to leave plenty of time for prayer tonight, as some might be more willing to pray out loud after the Retreat experience.

**Reminders:**

* Your Guests may be still reflecting on the experiences they had at the Retreat. Allow the Holy Spirit to continue to work in your group. Encourage discussion about the Retreat.
* Everyone in your group may not have attended the Retreat so help them to feel part of the discussion. Perhaps ask the Guests who did attend the Retreat to describe it for others.
* Speak to your small group regarding future small group options. Would they like to continue to grow in their faith? You will be provided with a follow-up guide next week.

**Scripture References:**

**Ephesians 6:10-18**

10Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. 11 Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. 13 Therefore, put on the armor of God that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. 14 So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, 15 and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all (the) flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit.

**Romans 12:21**

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. 19 Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 Rather, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” 21 *Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.*

Session 8: How Can I Resist Evil?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Begin meal. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Play the song “Lord I Need You” by Matt Maher  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gS9e0nxHP-w> |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“How Can I Resist Evil?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. What stood out for you in the video?  2. Do you believe the power of evil exists?  3. Why do you think bad things happen?  4. Temptation itself is not a sin; it is a path to sin. We have a choice. It is the devil who tries to drag us down. Would anyone like to share techniques they use to resist sin or fight off temptation?  5. As we observe the bad things in this world, do you feel you can personally make a difference? |
| 8:10 pm | Session leader to send five minute warning. |
| 8:15 pm | Hosts to end discussion, pray with their guests, then dismiss.  Start talking to your group about getting together socially after Alpha is over. Maybe someone in the group would like to collect names and numbers to plan a get together. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & helpers to meet with session leader, review evening and end with prayer. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 9: Why and How Should I Tell Others?**

Thank you again for your dedication to bringing our Guests to a new relationship with Jesus.

It can be difficult to talk to others about the deeper or more personal matters of our lives. Certainly our faith in Christ falls into this category. Some people feel that one’s faith is a private matter and should not be discussed with others. But if we don’t share our faith with others, how will they ever know the love and mercy of Jesus Christ? So many people are hurting and lost, it’s up to us to tell them about the remedy for their hopelessness.

Today we will discuss signing up for Alpha follow-up programs. The Session Leader will discuss this topic further before the video, but try to encourage continued involvement and spiritual growth. Staying connected to a group is very important. Guests will be encouraged to sign up to volunteer in areas of Alpha and/or other parish programs.

**Reminders:**

* Please try to come 30 minutes early next week to review the Prayer Ministry.
* Continue to close your session with prayer, inviting each Guest to pray for something or someone in their lives.
* Encourage your group to participate in a follow-up program. We have arranged a number of opportunities for people to continue this discipleship process. These will be distributed at the pre-meeting.

**Scripture References:**

**Mat 28: 16-20**

16 The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. 18 Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. *19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,* 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

**Mat 5:13-16**

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. 16 Just so, *your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*.

Session 9: Why & How Should I Tell Others?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm. | Team Meeting & Prayer. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will login between now and 7:00pm. While logging in, there’ll be a fun question to answer while breaking the ice. Guests will use the chat bar to participate. All will be muted except the session leader. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Play the song “10,000 Reasons” by Matt Redman  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE_lRI0E> |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“Why & How Should I Tell Others?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. What stood out for you in the video?  2. Have you told any of your friends, family, or co-workers about the Alpha Course? If so, what was their reaction?  3. Nicky gave the example of his mother-in-law quickly spreading the news of their child’s birth because she was excited. Why do you think so many people are reluctant to show their excitement for Jesus? What do you think about telling others about your faith?  4. The little things we do can make such a difference in other people’s lives. Have you ever thought about the difference that might be made in someone’s life just by seeing and hearing your faith story?  5. What do you think about the idea of telling others about Alpha or inviting them to come on the next course? |
| 8:10 pm | Session leader to send five minute warning. |
| 8:15 pm | Hosts to end discussion, pray with their guests, then dismiss. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & helpers to meet with session leader, review evening and end in prayer. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 10: Does God Heal Today?**

It’s hard to believe we are entering Session 10 of Alpha! Thank you so very much for all the time and effort that you have contributed to the success of this program at St. Gabriel. God has blessed us in so many ways and you have been an integral part of all of this.

The Greek word that means “I save” also means “I heal”. God is concerned not just about our spiritual salvation, but the whole being of each of us. One day we shall have a new and perfect body. In this life, we will never reach perfection. When God heals someone miraculously today, we get a glimpse of the future when the final redemption of our bodies will take place (Romans 8:23).

Please pray for this time of prayer with your group, this is a great gift for the group to be able to pray for one another as they begin to draw the Alpha course to its conclusion in one week. These are friends that everyone has made throughout the course and no greater gift can be given to one another.

Allow God to guide you. This time together is so important and so significant in the Alpha process. Please remember, God is only asking us to extend our hand. God does the healing; He gives the gifts He chooses to give. For that moment, we are His instruments.

**Reminders:**

* Please try to arrive 30 minutes early for our Team Meeting & Prayer this week so we can review the Prayer Ministry portion of this session.
* There is no discussion after the video.
* Following the video, you will be praying with your Guests.

**Prayer Time:**

* The objective is to make it easy for the Guests to pray together and experience healing prayer in an environment of faith.
* This time of prayer is an expression of love for one another. It’s also a time to give and receive this expression of love.
* The gift of healing comes in the context of us naturally praying for one another. We pray and God responds. Jesus heals whom, when, and how He chooses in His providential love.

Session 10: Does God Heal Today?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | **Team Meeting & Prayer Ministry Introduction:**  For anybody who is unsure or anxious about praying with others, this will be a brief session where we will look again at the principles of praying with others and asking God for healing. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Meal will begin. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke.  Play the song “Holy Spirit” by Francesca Battistelli  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoZd7ZXh9yY> |
| 7:15 pm | VIDEO presentation, **“Does God Heal Today?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Short break. |
| 7:50 pm | **Session leader will describe the healing prayer ministry and will walk through an example. We’ll then invite tables to conduct their own healing prayer.**  **Music & Song.**  **Prayer Ministry** – **Table Host** will ask & encourage:  Does anyone want healing prayer today?  **Table Host** & **Helper** will approach those who in the group who wish to receive prayer.  **Table Host** or **Helper** will ask what they want prayer for.  Those around them, including Guests will lay hands on them and pray together. |
| 8:10 pm | **Session leader will send out five minute warning. Hosts to send note to session leader if they need more time.** |
| 8:15 pm | Hosts will end discussion and dismiss guests. |
| Notes: | Be prepared; this can be a very moving experience for group members.  It will be a very emotional experience.  People might linger for a while after we finish. |

**Table Host & Helper Notes—Session 11: What about the Church?**

Unbelievable! Today is Week 11 and the final session of the Alpha course. Words can’t express how grateful we are for your response in serving your brothers and sisters through these last eleven weeks of the Alpha course. Not only have your Guests been blessed to have you as Hosts and Helpers, but in turn, we are sure you have been blessed by the Guests at your tables. New friendships and relationships have been made. You may want to set a date for a group reunion or to suggest getting together for coffee or a meal in the months that follow.

What about the Church? Today the church, as an institution, gets a lot of negative press. Some see the church as an organization that abuses people or has some political agenda. This is certainly a different picture than what Jesus drew for His disciples when He described a church that would “prevail against the gates of hell and become hope for the world.” Our goal in this session is to help people rethink their understanding of the church as an organization, to begin to understand the value of Christian fellowship and to see how involvement could have a positive impact in their lives.

You and your Guests will be completing the Alpha Testimonies today during the first 10 minutes of your small group time. We will send out a follow-up survey to everyone. Please ask them to be as honest as they can be, as we hope you will as well. The purpose of the survey is to improve the experience of everyone on the Alpha course as we continue in the future. We know God has blessed our efforts, but there is always room for improvement.

**Reminders:**

* Discuss the prayer time from last week. What were people’s experiences?
* If there are Guests who were not here last week for healing prayer, ask if they would like to receive prayer and pray as a group.
* Your Guests will be asked to provide testimonials on the parish website.
* Please prayerfully consider and talk with your Guests about becoming a Host or Helper on the next course.
* Encourage your Guests: to make plans to get together again; to join a follow-up program; to help with the next Alpha course and to invite friends and family to participate in the next Alpha course.

Session 11: What About the Church?

Step by Step

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 6:00 pm | Team Meeting & Prayer. |
| 6:30 pm | Guests will have arrived. Begin meal. |
| 7:00 pm | **Session Leader** will give an introduction & joke. |
| 7:15 pm | Show video, **“What About the Church?”** |
| 7:45 pm | Session leader to give a brief comment then activate Zoom rooms. |
| 7:50 pm | **Small Group Discussion:**  1. Ask everyone to complete their Alpha Testimonies.  2. Go around the group asking each person to summarize their Alpha experience.  3. One of the images from today’s DVD is that the Church is God’s Family. What do you think your role or contribution could be to the family?  End your time together with Intercessory prayer. |
| 8:10 pm | **Session leader to send five minute warning.** |
| 8:15 pm | Session leader to reconvene whole group, thank everyone for attending. Play final song, “The Blessing” by Kari Jobe & Elevation Worship. Play only from 3:30 to 9:00. |
| 8:20 pm | Hosts & helpers to meet with session leader, review evening, thank everyone and end with final prayer. |