



EVANGELICAL CATHOLIC INITIATIVE

KEY QUOTES FROM

DIVINE RENOVATION

FROM A MAINTENANCE TO A
MISSIONAL PARISH

by Fr. James Mallon



St. Benedict Parish, Nova Scotia, Canada: 2,000 did Alpha:

Over the last 4 years... we have seen almost 2,000 people participate in Alpha with 20% to 30% being non — churchgoers. We have seen hundreds of lives transformed as people encountered the person of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. ... they have come to know God as their Father and have come alive in their experience of God's family, the Church.

Non-believers come to Jesus:

After doing the Alpha course, I knew that it worked. The hungry were fed, the lukewarm brought to life and non-believers were coming to faith in Jesus and returning to church. People were eager to begin serving in ministry... the Mass was coming to life for them and the collection was going up! I had never experienced that kind of discipleship fruit from any investment of time and energy in pastoral ministry. It was able to touch people from a variety of backgrounds and levels of faith.

Alpha Process: Food, Kerygma, Small Groups:

Each evening begins with a shared meal in a relaxed environment. Then there is a talk on some aspect of the first proclamation, the kerygma. After the talk there is a substantial amount of time devoted to small groups of eight to ten guests with at least two leaders. The purpose is not to teach, but to listen and facilitate discussion among the guests. .. the secret to its success is that it embraces the belong- believe-behave approach to evangelisation. It is perfectly suited to the post-modern mindset... many guests led to a personal encounter with Jesus and to a decision to follow him.

Alpha - Most effective tool for Evangelisation:

I am convinced that this is the most effective tool I have found to date.... we see clearly that Alpha is not just one of many programs we use, but is foundational to our identity as a missional and evangelising Church.

Eight Different Alphas concurrently:

We recently ran 8 different Alphas concurrently ... over 350 guests, about a third non-churchgoers. Daytime Alpha, Thursday and Friday night Alphas, Pub Alpha, Sushi Alpha, Youth Alphas (in the Parish and local public high school) and Alpha in prison. All run by our parishioners...

Army of Evangelisers:

We've a veritable army of evangelisers using this program to create a profound sense of belonging so that guests may hear and receive the Good News of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis, through his teaching in *Evangelii Gaudium*, would support the Alpha approach. ... need for the kerygma to be clearly articulated, heard and responded to before authentic evangelisation can take place.

Alpha - Ecumenical Base:

In the mind of this Pope, the ecumenical base that Alpha enjoys is not in any way a liability, but something that will enhance the effectiveness of our efforts.

Impact on Sunday Eucharist:

A church that runs Alpha will experience a tipping point when a substantial number of parishioners have been touched by the experience ... the experience of Sunday Eucharist will begin to change.

3 specific changes we introduced to our Sunday Eucharist:

- Name Tag Sunday: tags for 2,000 people! We do this once a month. Resistance has been minimal — a first step towards building meaningful community.
- Prayer Partners: We invite parishioners at every Mass to find a prayer partner, someone they will pray for, and who will pray for them
- Prayer Ministry after Mass: Trained teams of lay people offer prayer ministry at the end of each Mass ... 60 to 70 people each week receive prayer ministry that impacts their lives.

Importance of ‘on the spot’ Prayer Ministry:

Some years ago, I made a promise to God that when someone asked me to pray for them, I would pause and do it right on the spot. These moments have led to profound encounters, often with tears ... relief, peace and healing. Every time this happens, I think ‘Why don’t we do this more often?’

Formation of Small Communities - Connect Groups:

Universally, churches that are healthy, growing and making disciples embrace a model of the local church as a ‘community of communities’. Many distinguish between small groups of 8 to 12 and mid-sized groups of 25 to 35. ... involvement in a small or mid size group is not considered optional, but is an integral part of the life of that local church. We are trying to implement a system of mid-sized groups, called Connect Groups. The model we use is from Holy Trinity Brompton.

Marriage Preparation in St. Benedict’s:

We ask all preparing for marriage to take Alpha as the first step. Most have a very positive experience, some undergoing conversion and transformation. After Alpha, we run an evening for engaged couples using the Clifton Strengths Finder and a weekend on the sacrament of marriage.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults:

In the RCIA programme most parishes witness a drop-off of 50% in the first year. Are they truly encountering Jesus? Are lives being changed, or is information simply being communicated? We ask that every RCIA candidate undertake Alpha, a sure way to hear and respond to the Kerygma, to encounter Jesus, to experience the Holy Spirit and to find meaningful Christian community. After the Easter Vigil, these new Catholics are encouraged to be part of a Connect Group.

The Essential Role of Leadership:

We need priests to be trained as leaders.... There are many holy priests with solidly Catholic theology who lead dying parishes. I received very little training on preaching and nothing about leadership. The only source of knowledge of Church leadership I could find was in Evangelical Protestantism and the writings of Pastor Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church. ...

Today I pastor a large church with the equivalent of twelve full time staff. In addition to these are the leaders of almost 90 ministries and committees that allow the parish to function.

Continuing Leadership Support:

The learning curve has been great, and the number of mistakes I've made. I have continued to find support in leadership from the Evangelical world, especially from Sandy Millar and Nicky Gumbel. I have been privileged to learn from men like Pastor Rick Warren, ("The Purpose Driven Church"), and the writings on organizational health and leadership by Catholic author Patrick Lencioni.

Requirements for Parish Pastoral Council:

One of our requirements for membership on the Pastoral Council is that all who are discerning a place on Council must have attended Alpha and read a number of books and articles that have shaped the culture of the Parish. Bill Hybels defines vision as "a picture of the future that produces passion in us". Our vision statement is: "Saint Benedict Parish is a healthy and growing faith community that brings people to Christ, forms disciples and sends them out to transform the world. Every member is committed to worship, to grow to serve, to connect and to give."

Endorsements:

"A call to move every parish community from a maintenance model to a mission model... or die. I heartily recommend it to every parish priest and his parish council."

Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, Archbishop of Ottawa

"A book that transmits extremely well the passion for the New Evangelisation, Truly inspiring and challenging! I believe that this is where the Lord is leading his Church."

Cardinal Gerald Lacroix, Archbishop of Quebec.

"Fr. Mallon has an immense amount of experience in renewing struggling parishes. It is an essential guide to defining the identity of one's parish and changing the culture."

Fr. Michael White, Pastor and author of Rebuilt.

"Fr Mallon presents here a powerful, practical and real-world call to action that can transform parishes, lives and souls. Buy one for yourself and another for your pastor."

Patrick Lencioni, President Table Group and author of The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

"Fr. Mallon is a gifted communicator with a passion to help build vibrant Catholic parishes which spread the good news of Jesus and grow missionary disciples."

Nicky Gumbel, Pioneer of Alpha.

**To learn more about St. Benedict's Parish
visit: www.saintbenedict.ca**

**For more information on Alpha see
www.ireland.alpha.org
www.alphaireland.org**



**For more information on Evangelical Catholic Initiative:
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