

Alpha on Sunday mornings?!

By Rachel Sangster, Riccarton Baptist



We were at a stage as a faith community that we were starting to see new people, mostly new or discovering Christians coming as well as our faithful group of committed Christians. We were in a rebuilding phase as a church with a sense that the Holy Spirit was about to blow a new wind over us and that we had to get prepared. As we prayed, we were reminded of the disciples fishing all night on the boat without catching anything. Then Jesus said, "Hey, throw your nets on the other side!" In other words, trust me and do it differently.

My crazy idea was for all of us to do the Alpha Course on Sunday mornings as our weekly gathering.

I goggled to see if I could find out if anyone else had done this and the only church I could find was in UK. Divinely, I was able to set up a Zoom with them and they were blown away that we were thinking the same as them. They said, they looked around when they did it 3 years ago and found no one else who had done it this way! They shared their journey and we were so encouraged to hear that the outcomes for them doing it as a community, were the same dreams we had written down that we were hoping for.

- Activate new leaders
- Build unity and greater sense of family amongst us.
- Everyone grew in God, no matter how long they had been following Jesus
- Break the tradition of always having a sermon
- Encourage discussions and more voices to be heard
- More space for intergenerational connections
- Everyone involved children – adults
- New small groups formed



So, we kicked it off, right in the middle of another wave of Covid! Some may say that was crazy, but God has used this to His glory.

Each Sunday we started with breakfast, having different teams taking responsibility for this. What an amazing variety we had! Everyone pitched in with set up, cleaning, dishes with a great sense of family. The breakfasts time was a highlight as we gathered around tables and built friendships, welcomed visitors and connected with people we may not have talked to much before. During one of the breakfast a 9 year old girl who comes fortnightly when she stays with her grandma, wanted to share something with me. She said, " Grandma was making chicken fried rice during the week and I said to her that when it is our turn to bring food to OUR church, that this is what we should bring." This warmed my heart – this 9 year old, from a non-churched home has developed a sense of belonging to our Christian community.

I watched over a few weeks as one lady came for breakfast for the first 2 weeks and then left before the session started. On the third week she stayed in the foyer and listened to the Alpha video then left. On the fourth week she stayed and joined in with a group discussion.

We had a couple of songs of worship and then listened to the teaching using the Alpha Film Series. It was very easy to listen to and we were able to download it with subtitles for our ESOL families. The children had their own group during this time that was on the same topic each week. Each week we had a small card and gift for everyone that reminded people of the topic.



The structure of the Alpha course is that there is a Holy Spirit Weekend in the middle. Due to Covid and other factors we decided to do "A Big Day Out" instead and spent the day together at our church venue. This was a wonderful day of connecting, relaxing together and of seeing the Holy Spirit move on us in a gentle, deep and healing way.

The topic on the final week is, "What About The Church?" All ages stayed together and we wrote words that describe church to us then put them up on a cardboard "church". It was a very powerful moment for us as we sang "The Blessing" over each other and then people prayed out loud in their own cultural language. One of the 12 year olds who has only recently come from another country and has limited English, told me the following week that when this was happening she felt like her "heart was throbbing out of her chest", and she was so happy and peaceful. The power of experiencing the Holy Spirit!



The hopes we had at the beginning were far exceeded and we are looking forward with expectation to what God will do amongst us next.