

My experience of my first Alpha Introductory Dinner is still so vivid in my memory that it seems like it just happened last week.

It was 1998. I was the curate then in St John's-St Margaret's Church (SJSM), tasked with heading a new way of evangelising through small groups. We called it Evangelistic Bible Studies then (EBS groups). Our Cell groups were struggling with evangelism and that was bad news as the Cell's DNA is about multiplication. We were running out of ideas. EBS was key.

Then the Alpha Conference came around, hosted by Revd Sandy Millar and Revd Nicky Gumbel. We were asked to attend. After that, the team gathered and we discussed whether we should try out the Alpha Course. Everyone said yes except me. I thought we should do it on our own. After all, the Brits have taught us how to worship as Anglicans. Now, in evangelism as well?

I am glad I was just a Curate then. I am quite sure that if I was a Vicar then (and an inexperienced one at that), Alpha would have been barred. My Vicar then (currently Bishop Rennis) wisely overruled. Maybe - just maybe - if so many including the Vicar think otherwise, God may be speaking.

And so, I reluctantly agreed. We will do it. But quietly please. Our Cells were tired of programmes which did not work. And if Alpha fails, we will quietly move on. I did not like the idea of a video talk either. I will give the talk, I insisted.

On that fateful evening, we expected 300. Talking about a low key event,

members just took the opportunity to invite. And invite they did. In fact more than 500 turned up. The food was not enough. As good hosts, members ate lightly. We had never seen so many unbelievers in our Sanctuary. I gave the talk. It was inspired, funny, effective and anointed.

As they said, the rest is history. Alpha has worked in local Singaporean churches in an Asian setting. SJSM never looked back ever since, nor her Cells. Alpha moved on to impact other churches, prisons, the market place and the region. Countless have come to faith in Christ. My team subsequently insisted we switch to Nicky on videos when they realised - after the third live talk - that my anointing as an Alpha speaker, to put it kindly, was not a permanent gift. We can be glad because the videos can be used in ways which live talks can't. In any case, the real strength of Alpha is how it enables Christians to reach guests in small groups.

18 years have passed. St Paul urged Timothy to preach the Gospel in and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). May Alpha in Cathedral breathe a new life and way of evangelism in our community.



Alpha