

December 1997

Free throughout the Parish



# Mustard Seed

St. Thomas' Brampton, St. Peter's Holymoorside, St. John's Walton  
—going for growth in Christ—

## ALPHA IS HERE

Reaching the parts which other courses cannot reach



*A relaxed atmosphere.... good food.... real friendship*

**People all over the country are doing Alpha courses. In fact Alpha is spreading all over the world.**

Four courses have now taken place in this parish and the response has been enthusiastic. Alpha is a way of exploring fundamental questions in a relaxed environment.

- What is the point of life?
- How can we be fulfilled
- What relevance has Jesus today?
- What happens when we die?

Each of the ten sessions starts with a meal, followed by a presentation on a subject which is central to the Christian faith. Everyone joins a small pre-arranged group of 10 to 12 people, including two leaders which stays the same for the whole course. Members can ask any question they like as groups explore these important issues informally.

There is also a Saturday away day, forming an integral and important part of the course.



### What is the appeal of Alpha?

The Alpha course is for people with questions about life. The course does not guarantee to answer them all but it acts as a guide to point people in the right direction. Many who have followed the course have found that it has given them a new beginning.

Since it began at Holy Trinity Church, Brompton in 1979, there has been a huge increase in the numbers of people doing Alpha, in this country and abroad

#### TRANSFORMATION

About two years ago Alpha was featured in The Times newspaper with the title 'Smart Route to the Lord'. This included comments by two successful people whose lives had undergone a transformation. One of these was a 26 year old photographer called **Melinda Wells** who related how she had been healed after suffering for three years from ME.

**Paul Cowley**, a 41 year old executive, explained how he had come into a real Christian faith after experiencing major problems in life. Another man, serving a long prison sentence, wrote to Nicky Gumbel, the Anglican curate closely involved in setting up Alpha, to tell him how his life had changed dramatically.

So how can Alpha change a person's life? In itself it can't. The

*Continued overleaf*

# What is Alpha?

**A** is for Anyone interested in finding out more about the Christian faith. Whatever your age you are welcome.

**L** is for Learning and Laughter. There is joy in learning about the Christian faith.

**P** is for People and Pasta and Pudding. An opportunity to get to know other people and make new friends over a light meal.

**H** is for Helping each other. The small groups give you chance to discuss issues raised by the talks in a supportive environment.

**A** is for Asking anything. No question is regarded as too simple or too hostile.

## TOPICS COVERED

The series of presentations

- Who is Jesus?
- Why did Jesus die?
- How can I be sure of my faith?
- Why and how should I read the Bible?
- Why and how do I pray?
- What about the Holy Spirit?
- How does God guide us?
- How can I overcome evil?
- Why and how should I tell others?
- What about the Church?

## HOW ALPHA HAS GROWN

1991	4 courses	600 people
1992	5 courses	1,000 people
1993	200 courses	4,500 people
1994	750 courses	30,000 people
1995	2,500 courses	100,000 people
1996	500 courses	250,000 people
1997	estimated	500,000 people

**BILL GALLOWAY** has been involved in organising ALPHA courses in St. Thomas' parish for just over a year. Mustard Seed asked Bill why he would recommend Alpha.



*"One objective which we set was to offer three Alpha evening courses each year starting in January 1997, with afternoon courses available if there was sufficient demand. At the time of writing over 200 people in the parish will have completed a course by the end of November 1997.*

Organiser and enthusiast "It is fairly evident, either from our own experience or from our observations of others, that many people are searching for some sort of deeper meaning in their lives. People seek to find the answer in different ways but there is only one real and permanent solution and each person has the capacity within them to find it. Alpha is not a universal remedy but it could help anyone to find a new depth of meaning in his or her life.

**"I commend Alpha because it provides an opportunity, in the midst of the rush and bustle of busy lives, to consider in a relaxed atmosphere the fundamental issues of the Christian faith, with guidance if and when you need it."**



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whole point of Alpha is to focus attention on someone who can bring about the change. After an introduction, it starts by asking the question "Who is Jesus?" and goes on to raise various other questions about Christian life and faith. The answers to these questions are provided by the Bible rather than man-made philosophy.

The success of Alpha cannot be measured simply by the numbers of people who have been involved in it. For many, however, it has led to a life changing experience. For some, this has been quite dramatic but for many it has been a quiet, inner realisation that Jesus can bring a new meaning to life. They have met the person who is described in the Bible as the 'Alpha and Omega.'

# Excerpts from the Diary of a New Christian

Wednesday night 'ALPHA'

Arrived at St. John's, given a name badge, decided I was going to enjoy this, can never remember people's names.

Met and spoke to a few people, Maureen seemed to know several, most people appeared to be very happy to be out enjoying the fellowship.

Gathered into groups under the direction of "our" group leaders, we were directed into a side room away from the multitude. Felt honoured to be among the chosen few in the side room, later had it explained that there were too many people for the main room.

Went to collect food along with the rest of the group, hoped that nobody noticed that I was ravenous. Returned to side room, ate everything that was available, decided that I actually had a liking for water with food, must try it more regularly.

Main room for a welcome and talk on Christianity by Christopher, hymns and prayers. Memories of 'There is a green hill far away' did not seem to help me, tried to follow the others.



Maureen and Barry Thompson

Back to our room, John and Barbara our team leaders seemed to be a little hesitant to start the ball rolling by introducing contentious subjects. John seemed to welcome somebody saying something. Maureen frowned at me... must explain to her later that 'new' Christians like me have to 'feel their way.'

Really enjoyed not feeling embarrassed when talking about my feelings that were beginning to crystallise on religion. Head came round door to say it was time to go home. Sorry to have to go, could have stayed another hour or so.

Handed in name badge, really looking forward to next week.



Rapt attention during an Alpha presentation at St. John's Church Centre Centre

## HOW HAS ALPHA HELPED YOU?

Comments from some who have recently participated

"The Alpha course gave me the opportunity to ask questions about the Christian faith, which previously I had been unable to do. It was very relaxed and made me feel comfortable and able to ask. As a result of that, I committed myself to the Christian faith."

*Craig Galloway, thermocouple technician, father of two small children.*

"I have recently been bereaved and have since started coming to the 909 service at St. Thomas'. I joined the Alpha course and have been able to find out what it means to be a Christian and to start putting it into practice."

*Pat Clayton, teacher and mother.*



"From the time that we arrived through to the last meeting our lives were changed. To be able to discuss and to hear others discuss their own beliefs, hopes and doubts about Christianity was really important to us. The talks, covering a lot of ground that we had only vaguely thought about in the past, cleared up misunderstandings and helped to cement our belief and faith in Christ."

*Barry and Maureen Thompson, electronics sales engineer and guest house manager.*

"It has been good to be able to discuss things that you don't usually get the chance to talk about. It's nice to know you're not the only one to have doubts!"

*Norma Sewell, accountant and mother.*

# CHRISTMAS<sup>©</sup>

GREAT SINGING, FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE AND SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT  
HAVE A GENUINE CHRISTMAS ©

CHRISTMAS<sup>©</sup> IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

## ST. THOMAS' BRAMPTON

**Sunday, 21 December**  
6.30pm Carol Service

**Christmas Eve**  
6.00pm Family Carol Service

11.15pm Midnight Communion

**Christmas Day**  
8.00am Holy Communion  
10.00am Family Communion



## ST. JOHN'S WALTON

**Sunday, 21 December**  
10.30am All Age Christmas Praise  
6.30 pm Carols by Candlelight

**Christmas Eve**  
5.00 pm Carols around the Crib  
11.15pm Midnight Communion

**Christmas Day**  
9.30am All Age Communion

## ST. PETER'S HOLYMOORSIDE

**Thursday 18 December**  
7.00pm Blessing of the Village Crib  
7.15pm Churches Together Carol Service in the URC

**Sunday 21 December**  
9.30am Children's Carol Service  
6.00pm Carol Service

**Christmas Eve**  
7.00 pm Carols around the tree (in the recreation field)  
11.00pm Midnight Communion

**Christmas Day**  
10.00 am Family Communion

## ENQUIRIES

General enquiries should be made at St. Thomas' Church office which is usually staffed from 9am to 12.30 pm and 2pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

OFFICE TELEPHONE: 558461

Enquiries about weddings and baptisms should be made on Mondays between 6.30pm and 7.15pm at St. Thomas' Church. Use the office door at the East end (not the tower end)

## THE CLERGY

Most parishioners will meet one or more of the clergy at some time. They are here to help.

*Rector*  
Christopher Frith 232717

*Minister responsible for St. John's*  
Andy Broom 567490

*Minister responsible for St. Peter's*  
Judith Henderson 569106

*Curate*  
Peter Wilkinson 231089

Please complete and return to:  
The Secretary, St. Thomas' Church Office, Chatsworth Road,  
Chesterfield, S40 3AN

- I wish to join an ALPHA evening course
- I wish to join an ALPHA day-time course
- I would prefer the course starting in:
- January     April     September
- Please will a minister call to discuss doing an ALPHA course



Name : \_\_\_\_\_  
Address : \_\_\_\_\_  
Tel : \_\_\_\_\_

