

## **An Alpha Story -East Syracuse, NY**

Church of the Resurrection (which just changed its name to Life Church) conducted a 10-week Alpha Course in the Fall of 2014. God did wonderful things in the lives of our 9 Alpha guests. Here's the snapshot:

Nine people signed up for the Alpha Course. Most were non-believers, a couple were fairly entrenched atheists, and a only few had prior church experience. By the end of the course, all nine Alpha guests had prayed to receive Christ, and five began attending our church regularly with others at other churches. At least four guests were filled with the Holy Spirit, and several were physically healed in class as they learned how to pray with each other, one very dramatically right in front of the group. All of this happened very naturally and organically as the relationships developed over time. Three have joined a follow-up Alpha discipleship class, and two others are helpers in the current Spring Alpha course. Many have invited their friends to the next group. These people are all vibrant, with completely changed lives, and excited about helping others know Christ!

**Sally** was driving by the church, and seeing the Alpha sign, felt compelled to come in the office and find out more. She had no real prior born again experience. Over the course she began to participate more and more, until one evening when she shared her life story of heartache and abuse. God began to heal her heart that night through the love she received from the group. During the session on healing, she showed us her hands which had been constantly blue and cold for years due to Lupus. One of the leaders took her hands and prayed for her, and when he took his hands away, Sally's hands were completely pink and warm. To this day, she has had no more trouble with them. Of course everyone was really excited, built up in faith, which led the way to some other healings. Sally cooked all the food for a baby shower we had for an Alpha guest, and then brought 2 friends to our current Spring Alpha course. She is now involved in our follow up Jesus lifestyle course.

**Pierre** worked at a local coffee shop, where Pastor Lou buys his morning coffee. Pierre came to Alpha at Pastor's invitation. He began Alpha somewhat begrudgingly and a bit curious, since he had come to the firm conclusion that there is no God. He told us on week one how the concept of God is completely unscientific and for weak minded people. He did not come on week 2. He came again on week 3, which took us by surprise. He talked about the suffering he had gone through in his life, and how he can identify with Jesus because he suffered too. From then on, Pierre was eager to learn about Christianity and grow in his faith. When Sally's hands were healed, Pierre told his coworkers all about it. He prayed to receive Christ as Savior on the weekend away. He also received a vision for starting his own restaurant, which we saw as a gift from God, part of a "future and hope". Pierre has much to learn, but now has a firm foundation to stand on.

**Mary** started the course very closed, with folded arms. Her comments were hugely skeptical, almost to the point of bringing the others down. She would argue openly with her sister Elena in the group discussion time. Our discussion group leader was sending encouraging emails to the group members between sessions. The leader sent Mary an email, saying she was glad Mary was in the group. Mary wrote back; "please be patient with me. I'm sorry I've been so negative, but this is so new and I have so many questions". The leader assured her that we care about her and want to help. On week 5 we had the pleasure of seeing her come to Alpha with a "changed countenance". She told us, "I get it now!" She was smiling and saying how she was able to come to believe that Christianity is the way.

**Elena**, a nominal Christian, referred to herself as a “good, moral person”. It wasn’t until her sister became a Christian that her heart opened. She would cry whenever she talked about her sister’s transformation. On the weekend she came to terms with the concept of salvation by grace. She prayed to receive Christ’s offer of salvation. She began to use her gift of compassion to direct love and encouragement toward the other Alpha guests.

**Judy** was engaged to a young man in the church, but had no church background. She had received Christ prior to Alpha through conversations with her future mother-in-law. The couple was open about their level of intimacy in their relationship. Through Alpha, Judy learned how to look for God’s guidance in this area and other areas of life. They got married after week 5, wanting to honor God! They moved to a new city and are being disciplined by a church there.

After a failed marriage and the untimely death of her daughter, **Louise** found a room to rent in a house owned by a woman from our church. This woman signed Louise up for the Alpha course. She had no prior church background. She prayed to receive Christ on the weekend. On her first Sunday attending church, Louise said as she walked in, “well what do you know...lightning did not strike!” She has been attending Wednesdays and Sundays ever since, and is taking the Jesus Lifestyle course. She made the centerpieces and a meal for Spring Alpha.

On week nine, we broke into 3 small prayer groups of 4, with 3 members and 1 leader or helper in each group. We encouraged the Alpha members to pray for each other, asking them to think about prayer as a blessing you can give to a friend. Many of the guests had never prayed in front of anyone before. Six people asked for prayer for healing, and five were relieved of pain as they prayed. The sixth was healed of her pain a short time later. The prayer time was a huge encouragement for everyone.

This was the third time we ran an Alpha course. The first two were smaller not as visibly successful, but now Alpha is starting to transform the church vision. We held an Alpha celebration dinner and invited friends and family to hear about the good things we have experienced. The theme of the dinner was “we can’t stop speaking of what we have seen and heard”. Two family members received Christ, and three are participating in the Spring Alpha course. We as a church are really enjoying the new people, and have just launched another Alpha, plus a discipleship “Jesus Lifestyle” group for prior attendees. We all felt that God was truly amazing in how He put this together, and look forward to doing more Alphas of various kinds in the church and community. We plan to launch Student Alpha at a local university and with our Youth Group. Our hope is that we can continue to reach out to our community through Alpha groups, and to be a model for other churches to follow.