

Alpha

An interview with Rev. Peter Blundell, Former Alpha Chaplain to Sub-Saharan Africa

We continue our discussion on churches working together as 'The Body of Christ' by examining the rise of 'The Alpha Course'. Alpha Courses run at 43,000 locations in 164 countries and in over 100 languages. In Canada, an estimated 300,000 people have attended one. Yet twenty-five years ago, Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), London, the Anglican church where Alpha began, was the only church in the world to offer it.

To explain how Alpha has become the world-wide movement it is today, and to see what lessons we might learn from their example, I spoke with Rev. Peter Blundell.

"The course was originally designed in 1977 for new believers. My brother became a follower of Jesus in 1982 and took the Alpha course. I noticed a transformation after he attended the first ever Alpha weekend on 'The Holy Spirit'. I said 'I want to know all about this', and joined the small Alpha team."

How did Alpha start to spread?

"HTB planted several churches and Alpha went with them; those churches planted other

churches and so on. Significantly, people working in the city began attending evening Alpha courses at HTB, fell in love with Jesus, and then began attending their local churches (of all denominations), as fired-up, Jesus-loving, Bible-believing, Spirit-filled Christians. Those church leaders started making phone calls to HTB."

"HTB's attitude has always been 'build the kingdom, win the lost'.

Knowing how essential prayer is to something like this, they employed a full-time prayer co-ordinator in 1985. To equip other churches to run their own Alpha courses they sent out teams, staged leadership conferences and ran massive advertising campaigns. HTB does encourage churches to run their own denominational follow-up after the course, but the course itself is copyrighted to protect it from being corrupted or watered down. The greater temptation is to omit the parts of the course where the leader is forced to trust God, specifically when asking the Holy Spirit to come and fill people or when praying for healing."

Did anyone at HTB have any idea what it would become?

"Not then! But when Nicky Gumbel joined HTB as a minister in 1989 he was asked to head up Alpha. On the second course he ran, everyone in his small group was a non-believer, but by the end, all of

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them had become Christians. Nicky said, 'This is the best evangelistic tool, but it needs some changes to make it more accessible to seekers.'"

"Nicky has been extraordinarily used by God, not only because he is very gifted, but vitally because he is both humble and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit. His passions, which proactively drove the Alpha course globally, are: to bring glory to Jesus, to bring the Gospel to all people; and to build the local church."

For more information, visit www.alphacanada.org

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