

# Developing an Evangelism Strategy

*How to give this talk:*

This session is an interactive session and so relies on someone who can facilitate. There are various points when you need to interact with the delegates. We have included the possible answers we would expect as bullet points.

You will need lots of flipchart paper and blue tack. Everyone needs a pen and paper.

Instructions to you, the speaker, are in italics.

## **Talk**

Starting an Alpha course is quite easy. It's very nerve wracking but there are usually so many people within the church who do the course that it can seem like you are reaching hundreds of people.

But we know that to sustain a course you need some form of strategy to bring people into the course and that's what you are going to do today and my hope is that you are going to end this session with your own ideas. I have brought some ideas but there is no magic formula. Today is more about you thinking about the issues involved and identifying a way forward.

As Christians we are called to be fishers of men (and women too!!). Fishermen need somewhere to fish. So what we are going to do first is think about which pools to fish from. What I want you to call out is where you, your church can fish. Where are the people on your course going to come from?

*Have three separate sheets prepared, labelled – church contacts – church fringe – geographical area. As the ideas are called out write them on the relevant sheet.*

### **Under Church contacts expect:**

- Friends of church members
- Family of church members
- Work colleagues of church members
- Neighbours of church members

### **Under Church fringe expect**

- People coming to the church for baptisms
- People wanting to get married in the church
- Regular but uncommitted church attenders
- Occasional church attenders – esp Christmas, Easter
- Old age lunch
- Mothers and toddlers group
- Scouts, guides etc and related families.

### **Under Geographical area**

- People who walk up and down the high street etc – street evangelism
- People who live near the church – door to door
- People who walk past the church
- Young people who hang around on the street corner.
- Ministry to the area – Besom etc

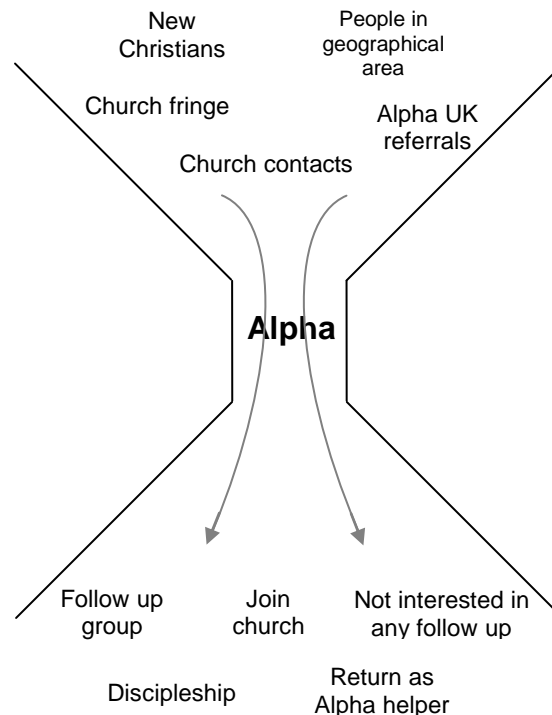
There may be lots more – hopefully!

Now we have a picture of who we want to reach. To speed things up, I'm going to summarise what we mean when we say reach. We mean we want all of those people to have an opportunity to explore the Christian faith, and we'll be praying like mad that they become

Christians or their faith comes alive and they become active servants of Jesus Christ. Can we agree on that?

Since you are all here on an Alpha day and this is track-2 can I assume that we agree Alpha is quite a good way of giving people that opportunity. I am sure there are many others.

*Have the following diagram prepared or if you can talk and draw at the same time then you can talk everyone through it as you draw. .*



This is a good way of picturing Alpha's role in this process. Alpha is like a funnel that people from all the various groups pass through.

Now this diagram doesn't show anything about Alpha's role as part of a leadership training program in the church but that's a different talk. And also this diagram doesn't show how Alpha builds community – especially if you go on a weekend.

Another talk that we won't cover now is all the stuff at the bottom of this diagram. How do you deal with what happens next.

The point of this diagram is to show that Alpha is one part of a wider process or system. (I use those words carefully because we are dealing with people and when we talk about processing it sounds very mechanical!)

So the point of this session is how to get people from outside into that system.

Before we get involved in the details I want to take a wide look at this and talk about what makes a church the kind of place that looks outwards like this. I'll mention three headings that I think need to be in place to make church the kind of place where it is in the DNA of the church. It's not a case of 'hey everyone it's September so it's evangelism time again' but simply this is what we do.

A strategy for evangelism will include **vision, intention** and **means**.

## **Vision**

What is a vision? One definition is 'a picture of a preferable future in the collective mind of a congregation'. What I mean by that is that every member of your church would have a mental image of evangelistic effectiveness, of new followers of Jesus joining with your current band of followers. The most effective ways of doing this is stories of changed lives. That's why every Alpha News is packed with stories of changed lives – so no matter what other stuff goes in – no-one misses the point.

The other point about vision is that when you have vision that hard work doesn't bog you down.

Think of a young girl tirelessly practicing dance moves in front of her mirror or someone doing the same with a golf swing. Why do they do this? They do it because they have a vision of the finished routine or hitting a hole in one.

A vision-caster in the church — usually the church leader but not necessarily — needs to shape this evangelistic dream to the congregation.

It must be communicated in various settings and in varied, creative ways. People don't "hear" the vision the first time, and they forget it within weeks if not regularly and imaginatively reminded.

As I am speaking I would like all of you to write down the name of the person you think should do this in your church. As you are writing you might think that person needs some persuading. I'd also like you to write down the key message that they need to get across?

## **Intention**

A congregational vision must go beyond some sentimental wish to a determined, purposeful, planned, budgeted and calendared activity. A church must order its life and structure to include evangelism. Evangelism does not just happen any more than overweight people suddenly find themselves on a diet. No one "stumbles" onto a diet and no church stumbles into evangelism. A firm and adamant decision must be made to do "what ever it takes" to implement the vision. When things in life don't get done it is normally because we have not actually intended to do it; we have only wished it or desired it.

The key to this is how do you move from a picture in the congregations minds which says 'that sounds like a good idea' to 'that sounds like a good idea what can I do to help?'

The barrier here is competition. Alpha takes time and energy: the school fete; the jumble sale; visiting the old folk; the PCC meeting. All good stuff. I want you to think right now – what is there in our calendar that takes precedence over evangelism. This isn't meant to be a clever trick where you are forced to put evangelism at the top – I just want you to think about the average church year and where Alpha fits in. I think we would all agree that it's very important in the life of a church. Is it getting the attention it deserves?

*(There is a real danger of sounding 'preachy' at this point – maybe almost telling the delegates off for not doing more with Alpha. The tone has to be 'I'm not saying you should spend more time on Alpha – but I am saying you need to think about your church calendar and to prayerfully weigh how you use your time).*

## **Means**

Once the vision is clear and compelling and the decision to act on it is in place, we then turn to this thought: "okay, what should we do?"

## **Strategy**

Right. So someone has cast the vision to the congregation. They are fired up and ready. What are they going to do?

This is where I would like us to return to the 'pools to fish in' we talked about earlier. Once again I don't have any magic formulas so you are going to have to do the thinking for me.

We have these three broad categories (church contacts – church fringe – geographical area) Let's deal with these one by one.

### **Church contacts**

So what needs to happen is simple. The members of your church need to start talking to their friends, family, neighbours and work colleagues about their faith and they need to invite them to an Alpha supper or course. Of course new Christians find this easiest, and the most natural. But to be truly effective everyone has to be involved.

What are the barriers to people inviting their church contacts?

*(Expect the following responses:)*

- Apathy – someone else will do it?
- Fear of rejection – what will my friends think of me?
- Not sure who to ask
- They won't like church
- Don't know how to witness - I'd love to but I wouldn't know what to say?

So let's take each of those barriers – how do we break them down?

*(Hopefully people will make some suggestions – it may be worth adding in the following thoughts:)*

- Apathy – preaching the vision – everyone is involved.
- Fear of rejection – unfortunately it's not optional!
- Not sure who to ask – anyone. Look for the Holy Spirit's leading – you may have invited them before but maybe this time they will say yes.
- They won't like church – this is a delicate one – does the church need to change to be something they will like? – is that practical?  
Is there a bridging event that they will like (quiz, social, sporting event)
- The point to get across here is that we don't have to be the world's greatest witness. Alpha is a 'come and see' that's all we need to say. If you want to give people confidence why not spend an evening looking at how to witness or try any number of courses (eg Breaking News by J John)
- Intermediate events. There are some things that the church can get involved in that in themselves are not in the slightest evangelistic but get people used to the inside of the church or to introduce people to church members. Things like a quiz night, a classical concert, a showing of some sporting event.

### **Church fringe**

*(In this section it may be worth grouping some of the categories together. The bulleted points are a summary of the points raised in the brainstorming session earlier, the numbered points are possible answers. )*

Referring back to the list above. Let's break these down a bit?

- *People coming to the church for baptisms (the baptism party)*
- *Occasional church attenders – esp Christmas, Easter*

These are people that will be in church at particular and predictable points. How do we make the most of those opportunities?

1. Ensure Alpha is positioned shortly afterwards. (Straight after Christmas, Easter; hold Baptisms a week or so before the Alpha course)
2. Treat the service like a guest service – testimonies, evangelistic sermon, Alpha invites handed out as people leave church.

- *Regular but uncommitted church attenders*

How are these people going to realise that Alpha is for them?

Who is going to make friends with these people?

1. Church magazine – testimonies – including testimonies of people who were already going to church
2. Church website – testimonies – clear information about the next course
3. Ensure that it is easy to sign up – people know where to get a form etc.
4. In church, ensure that when you talk about Alpha it is in a way that makes it unembarassing to sign up.

- *People enquiring about baptisms*
- *People wanting to get married in the church*
- *Old age lunch*
- *Mothers and toddlers group*
- *Scouts, guides etc and related families.*

To invite these people is easy if you are the person who is dealing with them. The problem here is that very often the only person a lot of these people are in contact with is the church leader. Is that a problem? Is there a way that we can share this out?

1. Church leader uses members of the congregation for baptism preparation
2. Other people in the church take on 'Marriage Preparation' course.
3. Encourage church members to take a lead in community groups.

How can we be strategic about these groups? What I mean is, all of these things have a point on their own so how can we make sure that opportunities don't get missed?

1. Preaching the vision.
2. Intermediate events eg. If you think there are three or four mothers from the mothers and toddlers group who may be interested, why not hold a coffee morning just for them and watch a short testimony video while someone looks after the toddlers.

### **Geographical area**

Now we get to the hardest ground of all to plough.

So, any ideas of how to reach people who have no connection to the church but live a stone's throw away?

1. Leaflet drop
2. Posters
3. Newspaper adverts
4. Banner

How effective do people find any of these?

Experience suggests that the way to make this much more effective is to put a leaflet through the door. Follow up with a knock at the door –

Hello, I'm from the local church I wondered if you had a chance to look at the leaflet we put through the day last week?..... Well I have another one here. If you are interested in finding out more about the Christian faith you would be very welcome to join us .....I'll leave this with you please do just come along if you are interested or let us know by filling in the coupon at the bottom there.'

### 5. Street evangelism?

This is one idea. Dress smart casual, smile, minted breath. Get a clipboard and a couple of pens. Approach people in the street.

Don't say 'Have you got a minute?' because the answer will be 'no'

You say 'I'm doing a quick survey, it will only take a minute and you will get a free gift'

Then you ask your questions so start with

Have you heard of Alpha?

Do you believe in God?

Do you believe in the devil?

Do you believe in heaven & hell?

Would you call yourself a Christian?  
Then you move into questions at the end  
If you could know God personally, would you want to?  
If so would you like to explore this further?

Then give them an invite and a Why Jesus? – that's the free gift.

Don't stay too long in one place to avoid upsetting shop-keepers. Go out in small teams so you get chances to chill out, take a breather and compare notes.

Most important don't react to any answers. When someone says 'yes, I'm a Satanist' just note it down and move onto the next question.

One Alpha Adviser says that this is one of the most rewarding forms of evangelism. Do contact Alpha UK if you would like to get hold of a sample questionnaire.

Now before we finish I would just like to encourage one more thing. Put an Alpha course in the diary. When are the training events, the supper, the day away. Getting those dates in the diary means you work towards them.

## Summary

*Depending on how much time you have left you can go for one of these options*

### 2 minutes or less

So we've looked at lots of things today. What I would like you to do is to spend 2 minutes committing to a plan.

You can't fight on all fronts at the same time. What's the main strategy?

Remember – vision that leads to intention that leads to action. Let's spend a few moments thinking about how that is going to happen.

### 3-4 minutes left

OK so I would love it if everyone could leave with a piece of paper with a plan written on it. What I want you to have on your piece of paper is the following.

#### 1. The pools to fish in

You should have written down on your paper a couple of the categories where you know that your church could be more strategic in who it is reaching.

2. Next to each of those pools you need to have written down what steps you need to either break down the barriers – what needs to happen in church services – what events need to happen to train people / or that people can invite their friends to. As you do this always mentally refer back to vision casting.

3. The vision – who is going to cast the vision. The congregation need to catch the vision for every strategy. Who is going to do that? Does that person have the vision – if not – what can you do to give it to them.

### 5-8minutes left

OK so I would love it if everyone could leave with a piece of paper with a plan written on it. What I want you to have on your piece of paper is the following.

#### 1. The pools to fish in

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3. The vision – who is going to cast the vision. The congregation need to catch the vision for every strategy. Who is going to do that? Does that person have the vision – if not – what can you do to give it to them.

Spend a couple of minutes doing that and then I want you to turn to the person next to you and summarise points 1&2. This isn't for them to approve it, but in speaking it out and trying to articulate you will start to own it.

#### 9+ minutes left

As per 5-8 minutes but start by praying. Ask everyone to stay seated but to move into a posture where they are comfortable and ready to hear from God. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and counsel everyone in the room. Ask him to touch on areas that need work and areas that can be left for another day. Ask him to bring to mind the names of people in the church who need to be approached.