

Dear SACC Friends

At a recent gathering of SA Council of Churches, I was struck by the following story from Gary and Ron, offering us insights into how hospitality of the heart and home can enrich and renew faith and life. Some snippets include:

Without doubt an early success factor was the decision to hold the ALPHA course at a leadership team member's home.

Loneliness and a desire to belong to a group where people feel comfortable talking big issues and Jesus Christ was a longing we experienced from many ALPHA participants.

Generosity of spirit was very evident also from everyone.

There is no doubt that participants felt welcome and comfortable in a warm family home environment. Just like we are sure Jesus would have felt comfortable meeting new friends over a meal all those years ago.

Thanks Gary and Ron for sharing and for writing up the following story.

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July 2017



Hospitality of the heart and home: enriching and renewing faith and life

Our parishes of Glenelg Plympton recently concluded their first ALPHA Course.

Able led by Phil Murdoch and a team of 8 Parishioners, Gary and I decided to act as the "Martha and Mary" by providing our home and the required hospitality for the duration of the course.

The team conducted two ALPHA training sessions with 6 test participants, drawn from our church community, during February so as to get the format right.

We decided to run an 8 weeks shortened course at our Home in Pier St Glenelg and hold a Holy Spirit weekend at St Doms Centre at Glenelg.

Some 22 diverse souls participated in our first ever ALPHA experience following Easter. 8 parishioners involved in the leadership and up to 14 guests each Wednesday night from 6.30 pm.



We welcomed people from some various religious traditions, a wide age range, some disaffected Christians as well, some practising committed Christians including a young bible savvy Baptist doctor.

We advertised widely utilizing a splendid banner which was hung out front of our home in Pier St, then outside the Parish house and then at the Plympton Parish. The Banner was provided free by Loraine McArthy from ALPHA headquarters.

As well we canvassed every mass centers for weeks with a full colour brochure produced at the Parish Office, distributed over the Easter seasons key Holy Week Triduum events.

Alpha teams, headed by Phil Murdock, spoke at every one of the mass centers after being introduced by Fr Anthony after the Homily.

Without doubt an early success factor was the decision to hold the ALPHA course at a leadership team member's home.

We were inspired by the many Sunday Mass Gospel readings where Jesus was sitting with friends sharing a meal and discussing the big issues.



The whole group of people involved in ALPHA hit it off from day one. There was a tremendous feeling of warmth and friendship and openness to the video and ensuing group discussions.

Loneliness and a desire to belong to a group where people feel comfortable talking big issues and Jesus Christ was a longing we experienced from many ALPHA participants.

Generosity of spirit was very evident also from everyone.

People felt an incredible feeling of welcome and friendship. It was not difficult to talk about Jesus with this group. People came along willing and comfortable to share their personal life experience amongst others they welcomed as new friends.

Having a well prepared meal specific to each participants dietary requirement, be it diabetic, vegetarian or Gluten free was not difficult to provide, but was especially appreciated by participants with such dietary need. A true sign of welcome.

Wine and coffee as well deserts were provided by team members.

There is no doubt that participants felt welcome and comfortable in a warm family home environment. Just like we are sure Jesus would have felt comfortable meeting new friends over a meal all those years ago.

We have since kept in touch with all the ALPHA participants and leadership team. Indeed participants themselves convened a thankyou supper at a local restaurant the week after concluding ALPHA and all but a couple of people attended the dinner. There has been a strong desire by ALPHA members to stay in touch. What further things can we do to further our journey was often the question.

At a follow up leaders meeting, we are to invite course participants along to a further 4 sessions introducing subjects omitted from our 8 week course. As well Fr Anthony has offered Scripture courses, RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation) as well Lenten and Advent preparation courses to be offered to ALPHA participants so as to keep them engaged along their own particular faith journeys. Obviously weekly church attendance was encouraged.

Of note we have welcomed at least 4 new Sunday mass attendees emanating from our Parish ALPHA experience. One has approached me to become actively involved in parish ministry to the sick or as a mass reader or commentator. We have directed this person to the Parish leadership team.

Importantly, welcome is a two way street. Both Gary and I have experienced a growth in our own personal feeling of acceptance and friendship in this community.

It is anticipated that when nurtured by our church community some of our ALPHA participants themselves will begin to be welcomers and friends, indeed evangelisers for Jesus Christ.

Regards and Blessings from Glenelg.

Ron and Gary

10 July 2017