

Questions for the Minister

Asking questions seems to be a consistent part of exploring our faith at St John's. This wooden box used to be available in the church for people to drop the questions into for the Minister to attend to – very much the 'email' of its day! (Or, maybe as our understanding of authority shifts, this box could be considered the 'Google' of its day.) But what is most important is that questions are encouraged!

As we commemorate 500 years of The Reformation, it occurs to me that we have inherited this rich legacy of asking questions from restless agitators like Martin Luther and the various Reformers. They show us that asking questions is important for developing a mature faith. We may take this for granted as this is the 'sea in which we swim'. It is difficult to imagine a time when church structures and authorities were more restricting; when reading the Bible for yourself was not something most people were able to do. We, in the Reformed tradition, know that asking questions is not only permissible, but that it can actually help our faith grow. We can ask questions about God on the basis that God wants to be known. God chooses to be revealed in Jesus

Christ, who said: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

Asking questions is an important feature of the current Alpha Course being run at St John's. Each topic is presented with accompanying questions for discussion in small groups and, in addition, each participant is encouraged to ask their own questions about the Christian faith. Curious inquiry is the first response to the God who has reached out to each of us and is also fuel for the faith journey. Let us continue to encourage each other to always ask questions and seek truth together as we grow in our faith and love for God.



Allister Lane

Allister has been a minister at St John's since 2008. He is married to Naomi and they have four children His email is a.lane@stjohnsinthecity.org.nz

Growing Faith

One of the St John's goals is 'growing faith' This is a fairly abstract goal for many of us – how do we measure when or if we have grown faith? Is it more people at church on a Sunday? Or is it something more personal – do I 'feel' more Christian? And is it a goal that we will ever attain?

One of the ways we have been working on growing faith and making it more tangible is with the Alpha course that is currently running. I've been attending this course, along with about 60 others on a Sunday evening. The basic format of the course is to share a meal, then watch a video, breaking into small groups about three times during this to have a short discussion on a question posed in the video.

Thrive and EPIC (the youth groups) are both taking part and it's great to see so many younger people exploring what it means to be a Christian and what faith means. But it's not just for our youth.

We've got people at all ages and stages in their faith journey attending, and I for one, am learning a lot, being challenged, and hearing different perspectives. Often the first answer to a question is fairly glib and top of mind, but hearing what other people think can help us move deeper and really consolidate what we believe.

One thing that is definitely being reinforced is that faith is something we live, not just attending church on Sundays. I am lucky enough to work in an environment with at least three other Christians who are open (but not pushy) about their faith. Our workmates respect our beliefs and occasionally ask a few questions, which (with God's help) we answer and hopefully help them to start their faith journey too

even if that's not what they think they're doing!

Some of the Alpha participants, organisers, and helpers have been generous enough to share their reflections of the course so far, and these are in this issue of the Messenger. Of course, these sessions would not be possible without the many volunteers putting in their time and energy (and baking!) to help things run smoothly. Without the sub-committee who planned and organised the course, those who provided food and tidied up so we could concentrate on the course content, and those who volunteered to be hosts to help facilitate the discussions and make sure everyone is heard, we wouldn't be able to enjoy the comfortable, safe and relaxed atmosphere that is so conducive to learning and discussing what we believe. So I'd like to give a big thank you to all those who have helped in any way.

Once the course is finished, it would be easy to say 'Great! All good now thanks – faith growth achieved!' However, hopefully this will spur many of us to continue the never-ending journey of becoming closer to God and living out his Word. One way to get the support of others and continue to explore and be challenged on our faith journey is to join a small group. There are many groups available within St John's and these are outlined in the Bulletin each week. Even if you haven't been able to attend the course, you can still watch the first few videos in the series. Just head over to the St John's Facebook page and check out the links there. See if you can start a discussion!

Elizabeth Gibbs
Editor

Celebrating our volunteers

Behind the scenes of Alpha, I've been inspired to see a group of empowered volunteers in action. They're a mix of elders, congregational members, young, middle-aged, and senior people. Volunteers have worked to coordinate timetables, food, MCing, Alpha retreat, technology, welcoming, and group facilitation.

Most noticeably, this coordination has purposefully minimised the burden often placed on our Ministers to coordinate, leaving Ministers to minister and volunteers to champion the coordination. This is a healthy sign of a church body, where church members come together to contribute what they can and share their gifts to the wider group. It also speaks to our core church goals of encouraging participation and building community.

Something we often discuss at BGI is the importance and necessity of volunteers. Volunteers help us to stretch each dollar that is donated to make the biggest difference possible and ensures that the participants never feel that it's only paid people who care.

Alongside my work with St John's, BGI, and studying, I have also been volunteering part-time over the last two months to help coordinate National Volunteer Week, which works to recognise and celebrate New Zealand's approximately 1.2 million volunteers.

National Volunteer Week 2017 will be held from 18 to 24 June. This year's theme is 'Live, laugh, share – Volunteer' or 'Kia ringa hora: Me mahi t ao.' This positive message is about celebrating what volunteers bring to their communities. It is important to recognise volunteering and the place it has in keeping our communities strong and healthy.

For more information, visit
www.nationalvolunteerweek.nz

Dave Adams

National Volunteer Week
18-24 June 2017



Live, Laugh, Share
Volunteer

 Volunteering
NEW ZEALAND

#NVW2017

Alpha course reflections

I agreed to be an Alpha host for two reasons: because I wanted to do my bit for St John's, and because I thought it'd help me in my personal growth. And that's proved to be the case so far. Although there are few non-Christians attending, I can see the value for all participants in the course. As a host, I love the way the course is building a sense of community.

My favourite part is prayer with the hosts (about 12 of us, with Allister) during the planning meetings we've held and in our meetings before each session. It's a great reminder to me that the course — and our lives — are in God's hands, who works in mysterious ways in His own time.

Simon Chiaroni

Q?
03

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE DEATH OF
JESUS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS
LEADERS, MARTYRS OR WAR HEROES?



Alpha course has been fun and enjoyable. It has really made me think about God and the Bible a bit more in depth than I have otherwise. One of the best questions so far was probably 'if you could ask God one question, what would it be?' The food is also quite good.

Luke Gibbs
EPIC

The Alpha course, so far is a thought provoking series on Christianity and God. There has been awesome banter, great discussions and good, good food. It is a very friendly environment, and there is no pressure to have to answer questions if you don't feel comfortable.

Tom McKenzie-Bridle
Thrive

When I first moved to New Zealand 12 years ago, I was exploring a lot. Being by myself, I was free to discover a new country, new job, and new friends without any of my background, social or cultural expectations holding me back. Faith came into that mix. I came upon an Alpha course at a local church and decided to go along. It was a transformational experience for me, one which completely challenged my mind and my heart in how I thought about God and who Jesus is. Going on the course made me hungry to find out more about this Creator of the universe. I built a new relationship with God, one which has been transformational ever since.

I am forever grateful for the people who made that first Alpha course I went on happen....from the facilitators in my group, to the lovely people who made delicious meals each week, the guy who played those songs on his guitar at the beginning of each session, to those who accepted me as I was and didn't judge me with my 'difficult' questions. God bless them all.

As soon as I heard that we were thinking of running an Alpha course at St John's, I put my hand up straight away to help out. I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the organisation of it all, connecting with others who are helping out too and are passionate about its purpose, seeing the people turn up each week especially all those from the youth groups.

Although most of the course attendees are already church-goers (and the course is more targeted to non or new Christians), it's been very encouraging seeing us as a church thirsty to grow our own faith, cement our understanding of who Jesus is in our lives and what he did for us, and talk through challenging questions together as groups. We're all so different and God knows each and every one of us intimately, more than we can possibly understand. That He wants us to join with Him for His glory is beyond unbelievable!

Antonia Milkop



The Alpha course allows for the youth to interact with and build more of a relationship with other members of the St John's congregation. It's a good opportunity to hang with other youth, and it promotes interesting discussions around the questions posed in the video.

*Samuel Allen
Thrive*



I think of Alpha as being a bit like the wardrobe in the Narnia books.

The children found their way into the place where the clothes, the coats, the shoes, the hats, and perhaps an umbrella or two were all hanging ready for use; all necessary and functional for daily living, just as our faith needs to be.

But the children wondered about more, was there anything more? And so they went exploring...finding a place of wonderment.

We know that the Narnia stories are allegories, but the allegory fits Alpha too. The children started on a journey of discovery, just as those who join Alpha are able to do...and for those who have worn the clothes in the wardrobe for a very long time, to come and explore and find the wonderment of the more...there is more!

Janet Thomson

A key part of the Alpha course is learning to put your trust in Christ and to share your life with Him. For the organising team, this started with the first night when we weren't even sure how many, if any, would be there. It might have been just us, two or three, or twenty. It was all about being open to the possibility of the unknown and trusting God - not ourselves! In fact, we ended up with over fifty: young and old; women and men; people from all walks of life.

Some starting out on the journey, and others looking for refreshment along the way. And what a buzz there was in the room - a real energy and enthusiasm. The Spirit at work, perhaps! It is a real privilege and experience to share this time with a group that genuinely reflects the wonderful diversity of the body of Christ. Thank you to all for your encouragement and support.

Paul Ramsay

I originally came along to the Alpha course because of its placement in the week and it would be during the evening service slot, and I had never been to an Alpha evening, so it was luck as much as anything that spurred my decision.

It was a lucky decision though, since the course has been fantastic. The format of video, discussion, video, discussion, etc. has been excellent for fostering some really deep thought about the basic principles of Christianity. Going back through these basic principles has been amazing as well. I feel like I really am coming back to the heart of worship.

I definitely recommend the course to anyone interested in sharing thoughts and discussion around their faith, or for anyone interested in exploring Christianity.

Connor Driver-Burgess

Absolutely positively Aina

Conversation starting

Laughter

Overly interesting (so cool)

Phillling food

f **U**n times

Helpful

Religion

Awesome Banter

Surprising

*Aina Simpson
Thrive*

Educational

What's Happening at St John's?

June

4	Pentecost Combined Ecumenical Service at St Peter's, 7.30pm
7	Session Meeting
11	Quarterly Communion
18	Souper Sunday (Daw - Has)
21	Council Meeting
25	Alpha Course (last session)
29	Keeping Faith in Politics - Incarceration

July

2	All Age Worship
5	Session Meeting
9	Monthly Communion
	Souper Sunday (Hay - L)
19	Council Meeting
27	Keeping Faith in Politics - Immigration

August

2	Session Meeting
6	Souper Sunday (M - R)
13	Monthly Communion
	Church Service with Scots College - Glasgow House
16	Council Meeting
18-20	Presbytery Central Gathering
27	Founders Service Scots & QMC at 7pm
31	Keeping Faith in Politics - Honest Leadership in a Post-Truth World

Congratulations

Cecil Duff has reached the impressive milestone of 100 blood donations.

The NZ Blood Service estimates that these donations will have made a direct difference to the lives of more than 300 New Zealanders (fighters of cancer, accident victims, premature babies, and more).

Rose Rosniwaty graduated in May with a Master of Professional Accounting from VUW.

Allister and Naomi Lane celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary in May.

Aaron Azarel Honggowidjojo was baptised on 14 May 2017.

Jenny Adams has graduated with a Diploma of Web Development.

Samuel Allen raised over \$1,000 for cancer research from sponsors who wanted to see his head shaved.

Linda Shaw and Janet Davis have concluded many years serving children and their families through the St J's Kids ministry.