



Will Marshall (left) in discussion as part of Alpha run by Harbour Church

Discussing the big issues over pints and pizza

IT'S quite natural to talk through the big issues of life over a pint in the pub. So it makes sense that Harbour Church in Portsmouth holds an Alpha Course there.

Those who come to sessions in the Guildhall Village are welcomed with a free drink, pizza and fries. Then they watch the Alpha video and split into smaller discussion groups.

Harbour Church runs regular Alpha Courses, with one held in the pub each year designed for those aged 18-30, with a particular focus on students.

For Johan Kool, 19, it's a good way to discover more about the faith that half his family and his girlfriend believes in.

He said: "It's been helpful as I've always had reservations about faith. It's great to meet people who are open-minded and to speak about some of the fundamentals, as you don't always have time in normal life."

His girlfriend, Naomi Day, 19, said: "I've been a Christian all my life and I've done Youth Alpha. Coming to university is a different experience and now I'm more independent, I'm starting to ask different questions."

Emily Vale, 18, has been on Youth Alpha courses, and helps with children's groups at Harbour Church on a Sunday morning.

She said: "It's good to be in an environment where you can ask questions that you can't really ask on a Sunday. I've had some questions answered about the reliability of the Bible."

Will Marshall, 18, joined an Alpha Course last autumn which led him to make a Christian commitment. He's now helping to lead the current course.

"I knew all about Christianity, but had pushed back against it until Alpha changed my life," he said. "I made a commitment to Christ on the Alpha Saturday and now I'm involved with the 10am and 6pm services."

Another leader, Julie Kleivset, 22, said: "This is a good group that is asking great questions. I always come out of these courses with a new perspective. Being in the pub is more comfortable for those who aren't involved with church. Free drinks and food is a good way to encourage them to come."

Find out more about Alpha on www.harbourchurchuk.org

Youth Alpha led to new regular groups for teenagers

ONE of the ways we can help young people learn more about faith is via the Youth Alpha Course. It's a nine-week version of the Alpha Course, specifically designed for teenagers and young people.

Churches in Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent have used those resources and questions, and twice recently those small groups have morphed into youth groups that meet regularly.

The 'TGI Thursday' group was originally launched last year as a Youth Alpha. It now meets each Thursday at St Faith's, Lee-on-the-Solent, where 11-14 year olds share a meal together, ahead of discussion, craft or activity that helps to develop their faith.

Bishop Jonathan was invited as part of a series in which local Christians were quizzed about their faith and the difference it has made to their lives.

Isaac Mellors, 12, said: "It's good to have Christian friends, to pray together and to talk about faith."

And Daniel Chamberlain, 12, said: "It's nice to see people, and to expand your faith. It's good to learn about what the Bible says and how to care for each other."

One of the leaders, Rebecca Parrett, said: "We wanted to start a group for younger teenagers to do Youth Alpha. They've found the materials really helpful in setting a framework for the sessions and allowing them to explore their faith in a safe space.

"Some are from different churches, so sometimes they invite each other to their churches on a Sunday and each of them does a 'church tour'.

"We try to find creative ways to approach faith, so that might be discussion about how it affects real life, at home or school, or it could be doing some art or poetry. We recently asked the vicar, Paul, to talk to us about faith and science, because he's a scientist."

The group runs alongside a separate youth group for older



Bishop Jonathan meets young people at TGI Thursday

teenagers, called KFC - Kids for Christ - which also started as a Youth Alpha Course shared between St Faith's and St Mary's, Alverstoke, five years ago.

It was also originally for Years 7 and 8, but those attending now tend to be in Years 9 to 11 - between 14 and 16 years old. They meet on

a Wednesday evening in St Mary's parish centre, for Bible study, games, discussion and a meal from 5.30pm.

Members of both groups also help to lead the ecumenical High Tide West monthly youth services, and attend the annual Big Church Day Out. For details of the course, see www.alpha.org/youth

will deliver the presentation. Sometimes participants watch the specially-created videos hosted by the Rev Nicky Gumbel, who developed the Alpha Course at Holy Trinity Brompton.

St Margaret's Southsea started running Alpha courses almost as soon as they moved into their church building in 2018 and have run at least one each year since, including online courses throughout Covid. In 2022, they ran two courses simultaneously, one for an Iranian group with subtitles in Farsi. Both groups joined together for an away day at All Saints Catherington, with one of the group interpreting.

Course leader Stephen Dawson said: "Attendance tends to be in the high teens or early twenties and a number of people have come to faith as a result. People come with many questions, enjoying the invitation to 'ask anything, there is no question



Participants take part in 'Reveal' at St Thomas Church, Bedhampton

too simple, or too hostile'. Alpha is good at allowing people to explore the fundamentals of the Christian faith, as well as being an excellent evangelistic tool."

At Cosham and Wymering, they try to run at least one Alpha course every year. The vicar, the Rev Amy Webb, said: "Sharing a meal together over a number of weeks

helps to build up friendships and participants feel more comfortable to ask questions and share their opinions and experiences."

In Bedhampton parish, there's another entry point to join the church community. They run 'Reveal' - a drop-in discussion every fortnight. Those who take part can do so before, after or instead of an

Alpha Course. It also involves food, input and discussion. The rector, the Rev Max Cross, developed the concept as a curate at St Mary Magdalen, Sheet.

"It's aimed for those on the edge, who are considering faith," he said. We share some food, listen to a presentation, talk or video, and then discuss it around our tables. We might finish with a prayer or some worship or silence.

"It's designed for those on a journey, who stay with us for as long as they need. It could be a halfway house between Alpha and Sunday morning, or between Alpha and a life group. They might stay on this for three weeks, three months or a year, depending on their next step. We started it in 2023 because we had a group that had completed an Alpha course, but weren't quite ready for the next thing."

More details on www.bedhampton.church/reveal and www.alpha.org.