



- **Alpha:** Our Alpha Course finished last month – read about it below
- **Welcome to Worship event:** “Seek first the kingdom” update
- **Come to the Feast:** exciting event coming next term – see overleaf
- **Networking:** what has been happening?

For the past 3 months, over 80 people have been participating in the Alpha Course held in Avon Stour Pastoral Area. Overall about 120 people have been involved,

including leaders and helpers. On Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June, everyone involved was invited to an Alpha Celebration Evening to bring the Alpha Course to an end by sharing stories of their Alpha journey. It was amazing! God has clearly been working in many wonderful ways in people's lives through Alpha, some very powerful, moving and life-changing. This applies whether they were already regular church-going Catholics or those with little or no connection to a Christian community.

So many commented on the new friends made and the sense of love, friendship, support, community and belonging, both in the small groups and the large group. Some said they were given new hope/purpose for their lives and many had existing faith strengthened and deepened. Significant numbers moved to being open for the first time to a personal relationship with Jesus. Some had powerful insights and experiences of the Holy Spirit during prayer ministry and silent prayer time (some life-changing).



Many are now keen to take up the offer of further opportunities for growth and sharing, whether it be exploring the faith and continuing community in house-groups through our forthcoming 'Come to the Feast' initiative, gathering for praise, worship, prayer and reflection in our 'Welcome to Worship' evenings, helping to run further Alpha Courses in their local areas to bring others to encounter Jesus through the Holy Spirit as they have done, or other ways.

We had a wonderful team of people from across all six churches in our Pastoral Area helping to make it possible in so many ways, and the sense of shared purpose, mission and support has been powerful, unifying and exciting.

### ***Some comments from a few of those who took part:***

“a great boost to the practice of my faith”; “I was feeling lost and have found the course has helped me feel considerably more positive and has also helped me to understand more about the bible and in particular the Holy Spirit”; “given me back my enthusiasm... I feel invigorated”; “has changed my direction in life... has given me a purpose. I am now attending church regularly every Sunday, and have joined a Bible group”; “has given me the confidence to be more open with friends and family about my faith”; “Alpha is special because it is a place where you can talk about things you usually don't talk about... made me open the door to Jesus just a bit more.”

**THANK YOU!** to everyone who helped in any way, including all those from across the Pastoral Area who contributed to our Meal Sponsorship fund, which helped enormously!



## Welcome to Worship

On Tuesday 29th June, about 100 people from across the Pastoral Area and beyond gathered in St Joseph's Church, Christchurch, for another **Welcome to Worship** event. The theme was **"Seek first the kingdom"** (Matt 6:33) and the evening consisted of praise and worship, prayer, Scripture reading and a short talk/reflection exploring the meaning of "kingdom", why it is necessary to "seek" and what this might mean in practice, and the challenge of putting this "first" in our lives. There followed an extended opportunity to respond silently and prayerfully in a range of ways: personal reflection on different aspects of the theme stimulated and challenged by a series of beautifully prepared and presented 'prayer station' displays and resources; a practical act of repentance and commitment using rough stones and smooth gems; listening to reflective Christian music; and receiving individual prayer ministry.

This event was a moving and powerful spiritual experience, as indicated by some of the comments made by those participating, such as: "I feel like I've had a mini retreat", "thank you for the wonderful prayer and worship evening", "I could not believe I was only there one and a half hours. I gained from the evening as much as a whole weekend in the past", "prayerful and uplifting", "I felt spoken to", ...



This was our third Welcome to Worship event and we aim to hold one per term in different churches across the Area. Anyone is welcome to join us, so keep an eye out for details of the next one!



## Come to the Feast

*What is the Mass really about and why do Catholics say it is so important?*

*How do you answer when someone asks you:*

*"Why do you do...?" or "Why do you say...?"*

*How can we deepen our understanding and experience of coming to Mass?*

Throughout **November 2017**, the whole Pastoral Area is invited to explore the Mass together – broken down into 5 sections

**\*\* Special focus at all Sunday Masses \*\***

**\*\* Local 'house groups' to go deeper \*\***

**\*\* Youth Events \*\***

WATCH OUT FOR FURTHER DETAILS including **TASTER SESSIONS** in September

## RECENT NETWORK EVENTS



These draw together all those from each of our six churches who are involved in the same ministry or activity to meet, pray and reflect together, share and discuss good practice, experience, resources, difficulties and ideas, clarify understanding of the role, see where cross-parish links and joint working/pooling of resources may be possible and identify and plan for formation/training needs.

### Welcoming & Hospitality Network Event

*(October 2016, in Southbourne & Christchurch)*

Helping everyone feel they are welcome and belong is central to our mission and we all have a part to play, so this event focused on what we do and how we could improve - as a result changes have been made, including the introduction of a welcome ministry team in a parish where none existed.

### Local Pastoral Councils Network Event

*(November 2016, in Fordingbridge)*

This was the second gathering of LPC members from across all six churches and was again a very valuable time of sharing good practice, experience and mutual support, as well as keeping up to date.

### Further Network Events

Such events will continue on an ongoing basis. The next one will be for all those involved in the Liturgy of the Word – dates to be announced in due course.

Pastoral Area Facebook Group: search in Facebook for **"Avon Stour Pastoral Area"** and click **"Join"**

Pastoral Area website: [www.avonstourpastoralarea.org](http://www.avonstourpastoralarea.org)

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