

# NEWS

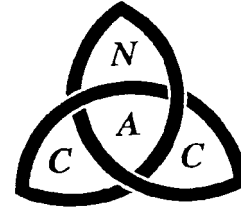
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# BRIEFS

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## THE ALPHA PROGRAM IS HELPING CHURCHES GROW!

The Canadian Edition of *Alpha News* makes bold claims for church growth in Canada for churches that use this unique Bible Study and Outreach Program. A survey conducted by the Alpha Organization shows that 75% of those responding have experienced church growth as a result of sponsoring the Alpha Program. The survey was sent electronically to 1300 of the 1631 Canadian Course Administrators of Alpha, to which 480 (37 percent) responded. 98.5% responded that they were satisfied that the Alpha Courses met their expectations. 75 of the 480 responding churches showed signs of GROWTH! Reports came from Mennonite Brethren, Christian Reformed, Roman Catholic, Missionary Alliance and United Churches.

64% of those who had run one to five courses reported high satisfaction. The survey confirmed that those who followed the "Alpha Recipe" of training their leaders and serving a weekly meal were more satisfied with the results than those who "short cut" the recommended process.

Small (50 members and less) and rural churches were as satisfied as the larger churches of 100 to 300 members. The most satisfied province was PEI, where there are numerous small and rural churches -- 100% of their respondents were very satisfied. An estimated 6000 people 'came to faith in Christ' on an Alpha Course in Canada in 2001.

This information about ALPHA goes hand in hand with the research Reginald Bibby has recently published (*Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*), where he attests to the fact that 81% of Canadian respondents believe in God (including 55% of those who never attend Church). Alpha is a great way for these inquiring people to investigate Christian Faith and to satisfy their spiritual needs.

This winter there will be over 1800 Alpha Courses offered in every Province and Territory of Canada. To locate a course near you, contact the Alpha Canada Office at 1-800-743-0899 or email [info@alphacanada.org](mailto:info@alphacanada.org).

Try the program and pray for YOUR local church to grow!

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**THAT DEADLY "E" WORD!** Lester's piece about the Alpha Program reminds us that telling the Good News is (and has always been) an essential part of the Christian package. But, some say, isn't that *Evangelism*? Doesn't doing that make you an "*Evangelical*"? And isn't there something dubious - or ridiculous - about *Evangelicals*?

Well, practically speaking, what does that term mean? Here's a brief working definition:

- evangelicals are people who believe the world's hope of salvation rests solely with Jesus;
- they believe the Bible is *God-given*, not man-made, and because of that it is our most reliable reference manual for living;
- they believe all Christians have a duty to tell others about the Good News;
- they believe they are called to loving service of their neighbours in need.

To the Christian ear, none of that sounds strange, but somehow the word has picked up all sorts of negative vibes - probably because some "evangelism" has put people off with its aggressiveness. It doesn't have to be like that though. For instance, you have to do considerable violence to the Gospels if you try to present Jesus as some sort of hard-sell, foot-in-the-door salesman for God. The Alpha Program is a very good example of how we can do His sort of gentle but uncompromising evangelism. (John Stackhouse, of Regent College, a self-declared evangelical and quite capable of being feisty about his faith, argues for this gentler, less pushy approach in his new book, *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today*, OUP.)

**Famously Getting It Wrong #1:** Late in his career, Voltaire (1694-1778), seminal thinker, philosopher, historian, etc., etc., predicted that Christianity would be swept out of existence within 100 years. --- But 200 years later, Christians, at close to 2 billion, form the world's biggest religious group. Voltaire was as smart as they come, but he didn't make allowance for the "God factor".

**Famously Getting It Wrong #2:** When arguing forcefully for evangelism to India, William Carey (1761-1834), a self-educated shoemaker (and eventually a missionary), was ordered by a pastor, "Young man, sit down, sit down! You are an *enthusiast!* When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me." --- But it is through ordinary people, like Carey (and you and me), that God most often chooses to work. He does the extraordinary with the ordinary. So, do we go with God's flow, or, like that pastor, do we get in his way?

## Snappers

- The UCC has announced the development of a "new statement of faith", and it has called for wide input. We believe it is critical that the church's orthodox voice is heard, and so our sessions (or their equivalents) will be receiving suggestions as to points they might make when completing the introductory questionnaire.
- The NACC has had its logo made up into attractive pins. The logo (see the top of the first page, minus the letters) is based on an old Celtic symbol for the Trinity. To order in quantity, contact Jack Scott, our Treasurer, at [jasscott1@rogers.com](mailto:jasscott1@rogers.com).
- A reminder: each year the NACC asks its congregations to set aside the second Sunday in June (this year, it's the 8th) as "NACC Sunday", re-covenanting themselves as members of the Alliance, praying for its work, and taking a special offering for it.
- The Central Ontario Region is hosting this year's NACC AGM. Delegates from across the country will be converging on Alderwood United Church (Toronto), which has kindly agreed to let us disrupt its life May 1-3. Our theme speaker will be Connie den Bok. It's going to be great! Please consider dropping in.

**OUCH!** Christian comic, Jeff Allen: "I think teenagers are God's revenge on mankind. See how *you* like creating someone in your own image who denies your existence."