

# Using local press to promote your launch event

## CONTENTS:

Page 1	Introduction
Page 2	What makes a story for the press?
Page 3 -4	How to get a story into the press
Page 5	What goes into a press pack?
Page 6 -7	Appendix 1: Press Release template
Page 8	Appendix 2: Photography – getting the right shot
Page 9 -11	Appendix 3: Examples of local press

## INTRODUCTION

**Public Relations (PR)** is a planned effort to develop awareness and understanding between an organisation and the public by arranging opportunities for exposure in the media. This could be through articles published in local, regional or national newspapers, magazines, radio or television.

### The value of local PR is enormous:

- The value of editorial is perceived to be worth 3 times more than advertising because it is being endorsed by a third party whereas an advert can be seen as bias because it is 'selling yourself.' Though advertising should not be underestimated; it raises awareness and is even more effective if it has editorial coverage too.
- People are actively interested in what is happening in their area. They are likely to seek out and read articles, posters and advertisements which are relevant to them.

As you do not pay the media to cover your story, there is no guarantee that it will appear in exactly the way that you intend, it is therefore important to prepare your story and press release and to develop a good relationship with the press.

## MEDIA ENQUIRIES

If you are contacted by a national journalist with questions about Alpha, please refer them to **Mark Elsdon-Dew in the Communications office at Alpha International on 0845 644 7533.**

We appreciate that you will be able to answer questions from local and regional journalists about Alpha in your area. If there are any questions that you cannot answer, please refer them to Mark Elsdon-Dew.

## 1. WHAT MAKES A STORY FOR THE PRESS?

It is worthwhile aiming for press coverage at the beginning of September because this is when the national advertising campaign begins to gain maximum impact.

The press are interested in local stories and particularly if they are taking part in a nationwide initiative. They look for stories that are topical, original, have a human interest element (such as a story of a life changed or a well-known local figure supporting it) and are visually interesting. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television may come to a story from slightly different angles but the following rules generally apply:

### What a newspaper and magazine editor is looking for:

- Groups of churches/people doing things together.
- Good local personal stories.
- A local angle that relates to your area but links with what's happening nationally.
- Something readers who don't go to church will find interesting.
- A good picture with a caption – this makes an enormous difference (see Appendix 2: Photography – getting the right shot).
- Speedy and reliable access to the right contacts.
- Attributable facts and quotes. The current statistics for the Alpha course are available at [alphafriends.org/facts-figures](http://alphafriends.org/facts-figures)
- Celebrity endorsement of the Alpha course, e.g. Bear Grylls, Ugo Monye and endorsement from Church Leaders, particularly local Diocese supporters.

### What a regional TV news editor wants:

- A good moving picture opportunity (see Appendix 2: Photography – getting the right shot).
- Possible interviews – human interest and fun, imaginative stories.

### Report local personal stories:

- Identify local people who have a particularly good story to tell in relation to the Alpha course and how it changed their life.
- Obtain permission to give their details to the local media for interview. It is helpful to have them available for interview at an Alpha launch event.
- Work out the key messages to convey in the interview – spend some time with these people prior to the interview helping them to prepare. See Interviews with the Media below.
- Always try to accompany them to the interview itself.

## 2. HOW TO GET A STORY INTO THE PRESS

Be proactive – don't assume that the press will know about your Alpha event or course or that they will approach you for a story. This does not mean that your story is not newsworthy. It is estimated that 50% of stories that appear in the local press are the result of people sending in the stories.

**Get to know your local press.** Research the publication's reader profile, the area they cover and the types of stories they report on. You can find information on your local newspapers on the Internet, for example, the Newspaper Society's web site on [adweb.co.uk](http://adweb.co.uk) has a breakdown of circulation and penetration. Try to build a personal relationship with local press contacts including reporters, picture editors and news editors and then let them know when you have a story of interest.

**Send a press release.** A press release is a one or two-page summary of your story. A press release template is available in **Appendix 1** for you to adapt locally. You can send the press release together with your press pack.

- Ensure the press release is sent to the right person (telephone the publication to ask the name of the person to whom it should be sent).

### Make phone contact to follow-up the story

- Don't call during busy times, e.g. right before going to press. It is best to contact editorial offices between the hours of 10am-1pm and 2pm-3pm.
- Ring the television and radio stations first (if applicable), followed by the dailies and lastly the weeklies. If you are inviting them to an event, the department looking at future events in TV is sometimes called 'Forward Planning.' If you know the name of a journalist who may be particularly interested in your story, ask to speak with them. Otherwise, approach the news editor.
- Don't assume the journalist received your press release as it can get lost in a busy environment. If the journalist is not familiar with your press release don't be disheartened, simply explain the story briefly, offer to fax or email it again and follow up again in a few hours or a day after re-faxing.
- Explain the story simply and concisely, emphasising why you think it's newsworthy (remember to think locally). If the journalist expresses no interest, thank them and try another publication.
- If you can't get through to the journalist you want, don't expect them to return your call. Say you will phone back – gentle persistence will work, but never persist to the point of being a nuisance.

- Don't forget picture desks either. They often operate with one camera person only. They will take a picture and the paper will then rely on you for the follow up information. Send invitations to the 'Picture Desk – Forward Planning' to ensure you get every opportunity for someone to cover your event.

## Invite the press to your Alpha Launch Event

For information on how to run an Alpha Launch Event visit [alphafriends.org/running/invitation](http://alphafriends.org/running/invitation)

- ✓ **Four weeks prior to the event** – identify the local press you want to invite
- ✓ **Two weeks prior to the event** – email, post or fax an invitation to your event and a press release. Keep it simple; give details of what is being launched, the day, the time, the location (with directions of how to get there and parking) and the timetable of the event. Give details of any local figures or celebrities attending (provide biographies of personalities if available) and let them know if there will be an opportunity to do an interview.
- ✓ **Three-to-four days prior to the event** – ring the press you have invited to check it is in their diary and try to get the name of the person who will be attending. Don't be discouraged if they do not appear to have received your invitation, offer to fax or email it and explain the details on the phone.
- ✓ **On the day** - make sure that your event is easy to find and clearly sign-posted. Designate a member of your team to welcome the press, someone who can host them and answer any questions they may have. Ensure they are introduced to the people you want them to speak to.
- ✓ Give journalists the opportunity to interview the speaker and those giving their testimonies. Always ask permission first from the interviewees and ensure they are properly briefed.
- ✓ **Provide a photo** or moving picture opportunities for television to encourage editors to use the material (see Appendix 2).
- ✓ **After the event** – phone the press who attended and ask if they need more information or would like to use any of your photographs of the event. Be sure to send a press release and your photographs to the local media who were unable to attend.

### 3. WHAT GOES INTO A PRESS PACK?

It should include:

- ☑ **Contact details** of your spokesperson for the press to contact with enquiries.
- ☑ **A Local Alpha fact sheet** with details of how long the Alpha course has been running locally, how many churches and denominations are running the Alpha course, how many people have done the Alpha course, what events are planned, how Alpha has affected your church or community and other interesting information.
- ☑ **Details of Alpha courses & Alpha launch events** planned for the area and how the Alpha course has grown in your church/area/region, Provide interesting statistics.
- ☑ **The 2011 advertising image and Alpha branding**, so people recognise your Alpha course is part of the national initiative. As well as the Invitation creative image, this also includes the wording 'The Alpha Course' in black Trajan font accompanied by the website **alpha.org** and the Alpha logo – it works well to have these elements in a white band across the bottom. Graphics can be downloaded from **alphafriends.org** or email [ukinvitation@alpha.org](mailto:ukinvitation@alpha.org)
- ☑ **A brief summary of potential interviewees** with interesting personal Alpha-related stories – always gain their permission beforehand
- ☑ Captioned **photographs** (post event) or details of where they can take a good photograph at the event

## Appendix 1: Alpha Invitation Press Release Template

[DATE]

[HEADING] - Insert the key feature of your story. It could be one of the following:

- [NUMBER OF CHURCHES] **CHURCHES IN [YOUR AREA] JOIN FORCES IN NATIONAL ALPHA CAMPAIGN**
- **EVERYONE IN [YOUR AREA] IS INVITED TO DRINKS / SUPPER [INSERT YOUR LAUNCH EVENT DETAILS] AT [INSERT YOUR UNUSUAL VENUE] TO LAUNCH THE ALPHA COURSE IN [YOUR AREA] THIS AUTUMN**
- [NAME OF LOCALLY KNOWN SPEAKER] **TO SPEAK AT EVENT IN [INSERT YOUR EVENT VENUE] TO LAUNCH THE ALPHA COURSE IN [YOUR AREA] THIS AUTUMN**
- [NAME OF RECENT ALPHA GUEST] **TELLS OF HOW THEIR LIFE HAS CHANGED THROUGH COMING ON AN ALPHA COURSE.**

Over [xxx] churches in [your area] are set to run Alpha courses this Autumn and will be [insert advertising activities planned] inviting people to launch events in [specify where: churches, homes, halls, pubs and restaurants]. The launch events are designed to introduce local people to the Alpha course, which provides an opportunity to explore the meaning of life. The course is free and open to everyone.

2.8 million people across the UK are estimated to have taken part in local Alpha courses which are now running at over 8,000 churches of all denominations.

Churches in [your area] are joining in a major national advertising campaign this September using posters, postcards, invitations, web banners and newspaper advertisements. The design of the advertising is an inviting statement, 'The meaning of life is \_\_\_\_\_. ' and the call to action is 'fill in the blanks at alpha.org.'

Local initiatives will be supported by a national advertising campaign which will launch in September 2011 across the nation.

The campaign is to form the basis of the UK's biggest Christian advertising initiative this year. This is the fourteenth annual initiative in the UK and is titled 'The Alpha Invitation' emphasising the relaxed nature of the course, which is primarily for those who do not attend church regularly.

Alpha is already one of the most widely-known Christian initiatives in the country. Over 23% of British adults can identify Alpha as a Christian course (MORI, October 2010).

The Alpha Invitation forms part of the church's plan to reverse the decline in attendance over the past twenty years. Only 7.5% of the population now regularly attends church, but many churches running Alpha report that their congregations are growing as a result and some are seeking bigger premises to hold these growing congregations.

The Alpha course is a practical and contemporary introduction to the Christian faith and provides a relaxed and informal opportunity for participants to make up their own mind about Christianity. It is constructed around one meeting a week for ten weeks and has become increasingly successful in the UK over the last 10 years.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams says of Alpha 'What Alpha has to offer is a unique mixture of Christian content and Christian style. I recommend it ...as a very special tool of evangelism.'

The Rev'd Nicky Gumbel, who presents the Alpha material, said: 'We have heard so many wonderful stories of people – many of them young – whose lives have been changed by God through the Alpha course in churches of all denominations throughout the country.'

**ENDS**

**For further information, contact: [local contact] in [your area], [telephone number, including mobile]**

Mark Elsdon-Dew in the Communications office at Alpha International on 0845 644 7533, or visit the website [alpha.org/media-room](http://alpha.org/media-room)

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

Devised in the UK, the Alpha course is supported by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and by leaders of all the main denominations. Alpha is a 15-session practical introduction to the Christian faith designed primarily for non-churchgoers and new Christians and is being run by churches of every denomination. Most courses take place in the evening with a meal followed by a talk central to the Christian faith. After the talk, participants divide into groups of about ten or twelve people to discuss the talk in an environment where each person is free to ask or express whatever they wish.

Since 1992 the Alpha course has seen astonishing growth, both in the United Kingdom and internationally, from just five courses running in the UK in 1992, to over 8,000 registered Alpha courses in the UK and 55,000 courses worldwide in over 164 countries. It is estimated that 16 million people have now been on the course worldwide.

**The growth of Alpha worldwide**

The below is an example only, to insert up to date stats please visit: <http://www.alphafriends.org/facts-figures>

Year	Number of registered Alpha courses worldwide	Estimated cumulative number of guests
1992	5	
1993	200	4,600
1994	750	25,000
1995	2,500	105,000
1996	5,000	360,000
1997	6,500	760,000
1998	10,500	1.3 million
1999	14,200	2 million
2000	17,000	2.8 million
2001	18,000	3.8 million
2002	21,400	4.7 million
2003	27,000	5.7 million
2004	29,051	6.8 million
2005	29,580	8 million
2006	33,500	9.5 million
2007	35,092	Over 11 million* (est)

## Appendix 2: Photography – getting the right shot

**Local Media love pictures** with a clear local angle, human interest, action, humour or famous people. Try to be as creative as possible when you are organising your event to provide good picture opportunities for the local press. If you are inviting both newspapers and television to your event, your picture opportunity should be interesting to both; newspapers need something which can be captured in a single shot – this might be an action shot; television needs a moving picture with some action (e.g. preparing for a launch event, unveiling a billboard, dropping off invitations, putting up posters, letting off hundreds of balloons, interviews).

- ‘A picture is worth a thousand words’ – so tell a story with your picture. Pictures in a newspaper are easy for the reader to take in and even if people don’t read the accompanying article, a well-captioned picture can have a great deal of impact.
- Keep an eye on your local papers and have a look at the sample newspaper articles in **Appendix 3**.
- Choose a suitable location for photography before the photographer arrives.
  - Is everyone who should be included in the photograph present?
  - Will they be on hand when the photographer arrives?
  - Is everyone dressed to convey the right image?
  - Do you have all the props (e.g. posters, balloons etc.) to hand?
- Make it look as natural as possible and *always* include people in the shot. Rather than photographing a row of people standing still and looking at the camera, bring the picture to life by encouraging everyone to be jolly. At the time it may seem unnatural to produce this kind of shot however, it creates a natural looking picture when used in a paper.
- Keep the purpose of the picture in mind, i.e. are there any props such as posters or promotional material you could use?
- For audience shots, zoom in and pan out – pick out people having fun.
- Show readers or viewers what they wouldn’t normally see for themselves. Take pictures of unusual events/situations, with the exception of pictures of prayer and worship as these can sometimes be used out of context.
- Caption your picture with a description of the content of the photograph. Always name people from left to right and remember to include a contact name and telephone number for further information.
- Don’t permit media to take photographs or film people worshipping or praying as these can be an invasion of privacy.

# Church takes Bible to the bar

By **JOHN SIDDL**

**S**OUTHPORT residents are to be asked "Is This It?" as two courses exploring faith commence.

Christ Church on Lord Street is holding Alpha courses in and out of the church in a bid to find out "If God did exist, what would you ask?"

The first course begins on Thursday, March 12, from 7pm at Christ Church, where entry is free.

A light meal will be served before the group debate topics including 'Who is Jesus?' and the eternal question; 'Is there more to life than this?'

Organisers are also bringing the Bible to the bar by holding a second Alpha group in Lloyds Bar, Lord Street, starting on Friday, March 13, 10.30am.

The Alpha coordinator, Jennifer

## New course to ask questions of faith

Higham, said: "People are free to come and share their views or just simply to listen to the views of others.

"It's a great opportunity to ask all those questions about God you've always wanted to discuss.

"We started a course in Lloyds so people who wouldn't be comfortable joining us in a church could participate.

"Again, it's a great opportunity to come along to discuss and discover what we really believe about God and his relevance today, without having to go anywhere near a church."

The Alpha course is run by many different church denominations all over the world.

Over two million people in the UK and 11 million people worldwide have now attended an Alpha course.

Christ Church leader, Nick Tissot, added: "We have held these courses for a number of years and they continue to be a great way of exploring, debating and developing faith.

"Stepping into a church can be intimidating to some people, so we've moved somewhere more informal.

"The management at Lloyds Bar have been extremely kind in letting us use their premises and we are very grateful."

Alpha courses have been described by many as "an opportunity to see what Christianity is about without having to commit to it".

Mr Tissot added: "A lot of people who attend Alpha courses ask questions like: 'If God exists, then why do bad things happen?' and 'Who is Jesus?' which we try and answer.



● Members of Christ Church are to hold an Alpha course at Lloyds Bar on Lord Street next week



■ Husband and wife Jane and Simon Hughes enjoy a quiet moment together

## Wisdom of Kent's TV dad

» A Kent father who hit the headlines when he appeared in Channel 4's documentary *The Family* is to share his experiences in a series of talks.

Father-of-four Simon Hughes, from Harbledown, near Canterbury, is to speak at the first session of a course organised by the City Church, in Canterbury.

Simon, 44, whose family was filmed for 100 hours for last year's fly-on-the-wall programmes, described his role in the family as "cook, taxi, painter and decorator".

Simon, himself a Christian, said

he was also "the giver of cuddles and the one who has to pretend to be in charge".

His talk - *Is This It?* - is the first of 10 Christian Alpha course talks to be held at Costa Coffee, Canterbury High Street and it will take place on Wednesday, January 28 at 7.30pm.

Free coffee and pastries will be served. For details, phone 01227 455440. All welcome.

Over four months the Hughes family starred in eight hours of television as more than 20 cameras captured their every move in a bid to give an insight into family life.



## Tough talking trio reveal Henfield's strongest man

by Ralph Miller

A TRIO of strong men came to Henfield to talk about their faith.

Three members of the Tough Talk team gave power-lifting displays and told their 'moving' life stories to a crowd at the Community Church, Henfield, on Sunday January 18.

The three men all explained how finding Christianity had helped them rebuild their lives after being in tragic situations.

"It was fantastic - we had a really good evening and a really good response from the crowds who gathered," said organiser Nick Megreth.

"It was certainly very moving and the people that were there were very, challenged listening to them."

She added: "The Tough Talk team are focusing a lot on going into prisons all over the country and talking to guys and telling their stories in the prisons."

"It was great we actually managed to get them to come - we would definitely have them back."

In front of a crowd of 150 people team member Simon Finchbeck told the audience how he'd left the police force after being charged with violent assault on another police officer.

Mr Finchbeck later became a Christian after seeing the change it had made in a friend



Student Josh McKie won the tie break for the Henfield's strongest man competition.

who he had first met chasing over the terraces during crowd violence.

He has now been reunited with the wife and children he previously walked out on.

Adams MacMillan told the story of how he had become a car thief and lost his job through smoking cannabis.

After picking up a Bible he began attending a church that he had previously broken into.

Martyn Parrish, an ex-heroin addict and the team's third member, demonstrated his strength by lifting gradually increasing weights, eventually reaching 250kg.

The event also incorporated a Henfield's strongest man competition in which the Tough Talk team invited members of the audience to join the weightlifting.

This was eventually won by 19-year-old Josh McKie of

Henfield, who managed to hold up two mallets horizontally for nearly a minute.

The evening ended with a short presentation about the Alpha course which starts today (January 30) at Henfield Youth Club.

If you would like more information about the Community Church Henfield or about the Alpha Course, call 01273 491526 or email [alpha@communitychurchhenfield.org](mailto:alpha@communitychurchhenfield.org)

# major's faith in battle

by Maxwell Kusi-Obodum  
■ mkusiobodum@berkamedia.co.uk

WAR hero Major General Tim Cross CBE has exclusively told the *Midweek* how his faith gave him the confidence to lead his troops into battle zones.

The retired British Army officer, who fought in Northern Ireland, the Balkans and the Middle East, was the guest of honour at Greyfriars Church, Friar Street for its introductory Alpha Course dinner. The course is a global initiative introducing people to Christianity in a sociable and relaxed environment.

He joined 80 guests for a meal prepared by an army of church volunteers, then led a talk about how Christianity was a crucial "moral component" of today's world and how his faith had encouraged him to fight for justice.

Maj Gen Cross, who retired in 2006 and now works as the House of Commons Defence Committee advisor, spoke to the *Midweek* on Saturday, September 26 before his speech.

He said: "Leadership is a big part of the Army and my faith has given me the confidence and enabled me to know who I am. Leadership must start from a firm foundation and it's only when you know yourself that you can command other people.

"Alpha links intellect, the mind and emotions and opens up a spiritual debate which allows people to explore issues which are normally beyond everyday experiences.

"It's not just appealing to your mind and body it's appealing to your soul and spirit. It's a safe environment where people can listen, discuss and explore these issues."

Meanwhile Zimbabwean fast bowler Henry Olonga, now a singer, performed and sold copies of his latest CD at the church on Sunday.

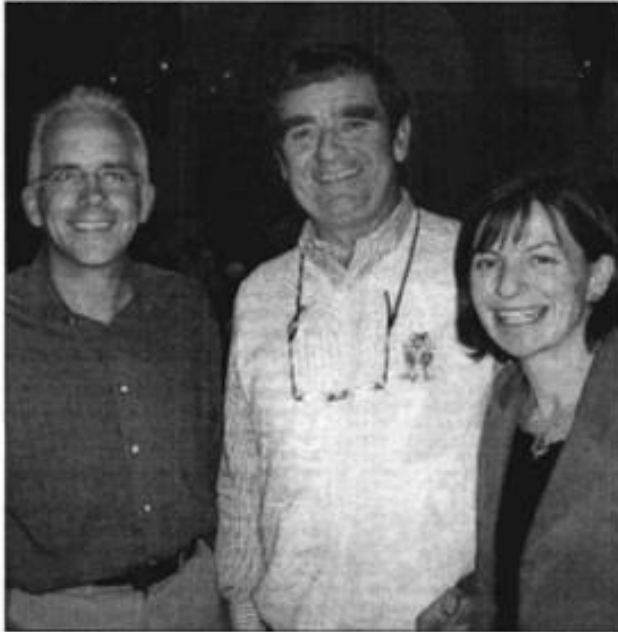
The devout Christian gained international recognition when he was arrested in 2003 for daring to speak out against dictator President Robert Mugabe.

Greyfriars Alpha spokeswoman Sue Wilmot, a friend of Maj Gen Cross, said she was "honoured" to welcome both men to the dinner.

More than 30 churches across Reading are hosting the course where

guests of all faiths and nationalities meet weekly for a meal and discussion. Greyfriars programme begins at La Fontana restaurant in Caversham Road today (Wednesday) from 7.15pm.

Contact 0118 951 6705 or email alpha@greyfriars.org.uk



**In the frontline:** Major General Tim Cross CBE, centre with Greyfriars church curate Pats Dolphin, left, and Alpha spokeswoman Sue Wilmot.

## Alpha course explores life

RESIDENTS in Falmouth and Helston are being invited to explore the meaning of life with an Alpha course.

The course is being led by members of KCM Falmouth parish church of King Charles.

It is a chance for people to find out how the Christian faith can relate to life in 2009.

The course takes place on Monday evenings and a meal is provided.

Telephone Jan on 01326 317750 or Steve on 01326 319141 for details.