

SUNNINGDALE ALPHA INVITATION LAUNCH

VILLAGE OUTREACH & ALPHA STREET PARTY

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1. What happened at your event?

- We held a community-wide street party as a combined outreach and Alpha launch event.
- This is our third year running this type of event. In the first year about 500 people attended, the second year, 750 and last year the number reached 1,000 people.
- It has been a terrific blessing for us a church and has widened our footprint with the community enormously.
- The key to the event is that it is free!
- Last year we fed everyone with hog-roast, barbeque, salad and pudding at a cost of just £2.50 per person.
- Holding an annual event has helped to build a sense of trust and love across all ages in our community.
- This year we decided to include a week of activities called, *Party 'round the Parish*.
- We did this jointly with the Parish Council to help them feel less defensive of the way we, as a church, are now choosing to engage with the community.
- This year we will be looking to cater for 1,250-1,500 people!



2. Why did you decide to run an Alpha launch event?

Alpha has been at the core of our outreach activities for the last ten years. In a community of about 4,000 we have seen our church numbers grow from 60-90 to 250-400. The launch event is about giving our whole church a chance to gain ownership of our outreach activities. We had over 100 people on the volunteer

team at our Street Party last year. Many of these people wouldn't dream of 'evangelising,' yet feel really proud to be part of this initiative.

3. How did you get a team together?

Many of our congregation have been through the Alpha course and they are keen to help if we can give them specific tasks to do. For example, they can make a salad or a pudding, help on the barbecue team or man the gates. The key is to communicate with your volunteers well in advance to help them feel part of the team and well-informed.

4. How did you manage the finances for your event?

God has been generous and gracious to us and we felt we should be equally generous and gracious to our community. The £2,500 - £3,000 cost has been built into our outreach budget and met with general giving. This level of expenditure is approved by the PCC and represents about 1/3 of our budget for outreach. *Party 'round the Parish* is self-financing and consists of about 15 events, two or three of which have an admission cost and any surplus is put into a trust-fund for local community care activities.

5. How did you promote your event?

We have used banners, advertising in the parish magazine, council publicity and the internet to raise awareness. We also leafleted invitations to households in our village. We could do more but the cost of colour printing is quite high. I am hopeful that we can improve our church printing facilities as some of our costs have been borne by individuals.



6. What were the main hurdles?

Mainly communicating the vision & organisational requirements for the day to our leaders, and meeting deadlines sufficiently in advance. Funding has been freely offered and as the vision has gained traction more and more people have asked how they can help. Also, at leadership level everyone is really busy so it is sometimes hard to get time to pray and plan together.

7. How did you overcome these hurdles?

In many ways we've just had to 'let go and let God.' Lessons are learned each year and our planning starts earlier as our team gets bigger. It is an exciting and dynamic place to be, even if marginally on the edge of one's comfort zone!

8. What was your main highlight?

We are overwhelmed by the high level of involvement by our church congregation. We had over 100 people mobilised with plenty more offering to make food. The team all had a colour-coded t-shirt with the

words, 'Ask Me' on the front, and 'Why am I doing this?' on the back. It has been a brilliant way of combining ownership of the event with gentle evangelisation.

9. Is there anything you would do differently?

Our community is small and many have long memories, some local families are only just beginning to forgive the church for events that happened 25 years ago or more. I would like to continue to build the trust between the church and community. This event, a hybrid between outreach and Alpha, plays a big part in this.

10. What was the impact of your event?

Our first year saw a higher level of interest in attendance of the Alpha course, up from an average of 7-10 to 15-20. The second year saw a huge jump in both the number of attendees and also the number of hosts and helpers. This meant we were able to run two Youth Alpha courses, a Senior Alpha course and three evening Alpha courses. About 100 people were involved in total. Last year we saw smaller numbers but several of these were cold contacts who had come such a long way and all of whom made a commitment to Jesus Christ.

Alan's top tips:

- Communicate early with your volunteers and keep in touch to help them feel part of the team and well-informed.
- Schedule time for planning and prayer.
- Consider combining outreach with Alpha for your small community. I recommend Graham Tomlin's book, *The Provocative Church*, for inspiration.

