

Leading with vulnerability: A story of faith and leadership success with **Christine MacLean**, Leader of the Alpha Group at Holy Family Parish

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After a move across Canada from British Columbia to Ontario, Christine MacLean was looking for something. Praying for a sign and some clarity, Christine thought of the program she was part of in British Columbia: Alpha. The Alpha program began in the 1970s at a church called Holy Family Brompton (HTB) in England. Taken over by Nicky Gumbel, a minister who was previously an atheist and a lawyer by trade, Gumbel repositioned the program as a course for people outside of the Church. Alpha is a non-denominational program that acts as an introduction to the Christian faith. It is a space for anybody to gather anywhere and learn and ask questions about their faith. We sat down with Christine MacLean, leader of the Alpha group at Holy Family Parish in Whitby, Ontario to talk about her journey leading this group and the life-changing effects of the program.

How has the Alpha program changed your life?

Over the course of her involvement in the Alpha program, Christine has seen it change the lives of many, including her own. Coming to the program herself from a broken part of life after losing her husband, Christine credits Alpha for making her faith come alive and enriching her life. After a period of wandering off the path of faith after being raised Catholic, as so many others do, Christine tells us that finding the Alpha program felt like coming home - saying the program fanned the belief she had always had in God from a glowing ember into a fire.

What does it take to be a good leader?

Christine tells us that "fundamentally, you need to like people. You need to like being with people, have an open mind, and enjoy listening to different opinions. As a facilitator, I am cautioned not to talk too much when leading the group, to draw everyone out of their shells and lead the group in a way that comes naturally. I share openly and am vulnerable with the group and try to build an environment of whatever is said there, stays there without judgement, I think it builds trust. When they hear the story you have to tell about your own struggles, they think I'm not alone, and they open up and share too. I love my work, I love the program and I am passionate about it."

What led you to invest in faith training as a leader?

Two days before her husband died, Christine describes a pivotal moment to us that led her to Alpha. After seeing her husband suffer in the hospital, Christine asked the Lord to heal and restore her husband and if he couldn't do that, to take him quickly out of his suffering. Two days later, her husband passed away peacefully. At that moment, Christine tells us that she realized God was at work the entire time, not only taking her husband out of his suffering but answering her prayers. Christine tells us without that revelation, she wouldn't be where she is today.

Do you have any advice for other leaders?

Christine told us, "As a leader, you have to believe in what you are saying, and know your subject matter. You are not going to get anyone to follow your direction if they get the slightest hint that you don't believe. Being open and listening to other's opinions made me realize that I don't have to know everything, I just needed to have people around me who were good at what they did and who felt part of the team so that whatever we accomplished, we accomplished together. Once a group feels like they are part of a whole, they tend to give more to do it. Having the attitude that It's not just a job, it's not just a project, that everyone has to be equally invested, not just the one giving direction. There is a competitive desire in me to be the best I can be and I would say to other leaders, to be passionate, live what you believe, and throw yourself into everything you do."

