



“Young people are wanting to engage and ask questions”

Churches in Salisbury, Wiltshire, were surprised – and delighted – when 100 participants signed up for their Youth Alpha Course. Interview with Hannah Giles

The sessions saw the predominantly secondary school aged children grow in their knowledge of Jesus, take more ownership of their faith, and develop friendships with their peers across the city.

“We were hoping for around 40, possibly 50,” says Hannah Giles, the Youth and Families Worker at Salisbury Baptist Church. “But in the last week or so before starting, numbers went up significantly.”

“We wondered if we had the space. It was logistically challenging and complex, but by God’s grace and by a fantastic team of volunteers from our churches we got into our stride, and we were delighted with how it all went.”

“We discovered our young people are wanting to engage and ask questions while getting closer to Jesus - and our Youth Alpha provided a safe space for this to happen.”

ECUMENICAL COLLABORATION, AND THE INITIAL IDEA

The sessions came about following the regular meetings of youth workers in the city. The Youth Alpha materials had been recently refreshed, and Hannah and Sophie Stokes, from St Francis and Hope Church, felt passionate about running the revamped course.

They chose the autumn term and were joined by Georg Knights, the newly appointed youth worker from St Paul’s Church.

The course was advertised among the children and young people at the each of the churches, alongside leaflet dropping in Salisbury city centre.

The sessions were held each Sunday evening at Salisbury Baptist Church. Around 85 per cent of the participants were connected to a church, though a significant number were not regular attenders. Several more were new to faith, coming to the course via an invite from a friend, or the leaflets. Ages ranged from Year 6 to Year 13.

Wider church support was crucial. A group of helpers were keen to make the course a reality, ranging from young people acting as table leads, cooking, or being part of a prayer team that met on Zoom while the sessions were happening.

Hannah says: “All our churches run the adult Alpha. They want to encourage people to ask questions, and to seek Jesus through that space, so they were really up for supporting us and doing it collaboratively.”

FOOD, VIDEOS AND BRILLIANT CONVERSATION

Hannah and the team assigned the young people to tables, according to age. They were also mindful of mixing people up from different churches, so new friendships could be made. The tables remained the same throughout the 10-week course to build consistency and develop relationships.

Hannah and Sophie hosted, and every week a different young person would share their own testimony: the things they loved about going to church and being part of that community; how being a Christian has affected their life; and how does God play a role in what they do? These included people from the Bridge Youth Project, a local youth charity which specialises in school chaplaincy.

Participants ate a meal together each week, prepared by a group of volunteers from the churches. The Alpha Course material was shown, and discussions followed around the tables.

“We found the videos were brilliant in just engaging conversation, and the reflections the young people came out with were also brilliant,” says Hannah.

“You can really see they do think about their faith and deep questions. What is our purpose? Why does God do this? They have so many questions.”

Worship music and prayer were introduced part way through the course.

The sessions would see a 90 per cent retention rate.

“They’ve just loved the friendships they’ve made,” says Hannah. “It’s really helped them just knowing there are other people who are seeking, who have the same questions or have a faith in Jesus. It’s given them courage.”

“And many of the young people said the worship really helped and the food was ‘banging.’”

“MANY SAW A BREAKTHROUGH” - RESPONSE AND FEEDBACK

With so many of the participants committing to the full course, many developed the confidence to take ownership of their faith for the first time, says Hannah. “They are taken to church by their family, and here they were asking: ‘Actually, do I truly believe in those things?’

“And for many, you saw that kind of breakthrough. You could see them thinking: ‘This is the point where I decide that I’m coming, because I believe this is true.’ They are now feeling empowered in that.”

Hannah, Sophie and Georg carried out a questionnaire following the course. Sixty per cent said they learnt ‘much more’ about Jesus, while 30 per cent said a little.

The sense of belonging and being in a safe place was a key feature, and developing friendships was vital.

NEXT STEPS

Hannah and her fellow organisers have looked at ways to continue the momentum into 2026.

Citywide youth worship nights are being held on the first Sunday of the month, aiming to equip young people to lead and participate in worship. The young people have loved gathering again and seeing friends from other churches. Youth discipleship groups are running collaboratively, with different nights to accommodate various schedules and provide more opportunities for the teenagers to go deeper in their faith.

In time, another Youth Alpha will run. “They’re eager to get other young people to come along because of the experience they’ve had,” says Hannah.

“Our vision has always been to enable them to encounter Jesus, deepen their understanding and for them to feel confident to share their faith. We felt this happened throughout, and we would value prayer as we take our next steps.”

For more on Youth Alpha, visit: alpha.org.uk/youth

