



Branches on the Vine

FEBRUARY 22 - 28, 2025



ALPHA PROGRAM LEADS OTHERS ENCOUNTER CHRIST

Story by Joe Pisani

When she was a student at St. John the Evangelist School in Long Island, N.Y., Diane Dinehart knew her Catechism inside out. But it took some time for her to develop a personal relationship with Jesus.

Today, as pastoral associate of St. Paul VI Parish in Hamden, she is working to help people have an encounter with Jesus through a program called Alpha, designed for those who are “looking for something more” on their spiritual journey.

“We’re trying to help people have a deeper relationship with Jesus that’s personal, which is what I was missing when I was growing up,” says Dinehart, coordinator of the program. “I didn’t understand that part, and I think Catholics in general don’t understand it.”

The 12-week course, with 90-minute sessions, has been a mainstay at the parish and has been taken by 30 million people worldwide. The series explores life and the Christian faith, with talks, videos and small-group discussions designed to engage and inspire conversation and foster personal growth in the basics of Christianity. The sessions are typically preceded by breakfast or dinners with fellowship.

“Alpha has something for everyone,” Dinehart says. “Even though it was designed for people who wouldn’t describe themselves as churchgoers, it attracts cradle Catholics. It awakens something in you, and it gives you something you never had before.”

During the sessions, participants consider questions like, “Who is Jesus?” “What is faith?” and “Does God heal?” Almost 500 people have been through the parish program since it began five years ago.

Midway through the course, there is a time-away segment, which is an opportunity for prayer.

“This lets them learn about the Holy Spirit and come away really on fire,” Dinehart says. “For a lot of Catholics, it’s a whole new experience because they have the opportunity to be prayed over and experience healing and peace.”

The parish priests, deacons, pastoral associates and ministry leaders of St. Paul VI Parish, which includes Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Blessed Sacrament, St. Rita and Ascension churches, have completed the program.

“Alpha has been such a success because we are blessed with so many people who are dedicated to the program,” Dinehart says, crediting the volunteers, the hospitality committee, support staff, group leaders and those who pray for the participants.

Gina, a participant says Alpha has helped me renew my faith in Jesus while learning new ways to pray.

Jerry, who participated in a previous course, says he signed up for Alpha because he was been looking for ways to renew and grow his faith in Jesus Christ.

This year, sixth graders in religious education are participating in a new youth Alpha program in the parish, along with their parents who are doing an adult version.

For more information about the Alpha program and the schedule, contact Dinehart at the parish office at 203.248.0141 or visit hamdencatholic.org.



Upcoming Events



03/6 - 04/17 THURSDAYS 6:30PM
LENTEN SCRIPTURE SERIES
 SS. Isidore and Maria Parish, St. Augustine Church, 55 Hopewell Rd, South Glastonbury

This FREE transformative series is designed to deepen your understanding of each Sunday reading during Lent. We'll examine the author's intended message, the relationship between the weekly readings, and their meaning for today's spiritual life. For more information or to register, please visit www.isidoreandmaria.org/lentenscriptures2025.



03/9 SUNDAY 3PM
SIGNS OF HOPE LENTEN SERVICE
 Church of the Incarnation, 544 Prospect St, Wethersfield

Join Christ the King Parish in this service, led by Rev. Nicholas Melo, honoring Pope Francis' Jubilee Year of Hope, designated as a time for renewal as "Pilgrims of Hope." Created by parishioner Nancy Kiely, who holds a Master's in moral theology, the service features prayers linked to the eight pillars of the Jubilee Year, music by the church choir, and personal stories from eight pilgrims of hope sharing experiences on peace, life, poverty, illness, incarceration, youth, migration, and the elderly. Fellowship will follow in Father Crawford Hall.



03/7 - 04/4 FRIDAYS 5:30PM
FRIDAY FISH FRY
 Our Lady of the Assumption, Church Hall, 81 Center Rd, Woodbridge

Woodbridge Knights are serving fish fry dinners on three Fridays this Lent (March 7, March 21, and April 4). The cost is \$15 for fish and chips, \$7 for grilled cheese/gluten free option and French fries.

Proceeds will support charity and parish needs including: OLOA Teen Mission Trip (March 7) Vocations support for local Seminarians and Postulants (March 21) "Build-a-Bed" event in June (April 4).

Please support these worthy causes while observing your Lenten obligations and enjoying our wonderful OLOA community. If you wish to help with setting up, cooking, serving, or cleaning up, contact **Bill Fortin (text: 203-565-4533, email: wfort2000@yahoo.com)**.



03/19 WEDNESDAY 10:30AM
MASS FOR THE CT MARCH FOR LIFE
 Cathedral of Saint Joseph, 140 Farmington Ave, Hartford

Join us for Mass at 10:30 AM at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph before the Connecticut March for Life! After Mass, head to the rally at 210 Capitol Ave, Hartford at noon, followed by the 1 PM march.

