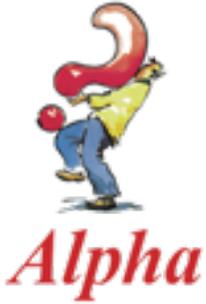


Atheists "Going Public" Has Some Christians Hot Under the Collar— Leading Evangelistic Ministry Urges Believers to Keep Their Cool



BANNOCKBURN, IL. — From eye-catching billboards that proclaim, "I can be good without God," to a critically acclaimed movie at the Sundance Film Festival, atheists are going public with their beliefs like never before. This has some Christians hot under the collar, but the leader of one of America's leading evangelistic ministries is urging believers to keep their cool.

Public opinion polling shows that the number of Americans who are unaffiliated with any religion is growing rapidly. Alpha USA president Gerard Long, called one of the "stars of the church-saving circuit" by *The Washington Post*, is encouraging Christians to direct their time and resources toward giving people opportunities to hear and experience the teachings of Jesus Christ.

"One of the main purposes of the church is to serve and love people outside of its membership," Long notes. "We've got to focus on the work God called us to, loving people and giving them a safe environment to hear and investigate the teachings of Jesus. Jesus himself was always asking people questions, and Alpha encourages people to wrestle with the big questions of life such as, 'What happens when I die?'"

Alpha will also be going public this fall with a national ad campaign in more than 500 cities. Using everything from bumper stickers and yard signs to billboards and buses, the ads will ask people to consider: "If you could ask God one question, what would you ask?"

More than 30,000 individuals are expected to respond to Alpha's national "Invitation" to consider the teachings of Jesus, including many atheists and agnostics.

Cejaye Bjarnason grew up not believing in God, but in her 20s had a change of heart as a result of Alpha. She recalls, "I thought church people lived in a make-believe world, and they were going to have a rude awakening when the end of their days came."

But one day, Bjarnason reluctantly agreed to go to church with a friend. There, she learned about the Alpha course, a 10-week exploration of the teachings of Jesus that answers questions about God, the meaning of life and more: "Everyone was friendly and welcoming. The course made me open my ears, and I asked Jesus into my life. Now, I pray every day; I have let go of my anger ... I feel like the Grinch at the end of my favorite Christmas movie. My heart is growing bigger every day."

Since 1997, Alpha USA has seen more than three million people take the Alpha course. The number of U.S. churches using Alpha has more than doubled in the last two years alone, with more than 4,700 churches representing all major denominations now running the course.

To learn more about this year's national Invitation, visit www.alphausa.org/invitation or call 1-800-DO-ALPHA (362-5742). For interviews with Alpha USA president Gerard Long, contact Janine Longoria at press@alphausa.org or 224-588-8526.

Alpha USA
2275 Half Day Road, Suite 185
Bannockburn, IL 60015
1-800-DO-ALPHA (362-5742)
alphausa.org