

Worship and people with dementia Including a service outline



Why bother with worship?

TO THOSE LIVING IN A WORLD THAT HAS BECOME CONFUSING AND STRANGE the repetitive nature of ritual gives familiarity and reliability and will act as a cue to the person's spirituality. Religious ritual also offers a framework for their spirituality, along with the benefit of companionship and a sense of belonging.

PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA ARE ALL DIFFERENT; they are of any denomination, or faith, or none. Even people from the same religious tradition may be at a different point along their journey through dementia, or indeed at a different point in their faith life.

SOME HELPS

However, when planning worship for people with dementia you have to start somewhere, so here are some things to help your preparation.

- Plan the worship in advance although you may have to learn to be flexible if the congregation deviates from your plan.
 - Keep the service short (15 - 25 minutes).
 - There is a place for both formal and informal types of worship, think which will work best in your setting.
 - As far as is possible involve people in the worship. They may like to choose a hymn, read from the Bible, or offer a prayer.
 - Use familiar and well-loved hymns, especially those with choruses, and avoid a multiplicity of photocopied sheets.
 - Choose familiar readings and prayers and use an appropriate version of the Bible. Good News or similar if the story is the focus, and the Authorised Version if the poetry and rhythm of the words is important. (e.g. 23rd Psalm or beginning of Genesis or John's gospel.)
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- No sermon but perhaps a short address or 'thought for the day' that confirms God's unconditional love and presence.
- Use of symbols to give clues and cues as to what is happening (e.g. a cross, a candle and the Bible placed on a lectern).
- Think of ways to make the worship multi-sensory.
- Use appropriate physical contact.
- Try to include a personal blessing.
- Keep as much eye contact as you can with people, even in the prayers. Praying with eyes shut can make people feel disconnected.

HOLY COMMUNION

Including a Communion Service can be really important for those living with dementia. Think about how many can say or read the responses, and what level of dementia there is when you consider using a liturgy. It could be that saying the words of institution, together with extempore prayers, is sufficient. Think too about how to administer the elements. Offering the elements in a combined way (intinction), by dipping the bread into the wine, can be the best way for those with dementia to receive, as it can reduce stress and the possibility of confusion. If possible come to each person at eye level and ask by name if they would like to receive the bread and wine. If they say no then offer a blessing.

THESE ARE JUST SOME HINTS TO HELP YOU put together a service. Reflect upon what works and what is good, and then modify the style of the service in the light of your experience.

When different people are leading worship it is important to have continuity. What follows in the centre of this booklet is an order of service for an act of worship that can be photocopied for your own use. If Holy Communion is to be included it may take the place of the talk.

A Service of Worship

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Leader: My name is ... and we have come together today,
(date), at (place), to worship God.

Leader: O give thanks to the Lord for he is good:

All: His mercy endures for ever

HYMN

Leader: In the beginning, when it was very dark,
God said, "Let there be light."

All: And there was light

The sign of light, a lighted candle, is placed on the empty table

Leader: In the beginning when it was very quiet,
The word was with God.

All: And the word was God

The sign of the Word, the Bible, is opened and placed on the table

Leader: When the time was right God sent His Son.

All: He came among us, and was one of us.

The sign of the Son, a cross, is placed on the table

Leader: Eternal God,
creator of all things, giver of life,
we praise you and we worship you.
We thank you that you have always loved the world you have made:
and that however far we stray from you,
your love is always there to welcome us home.

Let us confess our sin:

**All: God, our Father,
we have sinned against you
and against one another,
in thought, word and deed;
we have not loved you with all our heart;
we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves.
But you have kept faith with us.
Have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,
and restore us to newness of life:
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

Leader: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners
to all who turn to Him He says: "Your sins are forgiven."

All: Thanks be to God

Leader: Let us say together The Lord's Prayer

All: Our Father who art in heaven... Amen

*Follow with a hymn and a reading, a further hymn and a short address.
Then offer prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession, using the response:*

Leader: Lord in Your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer

Leader: Lord, when You shared our humanity
You knew the sorrows of our race:
You sensed the clouds of a threatening future.
To our times of darkness and fear bring
the consolation of Your healing presence:
Lord in Your mercy

All: Hear our prayer

Leader: We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen

HYMN

**All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all now and for evermore, Amen.**

Blow out the candle, close the Bible and offer a sign of peace to each person present

Suggestions for hymns

OLD FAVOURITES:

Abide with me
Dear Lord and Father of mankind
Love divine, all loves excelling
Now thank we all our God
O love that wilt not let me go
Rock of ages
Tell me the stories of Jesus
The Lord's my shepherd
What a friend we have in Jesus

SEASONAL HYMNS:

The old rugged cross
There is a green hill
When I survey the wondrous cross
We plough the fields and scatter
Most carols

HYMNS WITH A CHORUS:

All things bright and beautiful
Blessed assurance
Give me joy in my heart
Great is thy faithfulness
Kum ba yah
Lord of the dance
Tell me the old, old story
Trust and obey

Suggestions for readings

OLD TESTAMENT STORIES:

Creation - Genesis 1: 1-4

Noah - Genesis 6-9

Joseph - Genesis 37-50

Moses in the bullrushes - Exodus 2: 1-10

Moses and the burning bush - Exodus 3: 1-12

Samuel - I Samuel 3: 1-10

Saul - I Samuel 9:15 - 10:9

David - I Samuel 16: 1-13

PSALMS OF TRUST, PRAISE AND CONFESSION:

23, 27, 40, 50, 62, 63, 67, 84, 91, 95, 100, 117, 121, 139, 146.

PSALMS REFLECTING OUR CONFUSION OR DISTRESS:

42, 55, 69, 71, 86, 88, 131, 142.

GOSPEL STORIES:

The Beatitudes - Matthew 5: 3-12

The Magnificat - Luke 1: 46-48

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2: 29-32

The Good Samaritan - Luke 10: 30-37

The Lost Sheep - Luke 15: 3-7

The Lost Coin - Luke 15: 8-10

The Prodigal Son - Luke 15: 11-24

The Light shines in the darkness - John 1: 1-5

I am the Good Shepherd - John 10: 7-11

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life - John 14: 1-6

Methodist Homes (MHA) is a charity providing care, accommodation and support for older people throughout Britain. We are one of the most well respected care providers in the sector and amongst the largest charities in Britain, providing services to older people for over 70 years. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for older people, inspired by Christian concern and our services have always been open to all faiths and none.

Christians on Ageing (CCOA) is the main national fully ecumenical organisation that focuses on the spiritual needs and development of older people. For more information visit www.ccoa.co.uk

There is, as yet, no cure for dementia, but until there is we are doing everything we can to provide the best possible care for people with this condition. To order or download the companion leaflets [Visiting people with dementia](#), [Spiritual care and people with dementia](#) and [Growing dementia-friendly churches](#) visit www.mha.org.uk or call Freephone **0800 0856962** or write to **MHA Freepost 499 Derby DE1 9BR**. Suggested donation is 50p/ea or £2 /set.

Other resources

'Being with God' a series of three booklets, each containing 31 devotional outlines and a CD of suggested hymns (Scripture Union)

'A Mission-shaped Church for Older People? Practical Suggestions for Local Churches' (Church Army & The Leveson Centre, 2008)

'Hymns we've always loved' in large print A5 and 3 CD set also available (Kevin Mayhew)

The Aspects of Ageing Papers aim to deepen our understanding of meeting people's spiritual needs through sharing the insights from Chaplaincy to Older People with developments in Pastoral Theology. If you have comments on this paper, or indeed a wish to submit your own work for consideration, please email me at keith.albans@mha.org.uk. Papers submitted should be a maximum of 2,500 words.

Rev. Dr. Keith Albans - Director of Chaplaincy & Spirituality

By Revd Dr Margaret Goodall,
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