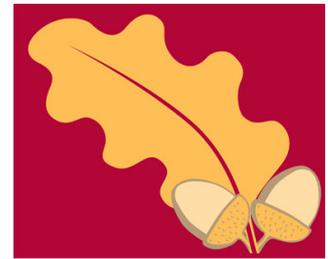


Worship with Older People in a Care Setting



Spiritual Care
for Older People

'THE EXTRA DIMENSION'

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should put as much energy, imagination and creativity into our worship as we can.

+ Sentamu Ebor, Archbishop of York

Building a prayerful, worshipping community.

As with any other ministry, those involved in preparing and leading worship in a care setting need support from the wider church community. A two-way exchange of information is important so that those for whom the service is being planned can still feel part of that 'wider' community, and also that the newly forming community will be prayed for in a constructive way by the other church members.

Careful preparation is essential. Firstly, the individuals may not, at least initially, be known to those, lay or ordained, who visit from the parish. Secondly the needs of the individuals living within a care home or attending a day centre will be very diverse. Some members of such a group may have severe physical disabilities, others varying degrees of dementia, and some may have both. It is therefore important that any team works with care staff to ascertain the needs of the individuals who may attend.

It will help to 'build community' if members of staff are invited to join in the act of worship. It might also be possible and worthwhile to include family and friends. Individuals will feel affirmed if they are asked to make suggestions for readings, or requests

for hymns which are then incorporated into the service. A sense of belonging will be fostered if members of the group are invited to take part in the worship, perhaps by reading or adding prayers of their own.

So where do you start?

You will need to work in partnership with the Manager of the care home to arrange a convenient, regular time and, if at all possible, a permanent space. In a day centre this will almost certainly be during a week-day and might also be a better option in a care home. Sundays might be a family day for some residents and if the home has a day care facility, week-ends will probably exclude those who use it. (If the best day is a Sunday, try and avoid clashing with 'Songs of Praise' on the television. Many older people receive much spiritual nourishment from this programme.) Unless you have been explicitly invited to arrange worship you will need to discuss your thoughts and ideas with the care home staff, to listen to their thoughts about the needs of the older people, and to invite them to share any needs they may have as staff.

Work hard to get the staff 'on board' – you will require their help in several ways and you are asking them to gear

their work to your visit. Keep them informed.

Meeting with residents or day centre members will help determine the type of service you will be planning. There might be someone able to play a large part in both preparation and delivery; someone who could arrange less formal gatherings between your more formal ones.

During your visits time needs to be set aside to talk with individuals who may have things on their mind, or who may have something wonderful to share. For some people, what we consider a 'meaningful conversation' may not be possible, but just spending a little time sitting close, maybe holding hands, gives an opportunity to know and to give love.

As relationships strengthen and this new community grows encourage friendships and visits between services. Exchanging copies of the parish magazine and the home's or day centre's Newsletters will help foster feelings of connectedness between the 'new' community and the wider church.

Setting the scene:

To maintain continuity try to agree a space for the worship. This may be defined with chairs or screens and needs a 'focal point', such as a table with a cross or candle, or a relevant picture if space is limited. Arrange seating to be inclusive - a circle or horseshoe around the focal point. Remember to consider access and spaces for wheelchairs. Amplification might not be available but you will need good lighting. If people have any sensory impairment ask the staff to ensure they sit where they can best see you. Use clear speech but do not shout as this distorts your voice.

If you are collared – please wear it. Pink, green and blue stand out better

than black for those with visual impairment. Otherwise make yourselves recognisable. Perhaps team members could all wear the same easily identifiable cross or scarf. Introduce yourselves at each visit and give prompts and reminders if needed.

You may wish to use the liturgical colours. Hearing the meaning of symbolism will help recognition so do remember to explain them.

Live music will probably not be possible but most well known hymns are now available on either tapes or CDs and players are easily transportable. Hymns can be a really unifying element so as time goes by you may wish to build a portfolio of your members' favourite hymns. Print your own using a clear large font and if at all possible laminate them. Energy levels may be low so consider the number of verses you use. Older people often sing in a lower key so adjust that too along with the speed if your members cannot keep up.

Print your own service sheets, again using a clear 14 or 16 point font (and larger ones if required). Laminate those sheets in regular use. Define the top and use only one side. Have clear headings, perhaps with symbols to help people keep their place. Include on your sheets all passages, words and prayers in regular use.

Before your first few visits you might consider sending specific invitations to people rather than just putting up a poster. Then do the same for new residents or attendees.

The Act of Worship: (Scripture, Praise and Prayer)

This needs to be short and succinct but not infantile. Never underestimate the capacity, the emotions or the religious feelings of your members even those who appear severely confused. Plan for about twenty

minutes but be prepared for this to grow as the group gels. Familiarity aids communication so have a basic framework, use familiar language, have key prayers and always use the same versions. It will be helpful to have a consistent beginning, using the same music, hymn, words, prayer - or the lighting of a candle. And end with the same blessing, grace, closing prayer or by extinguishing the candle.

Familiarity does aid communication but occasional changes in the elements will help to refresh subsequent worship. So consider 'specials' and themes. Celebrate your members' important times - birthdays and also memorials. Use the seasons and the church year but within your regular pattern. Symbols can be very important, especially to those who have little verbal communication. They can point to deeper things. Try to use them and explain their significance. Laminated pictures to pass around might be helpful to some.

Have short focussed passages with relevant exposition or reflection. But also consider short stories, poems or even activities. Be prepared afterwards to support your members who may be struggling with various issues or topics.

As the team plans the act of worship think carefully about the types of prayer you use. The four usual types are intercessory, thanksgiving, litanies and bidding prayers. Put the ones you use regularly onto the service sheet, clearly marking responses. For those who have few words go back to those symbols or have pictures and you may wish to exaggerate your gestures. Find out which version of the Lord's Prayer is best known. Many people have been surprised by a person, who seems to have almost stopped speaking, suddenly joining in this much loved, learned-by-heart prayer.

Whether to use creeds, confessions and words of assurances will also

require consideration. But which? Older people might expect to hear the 'Comfortable Words' from the BCP. ASB has a good general confession or you might write your own. Whatever you use include it on the service sheet. Lay members may wish to consult clergy about these and should always remember to use inclusive language: 'WE' not 'YOU'.



Whilst your Service should have a clear sense of direction, be prepared to be flexible. Value contributions 'from the floor' and acknowledge interjections. Many people are rather fearful of silences but when focussed they can be very powerful. If you use them be prepared for interruptions - when someone wakes and finds themselves surrounded by silence or when they have misunderstood that it was a deliberate silent moment.

If you have a children's uniformed organisation locally, or a school or a Sunday School, you may like to consider asking them to be involved occasionally. Older people and the young so often have an affinity.

Occasionally you may find people are curious about what is happening and just wish to sit outside the main body. Without making a fuss gently invite them in. They may wander off again but they might be the very ones who would welcome a separate visit or a specific invitation to join you next time.

Today you may find people of very differing churchmanship, denomination or even other faiths coming along. Don't let this be a worry. Denominational ties are often

unimportant to older people and they are free to choose. If you can plan your services ecumenically so much the better and you may learn something very important from people of other faiths. If you do have concerns about individuals then consult with their faith leaders.

Frequency of services depends on your resources but it is better to start less often than to find you have to cut down once an expectation is felt. If your services will be infrequent you might consider either writing, or helping members write, an informal service for them to lead. There might be members of the wider church prepared to join in and help. This should be encouraged anyway.

Eucharist or not:



This is dependant of whether clergy are available or whether a reserved Sacrament can be used. Training is available for lay people wishing to offer 'Communion by Extension' as part of their ministry. If you have a care home nearby it might be possible to have services running in parallel, with Communion being taken straight from church to home.

For many older people not being able to take Communion is a very real loss. This can be particularly acute at times of special festivals or personal anniversaries.

If you have practical difficulties in administrating communion, intinction

might help (the bread is dipped into the wine rather than the individual sipping from the cup). Fresh bread might be more easily swallowed than wafers. If you have concerns about an individual's safety in swallowing, ask a member of staff for advice. If a person is unable to swallow properly or they repeatedly spit the bread out, discreetly wrap it in a tissue and dispose of it and offer a blessing instead.

When you are in a position to offer a Communion service, arrange with your members how often they would like this option.

Just planning the act of worship might seem rather daunting. But with careful preparation and planning it will almost certainly be well received and appreciated. If this is all new to you then start with a simple 'hymn sandwich'. As you and the team start to grow in confidence and get to know the other members better, you can adapt and adjust.

Use that energy, imagination and creativity which Archbishop John Sentamu speaks of.

Whatever type of services you arrange please do not forget those who may be confined to their beds or unable to come along without help, and those for whom a smile and a proffered arm will give the confidence to come along and try it out. It is never too late to invite people to accept God's offer of salvation.

And finally two ends of the scale:

We are ALL sent 'in the power of God's Spirit to live and to work . . .' so be prepared to be ministered to

For the very frail, Christian discipleship may be about personal growth and development or it might be a fleeting moment of being remembered by God. If that is all a person can hold on to, God is there for them.

