

Introduction:

I'm going to use a Memory Worship service as a guide for best practice for a service aimed at people living with Dementia, and accessible to people with varying degrees of Dementia. Some or all of the things I'll talk about can be offered to make people feel more comfortable and get the most out of a worship service

Slide 1: Good signposting

- **Badges** – badges are so helpful for both guests and helpers at services, it takes away the need to remember names and adds a sense of informality.
- **Signage** – make facilities clear by having clear signage, toilets this way, and again at the next door if it's not obvious where they are.
- **Zones/areas – your worship space is really important**, is there room to have zones around the main worship space for a quiet area, a creative area, a sensory area and an area for refreshments after the service? If your church has fixed pews think about having the service in the church hall and creating a worship space with the other zones to the side. If the worship and activities can be held in the same room that would work best. Too much moving between rooms can be confusing.
- **Make things as visual as possible** – make parts of the services as visual as possible, as an example, before the service starts and as people are settling, have a helper go round and ask if the guests have any prayer requests, and mark on the **laminated open hands (show laminated open hands A3)**, all the names of the people the guests would like to pray for. It's a clear visual aid and is a way of engaging guests with that part of the service.

Slide 2: Simplicity

- **Shorter service – no service sheet**
Making the service simpler and shorter means there's less need for a service sheet which people can become confused by.
- **No longer than 30 mins if possible** – people struggle to concentrate for longer services and in some cases become physically uncomfortable sitting for any length of time, so keep it simple and not too long.
- **Simplify hymns** – reduce verses to two or three. People can still enjoy the hymns they love within two or three verses - it's better to have variety rather than use up some of your service time on verses 5, 6, and in some cases 7!
- **Communion** – is it essential? Will people manage to eat the wafer, could it be a swallowing hazard? Memory Worship which I'm using as a guide, does not offer Communion, but if you know a guest would appreciate taking Communion do make a date and time to visit them at home and take Communion to them. You could arrange a small number of people to have a Home Communion with them, so that might be the guest's carer or pastoral visitor and

maybe another member of church if they are friends. It's a lovely way of offering fellowship and Communion in a smaller and more accessible way.

Slide 3: Familiarity

- **Sing well known and well-loved hymns** – people who struggle to read the hymn sheets still join in with the melody of well-loved hymns, so choose firm favourites if you can.
- **Use well known prayers and blessings** – Always include the Lord's Prayer – the traditional version is probably the version people know best - it's a good way to round-up intercessions for the prayer requests taken before the service. You could use The Grace at the end of the service, as many people recognise that prayer too.
- **Use the same service structure every session** – in Memory Worship we always start with 'Bring me Sunshine', in the care homes where I lead this it is a signal to others that it's Memory Worship time, with that and my red box, and with the elements of the worship space I set up – I have a red cloth, a cross, my prayer bear, the Bible and a candle - the visual clues help people recognise who I am and that we are starting a worship service.
- **Get to know your guests and tailor post-service activities to suit** – if you know some of your guests are passionate about things like motorbikes, knitting, making clothes, gardening etc, try and put out some vintage knitting patterns, or Motorcycle News, or Gardening Magazines, anything you can place on a table where people go to take part in any post-service activities or crafts

Slide 4: Interactive and Engaging

- **Memory Worship – setting up, giving the elements of the worship space to guests.**
As I mentioned before – Memory Worship has a variety of elements to it which you can share with guests as you set up the worship space. So I might hand my prayer bear to Brian and my candle to Vera, my Bible to Roy etc. before going to collect them and placing them on the table to create the worship space. This gets everyone's attention, gives people time to settle, and involves the congregation.
- **Talk/Sermon – like an all-age talk, plenty of engagement, with objects, things to show and pass around.**
Make sure your talk is engaging and fun, with items you can share and hand around – now there aren't the problems we had before with handling things due to Covid, we can hand out various objects used in the talk so people can hold them and look at them properly. So if we talk about the natural world and creation, we could hand around an inflatable globe, a small plant, some of these lovely birds which tweet when you squeeze them... taking time and sharing things engages everyone, and is enjoyable.
- **Prayers** – involving people in the intercessions by asking for prayer requests before the service is important in helping people to feel part of the service.

- **Activities after the service**

Try and make activities sensory, so touch, smell, sound etc. see what you can find which can engage. And as I mentioned earlier, tailor activities to some guests if you know they like certain things. At the memory service I went to in Essex they had a large plant pot on a table with forget-me-nots they had planted seeds for in a previous activities session - you could bring a pot in with basil, or rosemary, or any sort of scented herbs or flowers.

Hospitality is also important, just sitting and having a tea and a choice of cakes or biscuits, might be enough to help a guest relax or a carer to open up about how they are and what's happening in their lives.

Slide 5: Flexible

- **Time of service – and timings**

Be flexible about when you start and how long the various parts of the service take – it might be that people take a while to gather and settle, roll with that. During the talk when handing the various objects out, this could take time, as well as the Peace – you may want to circulate in the room, taking time to offer peace to everyone, that's fine, take your time.

- **Allow for people to move away if they need to – quiet area**

Some people might struggle during the service, and may wander, a helper or carer could guide them to a quieter area or ask if they'd like anything, just go with whatever is happening, pause if that's appropriate.

- **Worship space – what suits the needs of guests the most.**

I mentioned previously, worship in the space that works best for guests, that is likely to be the church hall if the church itself isn't a very flexible space.

Slide 6: Creativity & Fun

- **Offer a simple craft – nothing too complicated**

Provide something that doesn't require too much manual dexterity (paper cut to shapes, glue stick etc). Have a helper by the activity to help lend a hand if needed.

- **Colouring books and autonomous activities** – colouring can often be a preferred activity, it's easy and straightforward, doesn't require interaction with others, and can calm some people, my own Mum adored colouring. A simple jigsaw also engages, 30 pieces or less, or have a helper sit and start one and see if anyone would like to join in.

- **Make the service fun** – share interesting and engaging objects or a funny story

Warmth and friendship will be what people remember – even when other memories fade, the feeling of having a good time, joy and fun will remain.

Slide 7: Accessibility

- **Plenty of helpers – help with hymns, showing people to activities, engaging guests**
Having plenty of helpers makes everything much easier and more accessible for a guest - a helper can guide, support and settle anyone who might need assistance or become agitated, or need help engaging with the service or an activity.
- **Hearing Loop/AV/Speak clearly and slowly**
Make sure you think about people who have trouble hearing, if you use a hall instead of the church, you may not have an AV system. Speak loudly, clearly and slowly if you are unable to access a radio mic.
- **Large print hymns**
Do make sure you have favourite, shorter hymns, in as large type as possible, this example is 22pt (hold up example). It helps to prepare a number of hymns on file, print as needed, then put them in a slide binder, with plastic cover, for each session.
- **Area of worship – signage/horseshoe seating/zones/avoid jazzy carpets or chequered floors.**
A horseshoe shape seating configuration, where everyone is facing one another, is best, having people sat behind you can be unsettling, seeing everyone's faces can make people feel more comfortable. Uneven floors, patterns and chequered floors can be very difficult to navigate for people with some forms of Dementia, as their spatial awareness can be affected.

Slide 8: Church isn't just the building

- **Progression of dementia, support for members of your church – visiting**
Keeping in touch with people in your community who live with Dementia, and their carer, helps them to remain part of your church community even if attending their usual service is not possible anymore. Some people find morning services increasingly difficult to be ready in time to attend, and often too long to be comfortable. Try to organize visits by parish friends if this is the case.
- **Well-organised Pastoral Visiting Group**
This makes such a difference when keeping people in touch with church. Working with the Methodist Church I've seen what excellent pastoral care groups they have, each Pastoral Visitor has a list of people they contact weekly to see how they are, they then feed back any concerns or actions to the Pastoral Secretary – this means nobody is missed and if someone requests a Home Communion visit it can be organised. A first step in organising a Pastoral Visiting Group might be having a list of those who struggle to get to church and make sure a Pastoral Visitor calls them weekly, feeding back to a Pastoral Group Leader.
- **Care Home support and services/visits - sharing the love of God with a care home community**
Care homes are now much more accessible. The past two years or so put a stop to most pastoral visiting, but I'm now being approached by Activities Coordinators to see if I can organise visitors for the residents who have few or no visitors. Consider if your church could organise for a small group to go in and share a cuppa and natter with residents in a care home within your parish, every couple of weeks, or a few Pastoral Visitors could call in and

visit a number of lonely residents. The usual DBS and Safeguarding checks will need to be completed for this. I am trying to look into coordinating visitors to our city's care homes so do please approach me at the end if you'd like to be involved in care home visiting. Also do come and see me if you would like to support worship or maybe play an instrument for a care home service or Songs and Praise service.

Dementia Friendly churches and services

So to sum up...

These Key Elements that I have outlined can be used in services to a greater or lesser extent to help make your services and church more Dementia Friendly

But, to be honest...

being loving, kind, patient and understanding, and offering hospitality and being open to making changes for the benefit of others, is what makes your church and church community Dementia Friendly. It also makes your church accessible for people with additional needs and for people with a range of disabilities, so that all are made welcome.

Please do contact me if you would like any further information, I can also arrange Dementia Friendly training sessions for your church, to help your church community have a better understanding of Dementia.