

## A Dementia-Friendly Service (with or without Communion)

### Duration:

The services are usually somewhere between thirty to forty minutes long (ending in time for lunch).

### Format:

1. **Opening music:** Anything you fancy that those present might know. We've used: Que Sera Sera, Cara Mia Mine, Beatles, Rolling Stones, etc. Anything from the 40s through to the 70s seems to work well.
2. **General Conversation:** This would get them nodding and talking about things to do with the weather, the season, time of year and where we were with regards to the Church year (Christmas, Easter, Advent, Lent, etc.). There were times when we would reflect on something from the Bible (if relevant and sequitur) which fitted the situation unfolding before us - which means interactive and responsive rather than something merely unpacked and presented as 'ready made' (and delivered regardless). There needs to be some resonance or else we end up with a 'done to' rather than 'done with' encounter.
3. **Second piece of music:** This varied in what it was depending on the season, especially if it was a season those present might recall (Christmas, Easter, Whitsun – which had a bank holiday attached – Lent with Pancake Day and Mothering Sunday). This piece of music would often have some resonance with the memories those present had shared (though the music might not directly fit, there's always the opportunity to shape it so that it does 😊).
4. **A short conversation:** Some might call this a sermon (I would, but I don't like sermons that talk at – they are an invitation to a conversation). The conversation might focus on:  
  
*People who have hurt us, or we might have hurt, and saying sorry* (care here that we don't find we've lit the blue touch paper and are about to experience fireworks). For me this leads to God's forgiveness for us through Jesus.  
  
*Giving or receiving gifts* (Christmas is a good one, but many experienced tough Christmases thanks to war time – so again, sensitivity is key).  
  
*Love* (another carefully handled matter) - I talk about love and God's love and the good things people can recall – they often remember the feeling rather than the fact, and this is good as it's internal and therefore, for them, real).
5. **Familiar hymn and tune:** The Lord's my Shepherd, Abide with me, Dear Lord and Father of mankind. Hymns they will know (I can provide a memory stick (USB or CDs you can use if you would find this a help).
6. **Sorry and Thank You moment:** It's what we call repentance (sorry) and forgiveness (absolution) in the Church language. A simple 'sorry' prayer and a prayer of absolution.

7. Communion: The bread and wine moment – I talk about Jesus' death and God's forgiveness. Not always sure all get this, but (oddly to some) many of those who take it experience something.
8. Lord's Prayer and final music: (sometimes with a blessing).

And that's the format pretty much taken care of!

## Things to think about

One of the important things in a service with those beset by the challenges that dementia brings is to avoid the use of service sheets and to conduct the service as a conversation – being ready to explore the diversions that come along and to use them to dynamically shaped the service as it progresses.

Over the years this has brought conversations and remembrances into the service and changed its shape (and any predetermined intentions) into a new place which has benefitted those present. There have been times when it has generated a general air of sadness, but dealt with positively and in a constructive way, these have been beneficial as well (in fact after one of these the staff told me later that the people who'd been resent talked to others for the rest of the afternoon because of the doors that had opened!).

The use of familiar words has also proved to be a very useful spur in opening doors and many of those who have engaged with the services can not only do the Lord's Prayer (traditional form) from memory but have surprised me with their ability to say the general confession and other, regularly used in their youth, passages.

Traditional hymns are always a valuable trigger for those attending – I was amazed to find that some of the 'children's hymns' brought back many memories of childhood friends, families and events. The standard 'traditional hymns' are also very effective and readily available 'youTube' is a good source of these.

## Various useful prayers:

### *General thanks*

We thank You for this day; for the birds and animals, the flowers and the trees; and the sun, the rain (and the snow) and the wind that blows.

We thank you for creation – and for our lives – and the lives of those we love.

Be with us today we pray. Amen.

### *For sad days*

There are days when we feel sad – but You are with us and you hear our cries.

Help us God, and bring us peace we pray.

Help us see and to remember all the good things have had and dry our tears.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

### *For friends and family*

Thank You for our friend and families - as we talk and listen help us to remember them and the times, the places, and the love we have shared with them.

We pray for them that they would be safe and know of our love.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

### *A general prayer*

God, there are times when we feel confused, broken and sad – be with us and touch us by Your love. Help us to smile and shine you love and light through the clouds of loss and confusion we pray. Amen.

### *'Sorry' Prayers (repentance)*

God, who knows our sorrows and sadness, our wrongdoings and our pain, forgives us by the love and life of His Son, Jesus Christ. May we know God's peace and forgiveness this day, and all the days of our life. Amen.

God, who forgives all who are sorry, have mercy on us and bring us His peace. Amen.

*'You're Forgiven' prayers*

God, who hears our prayers, grant us forgiveness and peace, His light and His love. Now and for ever. Amen.

May God forgive us and bless us and lead us into new life in Him. Amen.

*A more traditional prayer (which some have recognised – but I only use when I know the audience!):*

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,  
have mercy upon us,  
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,  
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,  
and keep us in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer (traditional form – which most remember):

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of preparation (which some have recognised and joined in with):

Almighty God, to whom all hearts be open,  
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Endings and Blessings

*The Grace*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always. Amen.

May God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us now and always. Amen.

The love of the Father, the presence of Jesus, the Son,  
And the power of the Holy Spirit, be with us now and always. Amen.

## Using the Bible

In the short and simple services we conduct in the care home setting (especially where, as in the Covid-19 situation we find the services fall to the events co-ordinators) one of the most simple sources of short Bible stories can be found in one of the many children's Bibles. I am happy to provide one of these for you to use as a resource if it would help.

## Video and Streamed Services

Some of the care homes, sheltered housing and private homes I am supporting are finding that services and Bible studies on memory sticks or DVDs are also helpful. I am more than happy to provide short (ten to thirty minute) services or talks for you to use.

I am also providing streamed services on FaceBook and YouTube which some are finding beneficial. Again, let me know if you would find these helpful.

## Conclusion

This is a very basic starter – the key is to give it a try and to see what happens.

There are days when the whole thing flies and you end with a spring in your step and others where you wonder what on earth has just happened!!!

Generally speaking this is a path of mutual exploration – something made new every morning where people advance and retreat as their day makes its marks and brings both challenges and joys which either take its toll or blesses them. The key is to enjoy yourself and enjoy the engagements and conversations and the wonderful places they can take us.

And to expect that God will do something quite amazing (and often unexpected) in the interaction.

Anything I can do to help – contact me.

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