

Dementia Friendly Church Services



Tips on making a church service accessible to people with dementia

The Isle of Wight has an ageing demographic, and a high number of older Island residents have dementia. Age UKIW and St. John the Baptist Church in Ryde have been working together to look at the best way to make their church services more accessible to people with dementia and to support the needs of older people generally.

At St. John the Baptist our Dementia Friendly Church Services have been running for just over two years, and are proving to be popular. The following lists some suggestions that we have put into place that can be taken on and adapted by others across the Island.

Top tips

Orders of service - use large print, a minimum of 16 point, but ideally 18, font should be left aligned and in Arial with no italics, underlining or blocks of capital letters.

Any pictures should be literal not stylised or abstract, e.g. picture plates from Bible stories.

Instructions clear and in a different colour – think about using pictures – e.g. praying hands, a Bible, music to denote hymns.

Page numbers should be at the bottom left hand corner and in the same size as the text. Page numbers are referred to whenever focus is returned to the order of service e.g. after the sermon. Also give time for people to find their place.

Multisensory is good – perhaps an item to hold during prayers, candles and symbols, something to taste or smell, and visual aids for sermons.

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What works well?

A 30 minute service is plenty long enough.

A good start is to arrange services linked to Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festivals.

A brief sermon or a “thought for the day” – about 5 minutes. Stories work well, as does recalling memories as a way in to the talk.

Use well known passages/stories. Many older people will be most familiar with the New King James Version.

Prayers are short and either traditional well known prayers or simple and ‘to the point.’ (But think about if Book of Common Prayer language is appropriate if the congregation is multi-denominational).

Include the Lord’s Prayer in traditional form. A good introduction is to say, “Now we say together the prayer which begins, ‘Our Father’.”

Use traditional/well known hymns – people often comment on how much they enjoy singing the hymns.

Have two people leading the service one of whom is the ‘cue’ for the congregation. Say at the beginning that this person is the person to watch to know when to join in.

Make it clear that people are free to stand or sit, or move around as they wish and reassure carers that it is ok if people wander or make a noise. The key is to make the whole thing as relaxed and welcoming as possible.

Tea and cake after the service is always very popular!

Additional Resources

Livability is a national Christian disability and community engagement charity. It provides information and tips about Dementia Friendly communities, communication, prayer, buildings and worship.

Services can be found under ‘blog and resources’ at: livability.org.uk

Dementia Action Alliance has a checklist for DF Physical Environments at:

http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk/assets/0002/6448/dementia_friendly_environments_checklist.pdf