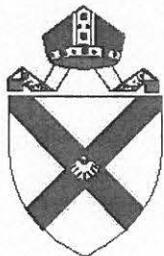


# Worshipping with Older People

Church in Society  
Rochester Diocese



Diocese of  
Rochester

Price £1.25

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## Introduction

This booklet has been produced with two aims in mind; firstly to provide guidelines to facilitate and affirm good practice, and secondly to highlight the breadth of services that can take place to mark events or stages in people's lives. You, the reader, may well think of other situations!

As some of the material included is appropriate across a variety of scenarios a list of cross-references is included to facilitate use.

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## General Principles

The key words for taking services with older people, especially those in residential or nursing care are: -



***SIMPLICITY*** - short and succinct is infinitely preferable to long and rambling - some people may not be able to concentrate for very long or have physical conditions that restrict them timewise. Fifteen to twenty minutes is usually long enough in a care setting. A church based setting can be longer but needs to have several points of focus or change of pace to maintain concentration and interest. If giving a talk then be straightforward and use 'normal' language; include humour and current issues, if appropriate.

and

***FAMILIARITY*** - people feel more secure with familiar settings, order or wording. If you are conducting services on a regular basis in a care environment then it would help the residents to get most from a service if the basic framework and key prayers retain a pattern and use the same version of wording. This does not mean that unfamiliar elements should not be introduced into the service but it does help the sense of continuity if only one major factor is changed within a service.

Occasionally a complete change for a special service may be appropriate and can refresh subsequent worship.

## A Basic Pattern for Worship

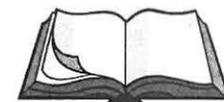
This is NOT intended as a rigid framework but can be used as a flexible tool for planning worship. A service, however short, needs a clear beginning and end but otherwise the elements can be moved around or omitted to suit the occasion the worship is intended for.

**i) Call to worship - welcome and setting the scene** - This is essential so as to focus people's minds on what is to come and draw them together. It could be a sentence e.g. *'Long life is the reward of the righteous; grey hair is a glorious crown'* to set the scene or theme of the service, or a short explanation of what the service is for e.g. a memorial, celebrate retirement or an anniversary. This should be done every time as the participants may change or there may be visitors, different staff etc.

**ii) Music** – whether people sing a hymn or listen to a piece of music this item is an important element for a service which includes the elderly. This should be well known, not too long and for singing; not too high pitched. It is worth asking people for their choice of hymns and to include them amongst those chosen as well as using others from your choice of hymn book. If investing in a set of hymn books, look for one that is published in large print as this is essential for many older people. The drawback is that they can be rather heavy. It may be preferable to produce song sheets in large print and making it discreetly obvious which way up it goes by use of a logo in one of the top corners e.g. a flying dove, a flower. Only one side of the sheet should be printed so as to help eliminate confusion.



Braille or moon script texts can also be obtained at low cost from the 'Royal National Institute for the Blind' or through 'Kent Association for the Blind' (KAB) - see Resources.



**iii) Confession or Assurance of Forgiveness** - the form of this will depend on the purpose of the service and the participants but could be the 'comfortable words' from the BCP, or a joint confession either in prayer e.g. ASB general confession, or as responses (it may need service sheet in large print if done this way or an OHP). It could also take the form of a short silence with the leader then saying prayer of confession on everyone's behalf and giving absolution.

**iv) Reading** - not necessarily from the Bible, could be a poem or short story, news-cutting etc.

**v) Creed** - see notes for confession. \*Only use if appropriate\*

**vi) Leaders contribution** - this could be a talk, a meditation, an activity, a sermon or presentation (hymn/music) i.e. whatever seems appropriate for the service and its specific requirements.

**vii) Prayers** - own or from written resources. If using responses may need to 'practise' or have on the service sheet.

**viii) Lords Prayer** - decide which version is most appropriate and have it written down for own reference - lead firmly and clearly.

**ix) Music**



**x) Grace, closing prayer or Blessing**

## Sample services

### 1. Elderly Care Home -

Call to worship  
Piece of music  
Reading  
Short talk/thoughts on reading  
Prayers for the home, residents and staff  
Lord's Prayer - BCP form  
Blessing



### 2. Thanksgiving for grandchildren

Call to worship  
Hymn  
Collect  
Confession  
Reading - poem about grandchildren  
Activity - each grandparent brings photo of grandchild(ren)  
and pins it on a board saying their name(s)  
Prayers  
Lords Prayer - ASB Form  
Hymn  
Blessing



### 3. Residential Care Home

Call to worship  
Listen to recorded hymn  
Lords Prayer  
Activity - with comments from residents  
Prayer - based on activity and the comments  
Grace - everyone holding hands



### 4. Affirmation on Retirement

Call to worship  
Collect  
Hymn  
Reading  
Talk (and presentation of gift)  
Prayers  
Lord's Prayer  
Hymn  
Blessing



(Note: not necessarily from work but from roles such as doing flowers, church cleaning, bell ringing, sides person, wardens, Sunday School /guide/scout leader etc. Can also be 'slotted in' as part of a regular service.)

## Services in Care Homes

Services in a care setting need special consideration for various reasons and several questions should be considered beforehand.

### 1. Who is going to lead worship?

The person taking the service needs to feel comfortable within the setting; especially important with some of the more specialised residential homes e.g. mental and/or physical disability, hearing impairment, Alzheimer's, Huntington's Chorea. Residents having either of the latter two conditions, may unexpectedly disrupt the leader's plans; they need to be able to cope with this, possibly changing the service radically to accommodate or integrate the disruption and not making the person feel they have been a nuisance. It may be that the minister is the most appropriate person but it may equally well be someone in an authorised ministry i.e. Reader, Pastoral Assistant, Evangelist. There may, however, be someone else in the parish who has skills in this area that could be utilised and developed. Ecumenical links could also provide the best person for a specific setting, rather than the minister feeling he or she has to take on a role they feel uncomfortable with or that takes them away from an area in which their particular skills could better be used.

### 2. Who is going to be there?

The residents and staff of the home will make up the largest portion of the 'congregation' and often it will simply be them. There may also be visitors to the home i.e. residents' family and friends as well as members of the church who come along to



support the leader. Occasionally health professionals will join in e.g. Occupational Therapists, Social Workers etc. Try and learn people's names - but beware calling them by the wrong name. Having confused Winifred with Winnie one day I was fixed with a baleful glare and the icy reprimand " My name, young woman, is Winifred." I didn't forget again! If in doubt, avoid using names or ask staff to remind you. Names – it is the fashion today to call people by their first name or 'pet' name. Be aware that some elderly people take great offence at this and prefer their title – Mr, Mrs or Miss. (Don't assume ladies are always Mrs!)

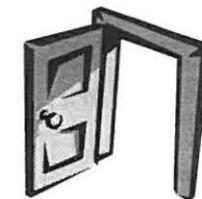
### 3. When shall we worship?

During the morning or late afternoon are probably going to be the best times, but this needs to be discussed with the Care Manager or owner so as not to cause difficulties with meal times and other set routines. Mid afternoon is generally not a good time as often residents have a nap. Some homes also have in-house activities or residents going out to adult education classes on a regular basis so certain days may be better than others.

**Services should not be too long - usually 15 to 20 minutes is enough but 40 minutes at the outside.**

### 4. Where is the worship being held?

When visiting the home prior to holding services, ask to see which room or area is going to be available for use and make a sketch map of it, noting location of windows, doors (and which way they open) what moveable/immovable furniture is already in there, etc. Access may also need to be considered if people are attending from outside the home.





What distractions are there? - TV/radio may need to be switched off either in the room or nearby. The smell of dinner wafting through can also be a distraction! When planning the arrangement of the room consideration of the congregation's mobility also needs to be made i.e. who can walk in to use chairs and how much space is needed for wheelchair users?

People are very unlikely to want or be able to get up and sit down easily so they may need to be reassured that they can worship in what ever position is most comfortable for them. Everyone should be able to see the person leading the worship. It is better not to place oneself in front of the window as a bright light will make you appear as a dark shape and facial expressions - essential for lip readers - are then lost. Space is also needed for large gestures if possible and/or for a signer if taking services for deaf residents. The use of audio equipment also has to be planned for i.e. Where's the best socket for the tape recorder without trailing leads everywhere and so creating a hazard?

If possible an inclusive arrangement should be aimed for such as a circle or oval, rather than a triangle or square, so as to ensure everyone can see and feels part of the group. However, some people may choose to sit on the edges or outside the main group, wanting to be there but not actively participate.

## 5. What sort of worship?

This depends to some extent on who is taking the service and whether reserved sacraments can be used i.e. it could be communion or a regular Service of the Word or planned from the format examples outlined earlier. Older people will probably expect the person taking a communion service to be robed but care should be taken not to wear



predominantly black as this is associated with death. White or coloured choir robes may be more appropriate and less threatening.

A focal point should be provided e.g. a cross, candle, picture, loaf of bread, pebble, basket of fruits/vegetables, flowers etc depending on the theme of the service. If people are seated in a circle then the focus may be best placed in the centre but needs to be visible from all around.

All the senses can be utilised i.e. touch, smell, taste, hearing and sight - touch is likely to be the least impaired e.g. the texture and warmth of a freshly baked loaf to pass around as well as its taste and smell. The sense of smell can often still be very strong so herbs such as mint or lavender can be very evocative *but questions need to be asked about residents likes, dislikes, allergies and drug contra-indications (this can be especially important if considering a communion service as some will not be able to take the wine)*. Just holding hands at some point in the service often makes a special moment.



If the home has a music therapy group they should be encouraged to contribute to the worship - this may involve clapping or the use of percussion instruments and needs to be carefully handled so as not to appear childish to visitors or non-members of the group. Large print service/song sheets may be necessary. Generally Overhead projectors are not successful when used with elderly people, being difficult to focus on easily. Valuable space may also be taken up by the equipment as well distracting the leader's attention away from the people.

Some old people need to make a monetary offering (part of their upbringing) of whatever size. Consideration and care should be taken here as others present may be embarrassed e.g. they didn't know about it or more likely have forgotten to bring it with them. It should be made clear how the offering is to be used.

## Themes for Services

Themes for services may come about naturally but residents appreciate being involved in the planning of future services and can come up with some challenging ideas! They may also suggest some wonderful objects to act as the focal point.

- a) **Seasonal** - using both the Church's year and the natural year as the basis for services e.g. spring, Easter, summer, holidays, autumn and harvest, Christmas etc.
- b) **Bereavement or Memorial Services** - primarily for those who are unable to attend the funeral service of a deceased resident, both staff and residents, to enable them to say their farewell. The use of a favourite piece of music to sit and listen to while quietly remembering the person often gives a space for grieving and is less difficult than singing a hymn. It could also be for a home's much-loved pet, the familiar cat or budgie.
- c) **'Family'** service to affirm the staff and residents as part of a very special family community. This may be more appropriate held quarterly at a weekend (Saturday) and gives an opportunity for inviting family and friends to attend, perhaps followed by a social gathering e.g. barbecue or tea.
- d) **'Special services'** - for all sorts of reasons - these can be arranged on an ad hoc basis e.g. 100th birthday in an elderly care home, 21st, 40th or 50th in a disabled care setting, to celebrate the new wing or mini-bus and those who will use it.



## Ideas for Activities

A few ideas are mentioned in 'What Sort of Worship?' The following are further suggestions: -

1. Each person present threads a bead onto a communal string as it is passed round and says a short prayer or says something they are thankful for, makes them happy etc.
2. Each person chooses a piece of wool from a pre-cut selection - any colour or thickness, as many different ones as possible - then joins it to their neighbours (may need help with this) either side so as to end up with a circle. Can sing something like ' Bind us together, Lord'. or discuss why/how all of us need each other to make a whole/interdependency.
3. Take two animals made of contrasting textures e.g. stone sheep, woolly sheep and ask for descriptions of them. e.g. heavy/ light, cold, soft, warm, fluffy etc and then discuss which one words also tell us most about God.
4. Give everyone a cold pebble that has been chilled in the freezer and ask them to hold it. Discuss how it feels and what is happening as they hold it - compare to prayer. The pebble is cold to start with but if we hold on, what happens? Can we share how we pray?



5. Pebbles again – taken from a bowl and given to each person. They are dull and dry, but when returned to a bowl containing water they become alive with colours. Connect with prayer or the action of the Holy Spirit.

6. Make base for an Easter Garden and take sufficient materials (foliage, small pebbles, flowers) etc to decorate.

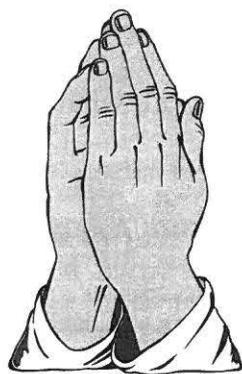
7. Take enough fruit in for everyone to have a piece - discuss where it comes from and its feel - texture, weight, smell, colour, shape etc. Then pass round a dish of pre-cut fruit so it can be tasted and savoured as well.

(This works well with bread rolls or a box of chocolates too!)

8. Watch a clip from a Video of scenery and music - how do they feel about it?

9. Use of photos/reminiscences can and often does help to speak of long forgotten memories and helps keep the brain active, which is very important in faith journeys.

10. Liquorice Allsorts can be used a 'connecting' theme. They are passed around and may cause a stir amongst those who have not experienced them before. The similarities and differences between them are discussed and then compared with people.



## Services in church and elsewhere.



As with services in Care settings various issues need to be explored in making decisions, choosing themes and planning worship. Many of the questions looked at in that section are also applicable to this, but there are a few additional and different areas to examine.

### 1. What is the best setting for this service?

The first question to consider is whether the purpose of the service is best met as a totally separate event or whether it is better to make it an integral part of a regular Sunday service.

If the purpose is to thank members for their service in whatever field, then incorporating this into regular worship is more appropriate, so that all the members can take part in showing their appreciation for the flower arranging, brass cleaning, being treasurer, warden etc undertaken by the person. It is also more likely that the person will have no part in the planning, as the Church will wish to surprise them.

If the service is requested by the person themselves or suggested by the family, then it is more likely to be a 'private' affair in which the person/people will probably wish to be involved in the planning. In this case their preferences should take precedence when setting the order, music, reading, hymns etc. Examples of requests are: - memorial services a year or more after bereavement, marking a deceased child's 18th or 21st birthday, a renewal of wedding vows for a 40th anniversary, thanksgiving for healing from cancer, recovery from a major heart attack, finding a long lost sibling or child i.e. anything that impinges on the life of a family that they feel should be celebrated in a special way. Memorial services can also be held at a graveside or in a place that brings back special memories of the person.

The reasons underpinning the service will influence its 'mood'; whether it takes on a formal or informal structure. This may determine who is involved in contributing to the taking of the service e.g. a family member or friend of the family may wish to contribute a reading or say a few words e.g. son or daughter at memorial service, best man or bridesmaid at renewal of vows.

## 2. Themes for Services

Please refer to the suggestions for services in a Care Setting (p. 11). Rites of passage or Marking Milestones - the idea behind holding a service relating to a change in life is to affirm the person/people concerned and to enable them not only to move on into a different phase of their life with a sense of achievement, but also ready to meet new challenges with excitement and pleasure. A positive, celebratory mood should be encouraged that looks beyond the end of the known and routine to the future.

Examples could include the ideas given above as well as services for retirement, both 'young' e.g. 50's and at a later age, either from paid or voluntary employment; taking voluntary redundancy.



Retirement and voluntary redundancy often bring particular stresses as people adjust to a different routine or none, sometimes feeling rather lost and worthless. It may also bring feelings of resentment at becoming old and therefore useless, no matter how much they have looked forward to or planned for this time.

Another reason for celebrating is becoming grandparents or great grandparents and a service can affirm this role as well as giving space for thanksgiving and appreciation. It is worth noting that often the parenting role is shunted onto grandparents due to the pressures on working parents.

## Resources



### Books

Worship in Residential Care - Christian Council on Ageing

Visiting People with Dementia - Christian Council on Ageing

Dementia: a Christian Perspective - Christian Council on Ageing

Vocation to Retirement - Christian Council on Ageing

All in the end is Harvest - ed. Agnes Westlake

The pattern of our days - Ed Kathy Galloway - pub Iona Community  
(Assorted liturgies, prayers and reflections)

The Best is yet to be - Richard Morgan - pub Bible Reading Fellowship  
(Readings for older people set out for daily use, includes reflections and meditations)

Not out of Mind - Althea Hayton - pub Arthur James  
(This book focuses on death in childhood but the second part contains some very useful resources i.e. Poetry and Prose readings. The suggested liturgies could also be adapted for other purposes)

The eye of the eagle - David Adams - pub Triangle  
Border Lands - David Adams - pub Triangle  
(Prayers and meditations based on the Celtic tradition - other titles also available)

Liturgy of Life - Donald Hilton - pub National Christian Education Council (Assorted readings and poems based on patterns of worship e.g. key phrases - 'Lord have mercy', 'Glory to God')

All Age Events and Worship - Tony Castle - pub Marshall Pickering (A practical guide with lots of ideas that can either be used as they stand or adapted)

Patterns for Worship - Church House Publishing

Church Family Worship - Stodder and Houghton

Extensive Resources are available from the Outlook Trust - evangelism to the over 50's including worship tapes.

### Videos

In Joyful Song - (Climb Ev'ry Mountain & How Great Thou Art) - Readers Digest.

You're never too old - Guildford Diocese Productions

Is Anyone There? - Christian Council on Ageing

Church in Society Database  
C/o Dot Hooker CSR, Robert Runcie House, 60 Marsham Street, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1EW 01622 755014.



## Useful Addresses



Christian Council on Ageing - (and CCOA Publications),  
Epworth House, Stuart Street' Derby DE1 2EQ

Kent Association for the Blind  
College Road  
Maidstone  
Kent ME15

Age Concern England  
Astral House, 1268 London Road,  
London SW16 4ER

Help the Aged (Church Rep)  
St James's Walk  
Clerkenwell Green  
London EC1R 0BE

MIND	MIND
23 College Road	283 Broadway
Maidstone	Bexleyheath
Kent ME15 6YH	Kent DA6 8DG

Outlook Trust	NSF
Clare Lodge	Community Support Centre
Hollybush Lane	Marsham Street
Harpenden	Maidstone
Herts AL5 4AY	Kent

Dot Hooker Older Persons Officer,  
CSR, Robert Runcie House,  
60 Marsham Street, Maidstone,  
Kent ME14 1EW 01622 755014

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**This booklet is for use by those  
leading worship with elderly people.**

**It includes some useful suggestions  
for worship, activities and resource material  
and guidelines to facilitate and affirm good practice.**

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