Welcoming, Connecting, Friendly

Dementia-awareness service Leader’s script

## Note:

* You are welcome to use/adapt this script, as helpful.
* The script is for two people to co-lead. This works well, to support one another and to vary the voices. Equally, it is possible for one person to lead the service.

# Introduction

## Early on in the service, to set the scene and share facts

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| Welcome and why?  (2 mins)  PERSON A | Thank you for being willing to focus together on dementia this morning. We want our church to be a place of welcome for everyone. And that welcome includes people affected by dementia. Our church is part of a network of more than 100 churches across the Diocese that are taking steps year by year to become more dementia-friendly.  And many of us have lived experience of dementia – in our families or amongst friends or neighbours. Through the challenges of dementia, a little bit of awareness goes a long way. It helps us to respond in a way that keeps connections. If we encounter something that’s a bit unexpected, we might be uncertain or unsure, so we might step back or decide not to get involved. With a bit more understanding, we might realise we can stay in step and keeping connections.  So this morning our focus is on understanding a bit more about how things are changing for people with dementia – and about the best way to keep in step together through advancing dementia. |
| Stages of dementia  (3 mins)  PERSON B | Let’s start by understanding a bit more about dementia, turning to pages 2 and 3 of the handout. Dementia is an umbrella term for diseases of the brain, including Alzheimer’s Disease and Vascular Dementia. It’s not a natural part of ageing.  We can think of dementia as progressing through three stages – and these are set out on page 3 – early, middle and late stages.  **In the early stage of dementia**, people will begin to experience problems that affect their everyday living. It may be helpful to see a doctor, so that the right support can be put in place early on.  Experiencing those problems, it may be helpful to think of your brain as like a string of fairy lights. Each different light is a different memory or skill or function. With dementia, it’s as though some of those lights are dimming, flickering or going out completely. And for each person, it will be different lights, in a different order. But something that I knew or used to be able to do becomes more difficult or impossible, as the light flickers or goes out.  **In the middle stage of dementia**, the signs and symptoms become more obvious and will have a bigger impact on daily life. Here, it be helpful if we think of a photo album of someone’s life. As dementia advances, the earlier pages may be easier to recall - memories of childhood, perhaps getting married or a first day at work – but the blanks in the album may become larger later in the album. Also, it may become harder to do tasks that used to be tackled easily – like getting dressed or making a cup of tea.  **By the late stages of dementia**, people will need more support – and it may become harder to live independently. More care will be needed and residential care may be appropriate.  **In church**, we are probably more likely to see people in the early or middle stages of dementia than the later stages.  And later in the service, we’ll share the “three rules of Contented Dementia”, which can help us to keep connections as dementia advances. |

# Suggested Bible Reading: 1 John 4:7,16-21

# Sermon slot

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| PERSON B  Intro | How do we keep connections, through advancing dementia? There are three rules from a book called “Contented Dementia” by Oliver James, which may be helpful to share in our churches and communities. They can help us tune in to the adjustments to make to help us to keep connections, as dementia progresses. They’re on page 6 of the handout.  *[Referencing the picture of the phone, keys and wallet on p.6]*  What must it feel like, as dementia progresses? I’m remembering that moment when I’ve lost not only my phone but also my keys and my purse. It’s confusing and bewildering - it’s disorientating. Perhaps that’s sometimes how it feels, as dementia progresses: things that you’ve relied on in the past, that you’ve almost taken for granted as your everyday tools for life, are not there. So there may be times of feeling bewildered or confused or disorientated. And our response to someone can either increase anxiety or increase wellbeing. |
| PERSON A  Three rules of Contented Dementia | Against that backdrop, here are the three rules from “Contented Dementia” by Oliver James – and if you just hold on to these three rules from today and support one another in putting them into practice, you can make a real difference.   1. **Don’t contradict:** For any of us, if someone’s telling us the whole time, “No, that’s not right”, our confidence will diminish. Don’t keep correcting the facts, when it may be increasingly difficult to store factual information, no matter how much it’s repeated. Is it possible to be a bit less rigidly attached to the facts, and to focus on the feelings of anxiety or wellbeing instead? See if you can notice this and avoid contradicting someone. 2. **Don’t ask questions:** A question puts someone in the spotlight. Will I be able to give the right answer? Do I know the factual information I’m being asked? Even a straightforward question can have this impact. Sometimes, it’s a case of re-framing a question, so that it doesn’t put the other person the spot. Instead of saying, “Would you like a cuppa?”, we might say, “I’m going to have a cuppa – let’s have one together”. 3. **Learn from the expert:** The expert is the person with dementia. See if you can be a bit like Sherlock Holmes, noticing where the connections are flowing, noticing what increases wellbeing – and also noticing the things that unhelpfully increase anxiety. It can be helpful to watch for eye contact too – that can so quickly show you when you’ve lost someone… So the person with dementia is the expert in their own dementia – and if you learn from them, you’ll learn a lot! |
| PERSON A  Putting it in to practice – Don’t ask questions… | So those are our rules. Now, let’s put that into practice, focusing just on the second rule, “Don’t ask questions”.  What difference does it make to our welcome, if we don’t ask questions? How do we communicate and welcome new people into our church?   * Of course, body language and gestures are important, as well as words. A smile goes a long way! * Also, it may be important not to be in a rush: patience may be important, if someone needs time to take in what you’ve said. Don't rush: smile and wait. * And if you don't get a response, don't worry. |
| PERSON A  Arriving in church | **When someone arrives at church**, as a Welcomer, I’ll often say “Hello! How are you today?”  OK, so “Don’t ask questions”: how else could I greet them? |
| PERSON B  Instead | * It could be simply, “Welcome to [name of your] church”. * It could be, “I’m [your name] – welcome!”. * Or we’re British, so it could be about the weather! “Well done for getting here, through the rain!”. |
| PERSON A  At the end of the service | **At the end of the service,** I might say, “Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?”  OK, so “Don’t ask questions”: what else could I say at this point? |
| PERSON B  Instead | * It could be, “It’s time for tea and coffee.” * Or, “I’m going for a cuppa now. You’re welcome to come.” |
| PERSON A  Chatting over coffee | **Chatting over coffee,** I might ask lots of questions, “Do you live locally?”, “Do you have family living nearby?”, “Have you had a busy weekend?”, or “Did you watch “Strictly Come Dancing” last night?”.  OK, so “Don’t ask questions”: what else could I say at this point? |
| PERSON B  Instead | There are other ways of saying things. What about:   * “I like to watch “Strictly Come Dancing” on a Saturday night.” * “I think...” * “Some people say...” * “I remember when…” * “I used to…”   So we are noticing the ways we can helpfully change our responses, to keep connection. |
| PERSON A  Bible reading | Returning to today’s Bible reading, on page 4 of the booklet, we read in verse 7, at the top, “Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God.” It all starts from God’s love for us. And when we journey into deep waters and fearful places, that love holds us and sustains us and carries us through.  So we read in verse 18 that “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear”. It’s from God’s love for us that we can find the courage to journey into deep waters, letting go of fear, trusting in the love which is deeper than our deepest fears.  And, resourced by God’s unfailing love for us, we then reach out and connect with one another not in our own strength but from that wellspring of God’s love within us. We open ourselves to receiving God’s love – and it flows through us and can be shared on, in our love for God and for one another. So we read in verse 21j, , “those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also”. |
| PERSON B  Prayer | So we open ourselves to connecting with one another from a place of love, a place that is deeper than any fear. Let’s pray together the prayer at the top of page 5 of the booklet:  Compassionate God,  Lead us through fear to your love which is deeper.  Bring us to the place where we connect  with one another and with you in love. Amen |

# Prayers could include one/both of these prayers

God of love,

In moments of confusion, keep us safe.

In moments of clarity, grant us joy.

In moments of frustration, give us peace.

In moments of sorrow, bring us comfort.

Though we now see through a glass, darkly,

we trust you to see into the secret places

of our minds and hearts and souls,

beyond anything which limits us,

to the person that is us,

always has been us and always will be us.

Encircle us in your faith and hope and love,

until we see you face to face,

until we know you fully, even as we are fully known.

Amen

God of our past, present and future,

When memory slips and fades

or when faces, events, challenges and the rush of life

threaten to overwhelm us,

be our still centre.

In caring, when we are unsure what to do,

when we are at full stretch and beyond,

help us to cross the bridge from facts to feelings,

from head to heart, to meet one another with love.

Amen

# Final Prayer at the end of the service:

We join in saying together the prayer on the back page of the handout

**God of all,**

**Bless all our churches**

**as places of welcome and hospitality,**

**places of compassion and safety,**

**places of connection and love for all.**

**Bless us to share small acts of love,**

**freely given to others,**

**so that Christ may be made known**

**in our community.**

**Bless us to walk together as friends,**

**recognising that God journeys with us**

**as we turn our understanding into action**

**and live with hope in our hearts.**

**Amen**