



Diocese of Leeds

Praying with people living with dementia



Prayer and worship can bring a familiarity to a person living with dementia and their family or carers. Religious rituals can offer a framework for a person's spirituality, especially if you can tap into the longer-term memory of the individual.

Companionship and a sense of belonging to the parish community can be important at any stage of the journey in dementia. Most people and their family or carer need to be connected, when experiencing various life situations. Religious, spiritual and end of life issues can be important times of need for pastoral care. The desire for meaning and hope is vital.

Questions may arise about the meaning of the situation when living with a person who has dementia. Faith and beliefs can be strengthened or questioned. A time for listening and accompanying those on the journey is essential. We can always learn from others.

All of us are unique in the eyes of God. People from the same religious tradition may be at a different point in their journey through dementia or at a different point in their faith life. However, we are all loved by God and God never stops loving us.

As the dementia progresses, mental capacity changes and people lack the ability to decide on aspects of their care at various degrees. This can include taking part in a Religious Service or receiving Holy Communion. There is still a need to offer spiritual care and support. However, for those who are able to express themselves verbally and for those who have a lifelong faith, they can be asked along with their family or carer, what helps them remain connected to the faith? It can be a good starting point in identifying where to begin or build upon.

It is important to value and cherish the members of our parishes who can inform and enrich the lives of others.

"You matter because you are you, until the moment you die".

Dame Cicely Saunders

- When praying with a person who is living with Dementia, it will help to get to know the person and their family or build on the relationship already established.
- **Tap into their values, beliefs, culture and tap into familiar prayers, hymns or readings that the person may know.** This may be a single sentence from the Gospel.
- **Keep the prayers or service short.**
- Involve the person, if possible, in choosing a prayer, a hymn or a reading, or offering a prayer.
- If visiting a person's home or place of care, use symbols like a cross, or bible, or Rosary Beads or a candle (if safe to use or a battery operated one), to enable the person to connect with what is happening.
- If the person is unwell or restless on a visit, it may be necessary to adapt and return another time.
- Provide continuity of the person(s) visiting the home and find somewhere calm to pray, with minimal distractions around.
- When people reach the advanced stage of dementia, sometimes music, touch and taste can be useful in supporting a person.
- Eye contact is important to enable a person to feel connected. Closing of the eyes can make a person feel disconnected.
- Communion services may need to be shortened to adapt to the needs of the person on that day.
- Encourage attendance at Parish services and events for as long as possible.
- Families and carers need support accordingly in their time of pre and post bereavement from the parish community.

Research shows *"the well being of people with dementia can be enhanced by person centred care based on the knowledge of their unique life story and the creation of positive relationships. It is important to help maintain a link or reconnect with (a person's) religion as part of their care provision and this has the potential to increase their sense of well-being"*. (Cohen-Mansfield et al, 2006)

"Spirituality includes the need for ultimate meaning in each person, whether this has been fulfilled through a relationship with God or some sense of other. It can be through anything that gives meaning to life." Mackinlay, 2001