

Appendix 4: Holiday sessions for older people and those living with dementia



Getting started

There is a great delight in working with and serving people in their later life. Yet for many churches the task and focus are incidental and historical rather than intentional and dynamic. If you are planning to adapt the holiday club material for your older people and those living with dementia you, and they, will be richly blessed.

Taking time to consider the adaptations needed is valuable. Considering the practicalities alongside the spiritual needs is essential to ensure smooth running, spiritual nourishment and everyone's wellbeing.

In this appendix you will find a mixture of practical hints to help in your planning – this list is not exhaustive, merely a starting point for your planning. There are also suggested additions of memory/sensory tables and adaptations of crafts for each theme. At the end, there is a list of where additional information can be found and resources shared.

In reality, the needs of your people will govern your choices and planning. Have ready ears to hear what they share about personal interests and needs. Have open eyes to see where joy is found or struggles shared. Have open hearts to God's leading in this vibrant, meaningful and rewarding area of ministry, which blesses participants and planners, hosts and visitors alike.

Practical hints – in no particular order

Space

Ramps, access and facilities all need clear signage and volunteers to ensure safety. Identify trip hazards and ensure passageways are free of mobility aids. A full risk assessment for your access and space for use by older people is required along with a safeguarding assessment for vulnerable adults. Appropriate signing in and out, security on external doors, dietary requirements and next of kin contact in case of emergencies should all be planned for.

Volunteer

Specific people with specific roles ensures smooth running of a session. Clear roles dividing responsibilities, plus “listeners” and “chatters” to mingle, are beneficial. Some older people may wish to be volunteers too, and recognising that some cross the participant/helper boundary is a blessing so long as the essential ratios are already covered.

Story snapshot – Bert first attended a Messy Vintage session on the insistence of his daughter. He had rarely left the house since his wife had passed away and was feeling that he had nothing to offer. Already feeling the effects of declining health and memory loss, he was unsure what he

would make of the session. Bert can now be found supplying participants with tea to their tables and then assisting at the buffet table. He occasionally engages in the activities but feels most comfortable helping as he can.

Time

Older people move at a different pace. Be prepared to slow the pace, have people joining mid activity, and retain an attitude of “no rush, take your time, we’re just glad you made it”. Taking time to chat, listen, hear and tease out a story is a blessing and a delight.

Dexterity

There can be no assumptions as to people’s abilities and manual dexterity. Some may require help and others would be offended by the offer. Visual impairments, cognitive ability, fine motor skills and coordination are all affected by age and dementia. Asking, watching, gently offering and listening to responses enable a happy balance, and encouragement when needed.

Story snapshot

Alfred was an engineer and has been living with dementia for a number of years. When presented with the large pinecone, small pompoms and felt decorations needed to make an owl he immediately responded with precision and care. His owl was beautifully precise and he enjoyed helping others with their owl features. He was able to contribute as well as receive during the activities that day and a photograph of his smile captured the moment beautifully.

Abilities

An awareness and assessment of people’s abilities is vital. Those with dementia may have lost the ability to read or write but appreciate visual images and picture forms of communications. Others may require larger print or specific fonts for clarity under magnifying text-readers. Asking individuals, or their carers, enables relevant provisions to be made.

Achievement

People are people and a sense of achievement at a task completed may feature strongly for some. Enabling participation and taking the time, if they wish, to complete a task whilst the programme moves on is important. Taking things home and having things that can be passed on to others can be valuable.

Movement

During the session consider whether to encourage participants to move or whether it’s better to bring activities to tables where they remain seated. A combination of the two may be appropriate depending on your participants’ abilities and wishes.

A quiet room

If the event is being run as an intergenerational event rather than just for older people, a quieter space or room may enable anyone feeling overwhelmed by sights and sounds to find a moment of calm. A memory box could be placed there or some gentle music might be playing.

Gender stereotypical activities

Be mindful of the activities offered and whether they appear typically to appeal to only one gender. Providing a balance and variety ensures all will find a point of access and relatability.

Worship

Consider where you will gather for worship. How do you plan to seat people to ensure they can participate as they wish? Familiar hymns, readings and prayers may be appropriate to share.

Some people may enjoy singing in parts and do so automatically. Consider loop systems for hearing, font size for any printed words, and how anything projected can be participated in as fully as possible. Inviting people to choose hymns, share their stories and recollections can be enlightening and refreshing.

Story snapshot

Many older people will have a historical attachment or experience of church even if they have not attended church actively for many years. Singing together, hearing familiar stories and praying evoke emotions and memories long forgotten. Shirley was one such lady who had drifted from Church many years earlier. As she sang the old harvest hymns and listened to Colin share tales of harvest as a young boy, she was moved to tears, remembering harvest festivals of her youth, her home and friends. “What lovely memories”: her comment before tucking into her harvest tea.

Refreshments

Many older people will eat alone every day. Fellowship over afternoon tea, light buffet or soup and roll may be a highlight for them. Some may need practical help, others may wish to contribute, giving them a reason to bake. As you consider your participants and volunteers, be aware of dietary requirements, serving practicalities and the time needed so as not to be rushed. Treats to take home are often appreciated.

Adapting Time Travellers Holiday Club

Many of the story telling methods and suggestions can be adapted for older people or intergenerational sessions. The suggestions below are specifically focused on engaging those in later life and those living with dementia.

Activities for the whole week

Familiarity and comfort helps ensure people feel at ease. These activities could remain present through the week for those who wish to visit and enjoy them. Consider leaving the tables/stations physically in the same place to aid this familiarity. Volunteers could encourage those who struggle to participate to engage in a 1-1 card game as a way in to more interaction and involvement.

- Props/pictures table: a place for the time capsule where things are added and taken away each day to prompt recollections and discussion. Items represent the different days eg: a compass, telephone, bread, cloth etc. These could have a quiz element.
- Jigsaw table: either a linked picture or simply a jigsaw space to chat and be.
- Games table: vintage games like dominos, snakes and ladders, scrabble etc.
- Paper activities: each day, printed pages of themed word searches, mazes, code cracking, colouring linked to the characters and theme of the day. These are readily available online and provide a talking point if needed.

Daily activities

These are specific to each day of the theme and change daily. Using tables placed in the same place each day ensures familiarity and can encourage confidence in moving between tables.

Overarching themes for the week (invitation to bring)

Each day participants are invited to bring an item that is linked to the current or previous day's topic. This enables participants to offer something as well as take away. Be aware of those who live with confusion. They may need reminding to take their item away at the end of each session or, if they are being kept until the end of the series, a reminder that it is still safe and will be returned then. There is no “invitation to bring” in the final session.

Day 1: Are we nearly there yet? – Israelites leave Egypt

Memory/sensory

An old suitcase filled with older and more modern travel items needed for a journey may prompt discussion and appeal to those who engage in a multi-sensory way: a compass, map, walking stick, modern food rations they can try etc. Questions about how travel has changed since they were young, journeys they have made, favourite destinations and why, places they have lived etc may aid discussions.

Craft/activity

It is likely that there may be discomfort with painting feet, and physical limitations may make this impossible. Encouraging the hand/fist approach avoids the awkwardness and ensures all can take part. Mazes, finger mazes and puzzles are all readily available online and evoke the sense of wandering. Sand art is an excellent way of creating images that are tactile and beautiful.

Worship/prayer

Physical prayers, introduced, practiced and repeated are an ideal way to encourage older people to be active. Introducing and demonstrating in an inviting manner enables participants to see what will be expected of them. Pre-made footprints could be passed around for people to add prayers which are then added to a prayer wall or tree.

Invitation to bring

Invite participants to bring a holiday snap or item they have collected through their life that symbolises a place they've lived or a place they have been. Invite participants to share the stories of their objects with the groups.

Day 2: Can you hear something? - Samuel

Memory/sensory table

Print out images of telephone boxes and telephones from the beginning of their existence until today. If you can locate physical examples, even better. Have people reminisce about their use of telephones, and the first memory they have of using one. What was it like? Was it exciting or nerve wracking? Consider how communication has changed over the years. Invite the participants to put the pictures (or items) into a timeline from oldest to most modern.

Craft/activity

Create a number of sounds for people to try to identify. E.g. steam train, wheel of bike, teapot pouring, bike bell, dawn chorus when camping, seagulls from the seaside, typewriter, whisks etc. This could be done "live" with items hidden from view, or from online sound clips. Ensure those using the loop can access the sounds too. Depending on the group it could be done as a table-based quiz or individually, as required.

Prayer/worship

The story includes Eli, an older man who is almost blind and who has dedicated his life to God. Reflect on the idea of how our hearing changes over time and how we hear God changing over time. Offer encouragement to use time, space and silence to offer prayers for others in families, communities or a particular fellowship. Offering a prayer bookmark with a general prayer that people can take away may boost people's confidence and act as a reminder. These prayers could be focused on those around us who listen such as: Age UK, Samaritans, family, talking newspaper etc.

Invitation to bring

Invite participants to bring their favourite, or a meaningful, piece of music to the next session on CD, tape or with information to find it online. These could be played during gathering and refreshment times in the background. Be aware if people find background music distracting or hinders their hearing and incorporate elsewhere as needed.

Day 3: You'll never guess what happened – Feeding the 5000

Memory/sensory

Items in a picnic basket. Gather items from picnics from times gone by and more contemporary times. Ask participants if they have any older items to bring in advance. Gingham rugs, wicker baskets, damp flannel instead of wipes etc. Go round the group asking: What would you take on your picnic? What was the best bit or the worst? Any interesting picnic venues? Items? Tales?

Having a tasting table/tray of different types of bread available today (pitta, bagel, naan, pretzel, panini etc.) engages the senses of taste, touch and smell and engages participants in discussions about the changing times and varieties in modern society.

Craft/activity

Making and baking bread may be an experience from people's past that evokes memories of home and family. Using a simple recipe that fits the timescale and may need preparation, invite participants early in the session to create knots and plaits with dough. As they knead and shape, invite conversation about picnics they enjoy now or have in the past. Bake and wrap the bread for people to take home and enjoy later.

Prayer/worship

In this miraculous story of plenty we are reminded that Jesus cared for those who were following him and would get hungry. There are many people in our world who are hungry today due to conflict, weather events, environmental damage, poverty etc. Either get participants to write of places known to them on cut-out paper fish or have some pre-prepared and offer them out. Encourage people to pray over the coming day/week for the people in that place who are hungry. Sharing stories from Save the Children, Christian Aid, Fairtrade foundation etc. of where people have been lifted out of hunger would also be appropriate.

Invitation to bring

Invite participants to bring a tin or packet of food they can donate to the local foodbank and gather them together at the next session.

Day 4: Does anybody love me? – Lydia

Memory/sensory

Collected samples of cloth, particularly purples, with different textures and patterns could be placed into a basket for participants to untangle and separate. If material can be found that evokes memories (eg tea towels, silk, canvas, work clothes, curtains), encourage participants to comment on textures, shape, colours as a way of evoking their own stories and experiences of how material has changed over their life time. If anyone has sewing workbaskets/pin cushions/tatting etc, these could be displayed to aid reminiscing and discussion.

Craft/activity

Tie dye tissues provide a wonderfully tactile and engaging craft that can be used during the sharing of refreshments later in the session. Consider making butterflies, or paper baskets

out of purple strips, or exploring purple chromatography on coffee filter crafts (How to Make Coffee Filter Dancers, onelittleproject.com).

Prayer/worship

Lydia symbolises the early believers gathering together to live, pray, share and work together in community. Everyone is valued, young and old. Spend some time giving thanks for the fellowship and community you all belong to. Create some purple hearts that can be strung on a prayer tree or placed on a prayer wall celebrating the gifts and skills of everyone. Commenting about the precious nature of the purple cloth mirroring the preciousness of each person present can remind each participant that they are valued and cherished.

Invitation to bring: Share “When I grow old I will wear purple” by Jenny Joseph and invite them to come to the next sessions wearing purple if they have it (The Surprising Story Behind the Poem “When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple” – Later Bloomer).

Day 5: Can I have a go? – Palm Sunday

Memory/sensory

Provide different words and traditions of welcome on printed paper and ask the group which they recognise or have experienced (eg Eskimo, French, Japanese, Indian). Invite participants to share stories of welcome they have experienced, whether in a new job or community, when travelling or welcoming someone into their home. These examples could be portrayed through flags that could be waved to welcome royalty; flower garlands for welcome to some countries; a tea cup and saucer/comfy slippers for a welcome home. If there have been local examples of grand welcomes for celebrities or royalty invite participants to share their stories and memories.

Craft/activity

The Finger Pathway craft is an excellent craft engaging touch and sight. Additional crafts could be folding palm crosses, with designs and demo videos available online. Additionally, newspaper can be used to create palm trees and leaves that can be used within worship. If your group appreciates games and fun, “pin the tail on the donkey” may be appropriate here!

Prayer/worship

Ensure everyone has made a “Finger Pathway” or have enough available for those who haven’t. Encourage participants to sit, and encourage a prayerful atmosphere. Assign each texture an appropriate prayer association. Eg smooth = for when life is going as expected; cardboard ridges = for when we face ups and downs; sandpaper = for those who face tough times; fun designs = for celebrations and happy times etc. Encourage everyone to feel these and ask for God’s help, comfort and joy.

“All together” activities led from the front or around tables in smaller groups.

- “Getting to know you” Bingo – finding out about each other’s work, families, skills, interests.
- Table-based quizzes on relevant themes can help draw people together and introduce the theme. Competition works at all ages and volunteers can be hands on to encourage and support as needed.

Resources

- Anna Chaplaincy Anna Chaplaincy - The Bible Reading Fellowship: (brf.org.uk)
- Livability Dementia Inclusive Church Guide: Travelling Together: www.livability.org.uk/news/a-dementia-inclusive-church-guide-travelling-together
- Bible Reading Fellowship's Messy Vintage: 52 sessions to share Christ-centred fun with the older generation by Katie Norman and Jill Phipps: www.messychurch.org.uk/messy-vintage
- Lichfield Diocese – Diocese of Lichfield, Dementia-Friendly Church: anglican.org
- Pinterest/Messy Vintage – for specific resources: www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/messy-vintage/

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