

# Why Memory Worship?

Julie Peek reflects on the growing success of church services for people with dementia

NO two people experience dementia in exactly the same way.

What may be a help for one person may not be for another. At Memory Worship we try to provide an accepting, accessible space where everyone feels held by God.

After all, we all have dark days from time to time but nothing can extinguish God's light, the light to light our path.

Back in 2016 I was newly employed as a mission enabler for older people and took part in a Methodist study day on the spiritual needs of older people and those living with dementia.

I came away with a strong sense that more needed to be done in our local community to support the spiritual needs of older people.

With the support of my church minister, the Rev Julia Monaghan, I set up a monthly church service called Memory Worship, worship for those with and without dementia at Wesley church in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex.

Memory Worship takes a regular consistent pattern of welcome; singing well-known hymns, reading familiar passages of Scripture, sharing the peace and saying the Lord's Prayer together.

The formal part of the service is 30 minutes before leading into a craft activity



and hospitality providing an opportunity for conversation to reinforce the theme of the service. A dementia friendly trained team of volunteers are always on hand with tea, homemade cake and Methodist fellowship.

This service grew very quickly and was replicated by Thorpe Bay church so every month there were two local church services on the first and third Mondays.

Other churches were regularly joining our services to see how they too could set up similar services for their local community.

This all stopped in March 2020 when Covid-19 gripped the world.

This devastating blow compelled me to put together a "Memory Worship at Home" service to be viewed on YouTube, initially for the people that had been attending monthly services at Wesley and Thorpe Bay.

Years on and Memory Worship at Home YouTube service has been watched at home and in care homes locally and all over the country.

These monthly services have been viewed more than 3,000 times by people such as Margaret (pictured) who watches at home in Bedale, Yorkshire, supported by her amazing carer daughter Heather.

Pre-Covid Bedale church had set up their own monthly Memory Worship "Silver service" that Margaret and Heather used to attend together.

The exit out of Covid re-

strictions for the people that used to attend Memory Worship at any of the churches needed to be very slow and steady but was very much needed. We had all struggled mentally and physically with isolation.

It was a complete joy to be able to sing those old familiar hymns again when we did return to worship.

This new ministry contin-

ues to grow and act as a beacon for churches across the country to address the spiritual needs of people living with dementia and their carers.

We expect God's work to amaze, but this has exceeded even those expectations.

Within our circuit a third Memory Worship service has been set up hosted by Rayleigh church as a joint

venture with Christ church United Reformed Church. This means there are now three services locally that people can attend every month.

Now in its eighth year at Wesley church in Leigh-on-Sea, support for people living with dementia is only getting harder.

When I look at our local authorities' support of people living with dementia it is shrinking rapidly due to funding issues and this is a national problem.

Support groups such as Singing for the Brain, men's clubs and advocacy groups are disappearing. Churches are in many cases offering the only support available to people.

A video on "Memory Worship in Leigh-on-Sea, helping all to be included in Church" can be seen on youtube.com.

Memory Worship sessions are all 2-4 pm on the first Monday of the month at Thorpe Bay Methodist church, on the first Tuesday of the month at Rayleigh Methodist church and on the third Monday of the month at Wesley Methodist church.

**Julie Peek is no longer employed by the church but continues to lead a dedicated volunteer team rolling out one of the only community connections people living with dementia have access to locally.**

