

# Top Tips



**Faith in  
Later Life**

## Running a Dementia Café

Rev Sally Bates

### Rooted in Scripture: What does the Bible say?

God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be... The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour... God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians 12: 18, 21-26).

This is the inspiration behind any church-based dementia café.

- ✓ **Reaching older people with the good news of Jesus**
- ✓ **Discipling older Christians to become like Jesus**
- ✓ **Mobilising them to be disciple-makers**

### Fostering Fruitfulness: What difference can this make?

Living with dementia can be a very lonely existence, both for cared-for and carer. Creating a safe and joyful space, where all are included and accepted, and where carers can 'share one another's burdens' is a wonderful gift a church can give to its community.

As each guest arrives, they are greeted by name, ensuring a warm welcome for everyone. For that short time, others step in to show love and attention to guests, and carers can relax and be served, knowing that they are understood and supported.

Consider providing a separate space for carers to retreat to if necessary and where possible, give them the opportunity to access specialist services and share experiences and expertise.

### Tips at a glance

Gather your team

Be realistic

Make it multi-sensory

Create partnerships

Celebrate your success

## Faith in Later Life's Top Tips

1

**Gather your team.** As you gather your team of volunteers, encourage people to respond with their heart – perhaps they have personal or professional experience of dementia and they want to give back. Ensure everyone (guests and team) has a name badge each week. Provide regular training, ideally with a refresher once a year, to allow new members to join on a regular basis.

2

**Be realistic.** It's better to start small rather than aiming high and risk stretching yourselves too thinly. Consider meeting for games/discussion once a month, and for music/singing at another time. Advertise through GP surgeries and social prescribers, memory clinics, dementia services and the local press, and don't worry if not many people come to start with; the word will get out!

### Further Inspiration

For more on this subject, please head over to the Resource Hub on our website at [faithinlaterlife.org](http://faithinlaterlife.org).

If you lead a ministry among older people in your church or Christian community, we'd love you to join our network – it's free and you can find out more on our website.

3

**Make it multi-sensory.** Everyone experiences dementia differently, so it's good to offer different ways of interacting – in groups, one-to-one, or altogether. Provide a range of resources, such as puzzles, picture bingo, twiddle blankets, purring cats, musical instruments, physical games and visual stimuli. This allows each guest to respond as they prefer. Refreshments are also a crucial part of the café experience.

4

**Create partnerships.** It helps if the café leader has up-to-date experience of dementia services, so carers can be signposted to useful agencies. You can also invite people to come in and talk about the services they offer, eg. care agencies, dementia charities, benefit advisors, pet therapy etc. Carers can then chat freely without having to worry about the person they're caring for.

5

**Celebrate your success.** We cultivate what we celebrate, so from the outset, encourage your church to 'own' this project. Share prayer requests and give regular updates in church, sharing stories of how guests and carers have been supported and the difference it's made to their experience of living with dementia. We are called to be a blessing to our communities!

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.' Psalm 92: 12-15

