



# How to ...

## Begin ministry in a care home

Our experience in ministry within care homes has developed over many years and is fully illustrated in “Heaven’s Above, 20 scripts for services for Care Homes...”. This resource is available to borrow from the Bristol diocesan office.

Our approach has centred on providing a little drama or an activity for all the residents near the start of every service. This stimulates and entertains, leading to a better reception of some psalm reading and prayers.

### **We apply the following principles:**

- This is a layman’s ministry. It does not require a priest, (unless one comes forward!)
- This is not church and no holy quiet or holy atmosphere is called for, but the little drama is done with some reverence. Quieter moments will emerge naturally as the residents are drawn in, and listen to the psalm and prayers towards the end.
- We are not preaching; there is no sermon of course. We provide a chance for the residents to find their own thoughts or stir their memory. The generations at present in care homes have often a residual memory of the scriptures, know their hymns and know their Lord’s Prayer. We see our role as tapping into their memories and previous experience of church. The leader makes a reflective comment on the message of the story performed.
- For our little drama we robe up in front of the residents. This can be fun and relaxing for everyone, creating some early interest.
- As the audience will all be in big armchairs or wheelchairs, they can only look straight ahead. So all action must be in front, facing them, and all the team must have good clear voices and speak slowly!
- On arrival, early, before the service is due, the team will greet the residents personally, and then spend a few minutes at the end chatting further with them. (Not all will be able to or want to.)
- We always expect to have one member of staff, if not two, from the home, present from the service.

### **Initial moves**

- Arrange to meet and discuss your proposal with the Activity Organizer of the home you would like to visit regularly. If you follow the “Heaven’s Above” resource, then you will be offering something different! The handbook’s introduction on page 3 lists some of the likely difficulties that should be considered. A regular service once a month is enough for all concerned, to be fixed, eventually, on a regular day, each time for 30 minutes.
- Be aware of the needs of the potential congregation. In our context we minister to a number of people with dementia and work hard to ensure that we are sensitive to these peoples needs in our planning and leading.
- Gather a small team together and plan a first service. A sample service is given in “Heaven’s Above”.
- Decide how to accompany the hymns, and how to provide hymn-books or hymn-sheets for some of the residents.
- Make the necessary preparations for the service including producing any resources or props that may be necessary for any planned drama sections.

- Apportion roles to the team, including assigning a person to move among the residents to help them.
- Distribute service plans and scripts to each member of your team in advance so that they are fully briefed and confident.
- Go for it! Hopefully this will be a joyful affair. Encourage the residents to join in and play a participatory role in the service and in responding the drama segment of the service.

## **Looking to the future**

Once the patterns for the services are established it is useful to draw up a yearly plan and distribute copies of that to the team. This gives continuity to the ministry and eliminates last minute panics about what to do each month.

We have found that it works best if the leader decides who does what and emails details to the team a few days beforehand. If anyone is unable to attend they can let the leader know at this point.

For further information about our care home ministry and for copies of the service and drama plans we use, please consult the Heaven's Above resource.

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