<u>Spiritual Nourishment in Dementia – Would a 'Hymn Sandwich' Satisfy You?</u>

On 25 November a group of 26 lay and clergy representatives from churches across the Diocese spent the day at St Andrew's Paddock Wood with Katy Hirst from Brightshadow theatre company. Our theme was Dementia Inclusive Worship. Katy helped us design services to engage people with dementia and nurture their faith. She showed us a Communion Service she has written for people with dementia which has multi-sensory, participative elements.

As we were taken through the Communion Service, Katy was asked if the service was somewhat long and whether this was appropriate for people with dementia. A general rule of thumb in care home ministry seems to be keeping things 'short and sweet'. A few familiar hymns interspersed with brief reflections – or 'thought for the day lite'. This is on the assumption those with cognitive problems cannot understand or concentrate for long. Katy and her colleague Rhiannon Lane have been running Zest workshops in dementia care settings since setting up Brightshadow in 2009. Katy explained that, with the right approach, people with dementia can happily take part in group activities that last at least an hour. This can allow them to thrive in ways that sitting listlessly in an armchair for huge chunks of the day cannot.

The spiritual world is not confined by memory and thought processes. Faith can continue to grow in dementia. Are we selling people with dementia short in assuming that they do not want to focus on spiritual things for more than a fleeting few minutes?

We left the workshop inspired to be more ambitious in offering opportunities for people with dementia to worship and express their faith. We could see how sharing Communion with those who are cognitively challenged but spiritually open might be enriching for everyone. The tools and strategies Katy shared helped us feel equipped and confident. Hopefully now we will be providing a hearty meal in care homes in our Diocese, not just a spiritual snack!