



Adaptations to Presenting the Story

Godly Play is person centred and because each care setting and each group of adults is unique there is no one size fits all. There may be people in the group with physical impairments, e.g. back problems, hearing loss, speech impairment, limited vision, unable to walk. There may be people in the group with cognitive impairments e.g. dementia, memory loss, stroke.

We offer some ideas for adaptations, followed by 'Reflections from the Field' to help you ask the question - how can I best serve the needs of the older people in this particular context? You might find the Reflective Evaluation Sheets helpful in reflecting on your own practice. We encourage you to share your experiences with others - perhaps through our Facebook page. We would like to include some of your ideas and experiences in updated versions of these documents.

Changing the Nature of the Storytelling Materials

In order to make the story more accessible it may be appropriate to change the story materials in a way that would not be appropriate in a Godly Play curriculum for children. For example, you might decide to make the pieces in a parable story 3D and more like the real thing. Working with elders in care settings has some differences in purpose to working with children. For children the educational / formational intention is very strong. So, it is important, for example, to show the children through the way the parable is told and wondered about and the accompanying materials, that we use parables - and let them teach us- in ways that are totally different from a sacred story. This is not so important in our work with elders who have different spiritual needs and for whom which Godly Play serves different purposes.

A caveat - when we make the parable pieces more concrete then we may lose some of the metaphorical and playful nature of the parable. For example, if the fold is represented by the sheepfold from the World Communion then we can no longer play with the strips of felt to move them into whatever positions are needed to help make meaning (for example placing all the strips around the places of danger).

Choosing Materials That Are Visually Helpful

E.G. Choosing the colour of the people of God that stand out against the colour of the sand or presenting the story on a cloth that makes the story stand out.

Choosing the Level at Which to Present the Story

Presenting the story on a low table can make it easier for the elders to see. It can be uncomfortable to sit on a chair and look down at the floor. Some stories could be presented vertically e.g. hanging pictures of Creation on a washing line.

Making Stories Larger

If you are working with a group that struggles with their eyesight or you are working in a large group, then perhaps make the story materials bigger.

Examples include: Faces of Easter on bigger card;

Saint stories using bigger objects e.g. for Mother Teresa use a big bucket, sari (white cloth with blue lines drawn along the edge, large peace sign and photo of Mother Teresa; and

Creation on large card or fabric to peg onto a washing line.

Making Stories Smaller

If you are working one to one with someone (e.g. at a person's bedside), you may want to leave people with the story to look at after the session or want to hand out pieces for people to hold and look at during the session then small versions of the story can be helpful.

Examples include Creation and Faces of Easter. You could even provide small rolls of the black or purple felt. These small versions could be offered for the elders to keep in their gold spiritual well being box (see separate documents on these).

Adding Words on Cards

Writing key words on cards and placing them down as you tell the story can be helpful for people with dementia. They can go back to them as a reference point if they can't access or remember where you are in the story.

Example: Exodus story key words – Pharaoh, Moses, Egypt etc

Using All the Senses

Using the senses is a good way to engage people with learning difficulties or on a dementia journey.

Contact with real life materials is also good for the well being of everyone.

Examples: The Sower – knitted nests and felt birds that people can hold; Creation – 3D boards and / or natural materials to represent each day; and The Good Shepherd – sheep's wool for people to hold during the story.

Using 3D Materials for the Parables

The parables may be more visually accessible and easier to understand for someone with dementia or someone with poor eyesight if the pieces are 3D.

Examples: The Good Shepherd – use the good shepherd, the sheep and the fold from the World Communion story; The Pearl - use doll's house furniture (though be aware of making it look patronising); and The Mustard seed - use knitted nests.

Adapting the Language of the Script to Make It More Familiar

Using language that is familiar to the elders will make the stories more accessible and may spark memories e.g. use the words 'Ten commandments' in place of 'Ten best ways.'

Using More Body Gestures and Exaggerating Body Gestures

Actions speak louder than words and the gestures might need to be amplified to catch the attention of the elders e.g. when saying 'God loved the people so much that he gave them the 10 best ways to live', the storyteller smiles and 'hugs' the love heart to her chest.

Using Battery Candles Instead of Real Candles for the Baptism Story?

It might be assumed that care settings do not allow naked flames, though if you think through the safety issues most care homes will allow real candles to be used. The elders need every opportunity we can give them to experience the real, the natural and the beautiful. (See example below.)

Creating Opportunities for Participation during the Story

Elders who are living with dementia will feel empowered (which is good spiritual care) if they can join in e.g. for the Ten Best Ways story once all the commandments have been placed in the sand, count them out loud '1,2,3...' inviting the elders to join in.

Reflections from the Field

1) *"I found more wondering when I had done this story vertically on the wash line, I think because it was easier for everyone to see rather than having to peer down onto the floor from their easy chair."*

'... yes, this looking downwards issue is an important and practical one...at Greenbelt we were showing stories 'large' to a larger group on a vertical plane. Perhaps some of the parallel experiences of showing stories large and vertically can inform designing stories of the right size and in the right visual-plane for a group with a variety of visual impairments."

2) *"Charles has made some triangular wooden wedges with non-slip mat glued on to go behind the creation cards to prop them up. They work really well."*

3) *"Baptism story this morning at a care home in Sheffield. Wondering if adapting the language used in this story may help older people (with dementia?) to engage more? Saying 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (Holy Ghost, perhaps!) only and leaving out 'Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer' may keep things more concise and be more familiar. Also, when presenting the 'Son' (I am the Light) part of the trinity circles, we might mention Jesus' name and say ...'There was once a person called Jesus, who said such wonderful things...' etc. This would perhaps help older people to recall stories told from the past, give a more concrete subject to the lesson and therefore enable them to enter into it. What do people think?"*

4) "Personally, what I've often found to be most powerful is the chance to reflect on the 'invisible light' and become intimately involved in 'changing the light'. Much of the real essence of this lesson, therefore, obviously requires the use of candles! I know that naked flames must be used with great caution in care homes!! (LED lights (shaped like a candle) are sometimes used to replace real flames). But there are ways round this. A Christ Candle can be lit and placed on a table with continual supervision. Last week during the baptism lesson, Yo used the Christ candle to light a tea light for each of the residents (5 in the group). She placed the tea lights on a plate on the table. The group was small enough for each resident to know which candle belonged to them, enabling personal involvement. After demonstrating changing the light of her's and the baby doll's lights, Yo carefully changed the lights of each resident in silence, giving a good amount of time for residents to personally wonder with their own thoughts."

5) "It's so important to include the care staff in our sessions! The activities coordinator who was sitting with one of the residents in the group, was asked if she, too, would like a light and if she would like it changed. During the Evaluation Sheets after the session, she said how pleased she was to have been offered a light, and had expected not to have been included, as she is not baptised! What an opportunity there is here!!.... to help care staff know that they are acknowledged, included and appreciated for the hard work they do!"

6) "The words used when a light is offered in this lesson are...." {Name}...Remember your baptism." I wonder if the words..."{Name}...Receive your light" might be more appropriate for people who have dementia. Being asked to 'remember' an event may cause anxiety as they may know that remembering things is very difficult. However - the word Baptism may spark memories of attending Baptism services. Perhaps" {Name}...Here is your baptism candle" "

7) "Yo did 'The Ten Best Ways' with 5 residents yesterday. She referred to the '10 best ways', as 'the 10 commandments', regularly throughout the story. When saying 'God loved the people so much that he gave them the 10 best ways to live', she smiled and 'hugged' the love heart to her chest - a very warm and loving gesture! Once all the commandments were placed in the sand, Yo counted them all again...'1,2,3...' and some residents joined her. I wonder if this seemed to help the residents to view all 10 collectively. "He gave them to us" said Yo. 'It's a miracle, really', said a resident."

8) "The way that parables are usually told with flat pieces can be a problem for older people who might have poor eyesight or who might be sitting in an armchair a fair distance from the table on which it is being told (which itself may not be the perfect height). Lois Howard who has been using Godly Play with people living with dementia for over 10 years uses the stand up sheep, the good shepherd and the sheep pen from the World communion story to tell the parable of the good shepherd.

"Bridget shared her ideas for the parable of the mustard seed. Here in Sheffield we have also been thinking about adapting the parables. I borrowed some dolls house furniture from church to practise the parable of the Pearl and it got me thinking through these questions... The size of furniture - big enough to see yet small enough to fit in the house - which may need to be larger, which means less houses - maybe 3 rather than 5? The colour of the furniture - so that it stands out against the white felt. The material of the furniture - wooden bed with fabric bedcover, ceramic sink, a woollen rug... - so they are tactile. The people - standing up the flat wooden pieces from the original parable or people of God or dolls house people - what age, clothes, period? The style of furniture - modern? from the 40's, 50's 60's and familiar from their childhood or when they were in their 30's? But then how would the story feel to see furniture reminiscent of a time before being in the care home, being sold, leaving the merchant with no house and no furniture? So, I have decided to purchase (from ebay) 'posh' furniture from the Victorian age (similar to the images of opulent furniture we use for parables). In all of this I am concerned that the materials should not make older people feel patronised."

9) "The Parable of the Precious Pearl at a care home this morning.... The storyteller, Yo, used 3D figures from a doll's house. Key phrases were also written on card and placed near the story as the story was told."

10) "We've found that some residents have been more engaged in a story when key phrases are written clearly in large, bold writing and displayed near the story throughout the session e.g. as above. Residents often read these aloud (and probably to themselves). I wonder if this reinforces the spoken word and helps people with hearing difficulties."

11) "Here in Sheffield we have been thinking about making changes to the Parable materials, so the story is more accessible. The way that parables are usually told with flat pieces can be a problem for older people who might have poor eyesight or who might be sitting in an armchair a fair distance from the table on which it is being told (which itself may not be the perfect height). Lois Howard who has been using Godly Play with people living with dementia for over 10 years uses the stand-up sheep, the good shepherd and the sheep pen from the World communion story to tell the parable of the good shepherd."

12) "Here is an adaptation for the parable of the mustard seed. You can hold and feel the 'homes' that the birds built - not just see and hear about them. When we shared this story with elders who have dementia one lady really enjoyed holding a nest."

"When working with the story myself I found myself playing in a different way because of the 3D and tactile nature of the materials, as well as the variety of bird sizes - adult birds feeding the babies in their nests, birds creeping up the tree, bigger birds scaring away the smaller ones, flocks of birds flying through the air..."

A lady from our church designed these knitted nests which feel SO lovely to hold... like feathered nests. I just cut the birds out of very thick felt from the scrap store (so they will stand up or lie flat) and stuck on bits of felting for the wings. It's a work in progress and I would welcome other ideas."