



break for tea and coffee, and then we finish off with a reflection. The take-home message might be practical or spiritual.

"It is a model that we've evolved and could work elsewhere. We just need to train facilitators who can do the hosting. If churches on the Isle of Wight or mainland wanted to do this, we'd be delighted to help - just get in touch.

"Ten years ago, dementia was hardly ever talked about, and people were fearful of developing dementia. They might not have approached their GP for a diagnosis, because they thought nothing could be done to help them with this incurable disease..

"Now there is greater awareness of dementia and a desire within society to help. Churches are good places, as they are involved in their neighbourhoods and know families that may be affected. I'm not a churchgoer, but I'm interested in the way that churches can help people spiritually in the face of this adverse life event."

Dementia Conversations began in St John's Church, Ryde, more than a year ago. Up to a dozen carers meet monthly to discuss topics relating to dementia care, such as appropriate nutrition, or how to avoid scammers.

Priest-in-charge the Rev Sue Theobald said: "Most of those who come are carers, but some are congregation members who want to find out more so they can offer pastoral care. One week a couple came whose mum had been diagnosed, as they didn't know where else to go for help.

'It's about helping them to feel they aren't on their own.'

"A big part of it is listening to people's concerns. We want to try to help them to make sense of what is going on and to share ideas about how to handle things. It's about helping them to feel they aren't on their own."



The 'Tovertafel - an interactive light table - was launched at St Mark's, Wootton

Sue, who is also the island's contact for ministry to older people, hopes to run training sessions to enable people to become Dementia Friends.

Meanwhile, St Mark's Church, Wootton, has offered Circle Dance sessions for those living with dementia, also in partnership with Dementia Pathfinders. The church also hosted the launch of the 'Tovertafel' - an innovative light table that inspires physical and

Help for those with dementia on the island

BECAUSE of the age profile of residents on the Isle of Wight, dementia is a particular issue.

Around 2,600 island residents are currently living with dementia, which means support for those people and their carers is vital.

Our worshippers often work in partnership with organisations such as Age UK Isle of Wight or the Alzheimer's Society, opening up churches and church halls so groups can meet there regularly.

St John's church hall in Ryde and St Mary's church hall in Brading are used as venues for weekly 'Community Memory Groups' run by Age UK Isle of Wight for those living with

dementia.

There are five such groups run by the charity on the island - the other three meet in Cowes, Lake and Newport. They run from 10am-3pm, but people can also attend for half a day.

The groups offer mental stimulation and the chance to reminisce and socialise. Activities include gardening, flower arranging, quizzes and music bingo, as well as a healthy lunch.

Tara Williams, from Age UK Isle of Wight, said: "People tell us they love the groups because they are friendly, fun, stimulating and they enjoy spending time with other people facing similar challenges.

"Carers needing respite or time to go to appointments also value the groups, as they know their loved one will be safe and supported."

Those who attend the St John's group and their carers are invited into the church for dementia-friendly services four times a year, at Christmas, Easter, summertime and Harvest. The half-hour services include familiar hymns, recognisable prayers and multi-sensory talks.

For more details about these Community Memory Groups, contact Age UK Isle of Wight on 01983-525282 or see www.ageukiw.org.uk/isleofwight

Becoming dementia-friendly

THERE are a wealth of resources to help a parish that would like to support those living with dementia. One initiative involves worshippers becoming 'Dementia Friends'.

Worshippers at St Peter and St Paul's Church in Hambledon became aware that some members of their congregation were exhibiting the short-term memory loss and confusion often associated with dementia.

They didn't want to exclude them from church events and activities, especially as they had given long service to the parish and community.

So they set up a working group of four people, with PCC approval, and contacted the charity Dementia Friendly Hampshire.

Those four people became Dementia Friends and did some research on what other churches had done, locally and nationally. They produced an action plan in 2015 and have renewed it annually ever since.

Group member Richard Hull, said: "We felt we should provide a supportive and caring environment for people living with dementia and their carers, in order for them to worship.

"We have held education meetings open to all in the parish and specific education for our clergy team and all involved with pastoral care."

The group communicated its commitment via website and magazine articles, and assessed whether its church building posed problems for those with dementia or any other disability.

"These actions have led to a wider knowledge of dementia in our community and we hope wider understanding and tolerance," said Richard.

"It has certainly led to informal conversations where problems are admitted and people and their families are given advice and sign-posting to services which may help them."