

SACRED SOUNDS IN SACRED SPACES:

Use of Music in the Spiritual Care Visit as Applied in Dementia Care

Mary E. MacDonald, M.A.

Boston, MA

SUMMARY

The many physiological, social and emotional benefits of therapeutic uses of music with persons living with dementia are well documented in the established music therapy literature. The spiritual benefits of music (the human breathing in and out of music as a medium for transcendence, hope, ritual, expressing joy and suffering with and towards a God-Spirit who we perceive is with us and sometimes not) have been experienced for ages, through the Christian musical tradition of hymns, psalms, chant, spirituals, "secular" songs of justice and peace, as well as the many musical expressions of other faith and cultural traditions worldwide who existed before and alongside Christianity. Person-centered dementia care has been well articulated by authors such as Tom Kitwood, Jane Verity and Daniel Kuhn. This poster aims to extend practices of music therapy and music ministry into meaningful personal and communal spiritual practice, in the context of whole-person dementia care. It offers a simple method of incorporating music into practices of spiritual care for three main groups of spiritual caregivers: family & friends, residential caregivers and spiritual care professionals (residential and acute care chaplains, lay and ordained ministers, religious persons, and pastoral counselors). What is a sacred sound, a sacred space, is open for interpretation, but here it is encouraged to think of sacred space as any that involves our relating to one another in a caring way. Sacred sounds (and music) are very much determined on a personal level, informed by experiences within faith traditions and "secular" experiences leading to new spiritual awareness and growth (the goal is to identify music which is uniquely sacramental for a person). It is an assumption that human caring is intrinsically spiritual caring, of being with, being the hands, voice, touch, of a loving God-Spirit in us, for each other. Therefore, as we move forward caring for each other, it is helpful to experiment with tools that enhance our awareness and ability to be God-Spirit for each other, that our loved ones living with dementia may experience a level of nurturing, transcendence, healing and hope, that sacramental music coupled with fellowship is able to offer, and that we, spouses, lovers, friends, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, and professional caregivers, are healed, blessed, transformed in ever new ways by our practice.

FAMILY & FRIENDS



Life Moment: Connecting with friends and family during a difficult hospitalization

Application: Compassionate Touch, Eye Contact, Instrumental "Mood" Music

Sacred Space: Acute Care

Sample Recording: Bach: Lute Suites, Vol. 1
(Arranged for guitar by John Williams, 2002, Sony Music)

METHOD

Step 1: Try on a new pair of shoes

Begin to take the perspective of your loved one, the resident, or program participant

- Identify what is sacred music for them, with them. Which faith tradition do they embrace? What music inspires experience of connection with self, others, their naming of God-Spirit? What music elicits feelings of peace, well-being, tranquility? What music gets their toes tapping, hands clapping? How does their participation in creating music allow expression of emotion that otherwise has limited outlet?
- The answers should vary greatly for each individual based on unique personal experiences within religious traditions and with music experienced in society at large: live concerts and recordings heard on radio, television, film, online. The key is to focus on music selections that, for that unique person, foster greater spiritual expression and experience of God with us.

Step 2: Create a personal playlist

Begin to build a personal playlist of sacred music for your spiritual practice with your loved one, resident, or program participant. Three areas to start with might include:

- Music for relaxation, quiet presence/being with each other (preferences might range from classical cello to smooth jazz to light bluegrass ballads)
- Music for joyful celebration, i.e. "we are alive, dancing, moving, singing in ways that feel best" (preferences might range from popular church hymns and spirituals to hip hop and funk to popular Broadway or show tunes)
- Music for self or communal expression of sad or angry feelings (preferences might range from musical settings of the Psalms to rap to justice/suffering songs from any number of world folk traditions)

Step 3: Identify environments, participants and applications

See sample applications specific to place and participants below

RESIDENTIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS



Life Moment: Expressing Connectedness, Joy

Application: Gentle Dancing, Holding Hands, Eye Contact, Singing a familiar song of hope, joy, transcendence

Sacred Space: Assisted Living Facility

Sample Hymn, Lyric: "Dance, dance, wherever you may be. I am the Lord of the Dance said he. I'll lead you all wherever you may be, I'll lead you all in the Dance said he." (Sydney Carter, 1963)

IMPLICATIONS



Extending the tools of spiritual care practice into the hands of all direct caregivers is important to the goal of providing whole-person care.

The exploration of spiritual care practices that include personally defined sacramental music (music which may or may not fit within typical sacred or secular labels, but may cross over and flow between and around both) is fundamental to honoring the unique spiritual life of each person living with dementia and to the practice of person-centered care.

Research is needed to more fully understand the spiritual care needs of persons living with dementia, how those needs may change over the course of illness, and how the use of a personally informed sacramental music can assist in meeting those needs over time.

SPIRITUAL CARE PROFESSIONALS



Life Moment: Hospice Care, End of Life
Application: Family Bedside Prayer

Sacred Space: Home

Sample Spiritual, Adapted Lyric:
"Precious Lord, Take our hands. Lead us on, help us stand. We are tired. We are weak. We are worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead us on to the light. Take our hands, Precious Lord, lead us home." (Thomas Dorsey, 1932, adapted for the context of family prayer by Mary MacDonald, 2008)

REFERENCES:

- ♦ Aldridge, D. (Ed.) (2000). *Music Therapy in Dementia Care*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ♦ Kitwood, T. (1997). *Dementia reconsidered: The person comes first*. New York, NY: Open University Press.
- ♦ MacDonald, M. (1999). *Sacred Sounds in Sacred Spaces: An Invitation*. (master thesis - manuscript available)
- ♦ Saliers, D.E. (2007). *Music and Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- ♦ Schneck, D.J. & Berger, D.S. (2006). *The Music Effect: Music Physiology and Clinical Applications*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ♦ Thaut, M.H. (2008). *Rhythm, Music, and the Brain: Scientific Foundations and Clinical Applications*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- ♦ Verity, J. & Kuhn, D. (2008). *The Art of Dementia Care*. Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.

This poster was originally presented online at the 2008 Alzheimer Association Dementia Care Conference. Mary was unable to attend the conference in person because, at that time, she was an unpaid family caregiver journeying with her mom through end-of-life. Ruah Musica is a marymac missions initiative.

2nd edition ©2011 Marymac Missions LLC, All Rights Reserved.