**What is the Hot Drinks Ministry?**

Members of New Song Network serve refreshments at the town crematorium and one cemetery on days when it is perceived that many people will be laying flowers: Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and Mothering Sunday. These days happen to be in the coldest months so the hot drinks are very welcome.

**Why do you do it?**

This is part of who we are as Christians. We are there to stand alongside others in their need and show them the love of Jesus. And we do it in this very practical - and so appreciated - way.

**How do you get authority?**

You need to establish a good relationship with the relevant local council department. Rev Jackie Bellfield (the first minister of NSN) was a member of Warrington Borough Council Bereavement Services committee and it was through this initially that arrangements were made. Now, a phone call or email to the Bereavement Services office is sufficient to make the arrangements for a session.

**When and where do you serve refreshments?**

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Mothering Sunday. Easter Sunday and Fathers’ Day were also tried but few people visited on those days.

The time is usually 10am-3pm but on Christmas Day it is 10am-2pm.

At Walton Lea (Warrington) crematorium and Fox Covert cemetery.  Bereavement Services would like NSN to cover more of the town’s cemeteries but currently there aren’t the people to do this.

**How do you make the arrangements?**

**1.   People**

Some weeks before the day people put their name on a rota. This is set up in one hour sessions: some people give just one hour while others can offer more. The aim is to have 3 or 4 people on at all times. On average 16 people cover each day.

2 or 3 people are required earlier to set up and similarly at the end to pack up although these are often the same people who are on the first and last hour slots respectively.

If you are committed to both Christmas Eve and Day you will need to work out the logistics of taking the equipment to whoever is setting up in the morning or to a central point. There also needs to be a check on consumables and that everything is cleaned.

The co-ordinator tries to give herself some flexibility to cover for any non-attenders (which is very, very infrequent) and also to obtain any items which have run out. All helpers have her mobile number and fortunately she lives close to both of the venues.

It is important to remind people to dress up very warmly!

**2.   Equipment/consumables**

Each venue has its own check-list, setting up details and named bags.

Full details are on the spreadsheet which can be downloaded - see link above.

At the end gazebos have to be thoroughly dried for storage and all equipment is cleaned; consumables are put out for general use by the church; notes made of anything broken and any equipment which it would be useful to have.

**3.   Bereavement Services**

A phone call, email or a visit is sufficient to make the arrangements. We say what times we expect to be there and they arrange to have the electrical supply available. It is useful to check the time when the gates are locked to cars at the cemetery and whether there will be any funerals or cremations on Christmas Eve. We ensure we do not damage anything and we take all our rubbish away with us. During the time we are there we are able to help people with directions.

**What is the set-up?**

We have a gazebo for cover and because of the extremes of weather we might encounter we initially had an additional waterproof tarpaulin to cover the roof but we have since bought more heavy duty gazebos with additional wind bars and weights for the legs. The gazebos are attached to whatever is available: again we have had extreme weather conditions which cause them to lift if not tied down. Our two sites are extremely windy!

Under this we have trestle tables with a waterproof table cover.

There is a convenient electrical supply and water at both places and an urn is plugged in. As it takes some time to heat a full urn from cold we take pump pots full of boiling water to be a starter in the urn. The pump pots are re-filled with boiling water from the urn and drinks made from them which is safer than direct from the urn.

Signs are put up advertising free refreshments and at the stand we have more information and hand-outs about who we are.

It is advertised as free but many people like to make a donation and so a bowl is out for this. Many people make donations even if they do not have a drink as they say they think it is a great thing we are doing.

**What refreshments do you provide?**

**Drinks:**

Tea and coffee - Fairtrade both normal and decaff

Hot chocolate - to make with water

Orange and blackcurrant squash

Sugar and sweeteners; semi-skimmed milk. We buy sugar slips now otherwise loose sugar gets damp.

**Food:**

Biscuits and cakes which people have donated or have been bought.

Tubs of sweets and, although not refreshments, we have small bubble blowing sets for children.

**What have been people’s reactions?**

In the early years people might ignore you but it is at the stage now where visitors to the venues know we will be there. This was illustrated by a lady bringing a box of biscuits to add to our supply.

There are always words of appreciation: for the drink, for some cover from the elements, for listening. We hear people’s stories and stand alongside them. Sometimes children stay at the stand while parents go to a grave.  At the cemetery the Christmas days can be quite cheery with people in fancy dress and always there are the amazing floral tributes that they bring.

The reaction of volunteers has been equally moving. People prepared to move the time of their Christmas lunch to help is a testimony to the impact of the hot drinks ministry.  Many speak of it helping their faith in clear and tangible ways as they see the difference a kind word and hot drinks can make.

The Bereavement Services too finds this an excellent service that we provide. They would like us to do more.