

## CREATING DEMENTIA FRIENDLY FAITH COMMUNITIES

Fostering spiritual connection and meaningful engagement for those living with dementia and support for families, as we work together to stop Alzheimer's disease.

### Know your congregation members

Keep track and keep in touch. Taking note of attendance is a critically important basic step in developing connections to families who may be facing dementia.

### Educate congregation members and your community about dementia

Education empowers and prepares community members to serve the needs of those living with dementia and their care partners, reduces stigma and increases awareness about cognitive health.

- Invite a person living with dementia to speak about his or her personal experience.
- Share materials on the Alzheimer's crisis, brain health and clinical trial opportunities.
- Become a Dementia Friend at [www.dementiafriendsusa.org](http://www.dementiafriendsusa.org).
- Speak about dementia.

### Create a safe and friendly environment

- Assess congregation facilities for safety and accessibility for people living with dementia.
- Display signs clearly identifying areas, such as restrooms.
- Accept and be sensitive to behaviors that people with dementia may display, such as talking, calling out, or walking about at inappropriate times. Respond flexibly to encourage people to remain involved or help them to another area if necessary.

### Invite members facing dementia to congregational events

- Make a special effort to invite individuals living with dementia and their families to participate in congregational events, such as study groups, concerts, plays, outings and preschool programs.
- Greet them warmly and participate with them.

- Offer a volunteer companion for a member with dementia when extra support is needed.
- Wear name tags.
- Provide a quiet area where the person with dementia may go during the service as needed.
- Arrange worship at home or in care facilities if a member can no longer attend in person.

### Encourage members with dementia to participate within your faith community

Enable members living with dementia to continue engaging in roles allowing them to serve God and others. As their dementia progresses, consider new ways to engage and involve them in the life or ministry of your community.

### Encourage participation in community service projects or faith-based opportunities

Invite people living with dementia and their caregivers to join in service projects and faith-based opportunities for as long as possible. Feeling a sense of purpose and the satisfaction of using God-given skills to help others is invaluable.

### Assess existing resources and how to share them with people living with dementia

- A youth group interested in service projects
- Members willing to provide meals for members in need
- An adult group or Sunday school class that could be empowered to provide care
- Prayer groups enlisted to pray for people living with dementia and their caregivers
- Service groups and service days dedicated to practical projects
- Singing groups or bands willing to perform
- Church van and driver to take members to church or appointments

### **Offer respite care to alleviate care partner stress and isolation**

Respite care for loved ones and care partners of people experiencing dementia offers a short period of rest or relief. While caregivers have a break, congregation volunteers can lead art, physical exercise, music, games, a meal and other activities for family members with dementia to enjoy.

### **Host a caregiver support group**

Organize or host a support group for caregivers using *Seasons of Caring: Meditations for Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregivers* and its companion *Leader's Guide* by ClergyAgainstAlzheimer's.

### **Pray**

Never underestimate the power of ongoing prayer. Encourage your faith and lay leaders, and congregants to remember in prayer those who travel the path of memory loss. Consider a daily or weekly prayer chain and check-in program for families and caregivers of those who have dementia.

### **Encourage community members to adopt healthy lifestyles**

Facilitate a physical, emotional and spiritual wellness program in support of holistic care of body, mind and spirit. People living with dementia can participate with all members in living life well through exercise, nutrition and social engagement.

### **Encourage members to volunteer for clinical trials**

Clinical trials are the key to curing Alzheimer's, but they need more volunteers. Participants in a clinical trial benefit from the knowledge of the medical team running it, and for some, the experimental treatment could improve their health. Visit [www.usagainstalzheimer.org/research](http://www.usagainstalzheimer.org/research).

### **Collect and lend resources**

Compose a list of community resources to share – doctors, memory care facilities, adult day care centers, senior advocacy groups -- and collect good, used adaptive medical equipment which families can borrow, as needed.

### **Educate and assist families in completing legal and financial planning**

Offer a seminar for the congregation and local community on legal and financial planning focused on the difficult decisions which may surface following a dementia diagnosis.

### **Offer the joy of music through choirs and bands**

Emerging research underscores the validity of music programs for people with dementia. Consider developing choirs and bands tailored for people with dementia and their caregivers.

### **Host a Memory Café**

A Memory Café is a safe, supportive gathering for caregivers and those with cognitive impairment to engage in fun and engaging activities – enjoying the company of others as they interact, share concerns, celebrate, cry and find friendship.

### **Plan an initiative to sustain support**

If your congregation is interested in better serving people living with dementia and their caregivers over the long term, consider forming a small group to examine options and resources. Create a plan and methodically work toward coordination. Collaborate with other interested faith communities and regional non-profit organizations, including Dementia Friendly America.

### **Get involved in advocacy for an Alzheimer's cure**

Encourage members to join Faith United Against Alzheimer's – a coalition of UsAgainstAlzheimer's dedicated to mobilizing faith communities in the fight against Alzheimer's – to take action on critical topics, such as Alzheimer's research funding, brain health and caregiver support.

[www.usagainstalzheimer.org/networks/faith](http://www.usagainstalzheimer.org/networks/faith)

Excerpted from *When Words Fail: Practical Ministry to People with Dementia and Their Caregivers* by Rev. Kathy Fogg Berry, used by permission of Kregel Publications, 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI and Westminster Canterbury Foundation, [whenwords-fail.com](http://whenwords-fail.com); "The Dementia Friendly Church," by Rev. Dr. William B. Randolph, Discipleship Ministries, The United Methodist Church; "10 Steps," by ClergyAgainstAlzheimer's; and the Faith Sector Guide, Dementia Friendly America.