

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CONGREGATION?

If we understand that “Remember Me” is among the highest mandates of Jesus and that faith regenerates through our shared memory, how can we better remember those who forget? Rev. Cindy Ray

Here are some examples of actions a congregation can take to create a supportive environment:

- **Visit the Dementia Friends of America webpage and become a Dementia Friend or set up a Dementia Friends Workshop.**
- **Talk to members** who are living with dementia and their caregivers to find out their perspectives about what the congregation can do to offer support and sustain their connections.
- **Commit to being more inclusive** and aware of the needs of people living with dementia, consistent with the congregation’s greater commitment of inclusiveness.
- **Collaborate** with the local senior living community that offers a memory care living option or adult care services. Senior living providers have qualified staff who can educate pastoral and volunteer caregivers and

church staff to increase awareness and understanding of dementia and provide training on good communication strategies.

- Consider how **worship practices** invite or hinder participation. Increasing multisensory elements, especially through art and music, can connect with people in ways that words fall short. Address dementia-related issues in preaching. Recruit “worship friends” willing to sit with and assist persons with dementia through the service.
- **Invite** those with early-stage dementia to join activities or volunteer for tasks that bring them satisfaction. Engage church youth as volunteers in your dementia related programs.
- **Evaluate the church’s physical environment** to ensure it is accessible and appropriate for people with dementia.
- **Review regularly** used documents- bulletins and newsletters-to ensure they use clear, straightforward language and appropriate design. Include written and digital resources about dementia and available support in literature racks, newsletters and on the church website.
- **Develop a caregiver ministry** to give caregivers a needed break to run errands, go to appointments or just take a break for their well-being.

- **Reach out** to local business and community organizations to begin a dementia friendly initiative.
- If a local group has formed in your area, offer to **host meetings and trainings** for dementia champions and dementia friends as well as an ongoing support group for caregivers.
- Plan a review and continuous improvement cycle to sustain and **normalize the emerging dementia-friendly culture of the congregation.**