

DAA

Leeds Dementia
Action Alliance



A summary of ideas for helping your church become dementia friendly



Dementia is an umbrella term for a range of conditions which are caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as [Alzheimer's disease](#) or a series of strokes. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia but not all dementia is due to Alzheimer's.

The symptoms that someone with dementia experiences depend on which parts of the brain are affected. Each person is unique and will experience dementia in their own way. Different types of dementia affect people differently, especially in the early stages. How others respond, and a supportive or enabling environment, can greatly affect how well someone can live with dementia.

Here is a summary of ideas you might like to consider.

1. Join the Dementia Action Alliance - www.dementiaaction.org.uk/join_the_alliance

The DAA is a national movement of over 3000 groups and organisations of all sizes which are working to become dementia friendly, including churches, dioceses and many other faith groups. Local alliances across the Yorkshire and Humber region support local members to get involved. Joining the Alliance is a good way to show your support and enables you to display the 'daisy' symbol on church literature. Your local alliance may also be able to send you some free window stickers. You can join online on the [DAA website](#) and search for your nearest local alliance, who will be happy to help you further.

Part of the membership form asks you to outline one or two simple actions which you feel are achievable over time. This might include:

- Helping people with dementia and carers feel welcome in your church, and supporting church members to grow in understanding
- Supporting people in their faith and spiritual life
- Making your building more dementia friendly
- Supporting people in their daily lives

You may well be doing things already which can be included in your plan.

2. Become a Dementia Friend – it's easy!

Becoming a Dementia Friend only takes a few minutes to do but it is a great way to show your support. To join you simply register on the website www.dementiafriends.org.uk, watch a short video, and in return you receive a dementia information pack including a

‘daisy’ badge to show that you have become a Dementia Friend. You can also book **Dementia Friends Champion training** on this website too, which provides people with the skills and tools to deliver short dementia awareness sessions to friends and colleagues.

3. Church services

As a person’s dementia progresses they may find it gets harder to take part in long services, so a clear beginning and end, and familiar liturgy and landmarks throughout can be helpful. People might like to sit near exits/aisles in case they need to get up or go to the toilet. You might also wish to consider holding an occasional short service (eg. 30 minutes). This could be held at the start of the usual service, followed by a short break offering fellowship and then people can leave if they wish before usual service begins. A shorter service could be held say on the first Sunday of the month so it’s easier to remember, or on a different day of the week, though a disadvantage of this is that it could be more limiting socially.

Some people may stay away from church even though they would like to go, if they feel embarrassed or worried about disrupting a service. Can your church help people to attend occasionally at quieter times?

4. Hymns and prayers

People may appreciate ‘old favourites’ and you might wish to shorten long hymns if needed.

5. Church Friend volunteers

If carers and the person with dementia would like a little extra help in church, a ‘Church Friend’ could be the answer. The Church Friend meets the person/people at the door and sits near them during the service, to offer support if it is needed. If the person with dementia can’t manage the whole service, the Church Friend can accompany the person to a separate room. The room could have books, photographs, memorabilia, music, Bible stories, a cross, candle or other reminders of people’s faith.

Volunteers might like to help with lifts to church or visiting people occasionally at home.

6. Sharing Fellowship

After a dementia-friendly service, refreshments provide an important time for fellowship.

7. Spiritual and prayer life

Prayer and spiritual life can continue to be deeply meaningful and comforting for a person with dementia, even if the person cannot express this verbally. Some ideas include:

- putting a **memory box** together with things that will remind people of their faith, telling a story to a friend as an object is placed in the box means that the friend can tell the story to them as the objects are unpacked.

- **Prayer partner.** When people are less able to pray alone they may feel comforted by praying with others.
- When people cannot come to church, providing a simple service in their **home**, or perhaps singing a favourite hymn.
- Reading **familiar passages** from the Bible or devotional material written for people with dementia such as the 'Being with God' series (Scripture Union).

8. Run or offer space for a community group

You may be able to offer a regular activity specifically for people with dementia, such as a friendship group, memory club, singing group, or Dementia Café. More information is available from the [Alzheimer's Society website](#). There may be a Dementia Friendly Community in your area or services for people with dementia which you might link up with.

9. Volunteers

As with all staff and volunteers who work with vulnerable groups, you will need to ensure that people are [DBS checked](#) as appropriate.

10. Some useful websites

www.dementiaaction.org.uk

www.alzheimers.org.uk

www.dementiafriends.org.uk

www.growingoldgracefully.org.uk

www.livability.org.uk/church/dementia-friendly-churches

www.mha.org.uk/files/3814/0931/8295/Growing_Dementia_Friendly_Churches.pdf

www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Shop/Biblereadingguides/Biblereadingforadults/BeingwithGod-fordementiasufferers/164915.id

Growing Old Grace-fully works across the Catholic Diocese of Leeds
For more information call **07702 255142** or email rachell.walker@ntlworld.com

This handout is based on material produced by Livability as well as the 'Growing Dementia-friendly Churches' booklet by Gaynor Hammond (available at www.mha.org.uk/publications).

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