

HOW TO BECOME A DEMENTIA FRIENDLY FAITH COMMUNITY

In Massachusetts, 1 out of every 8 people age 65 and over has Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia. People living with dementia and their family care partners often feel challenged and isolated. Faith communities are uniquely positioned to address this through spiritual nurturing, fellowship, and compassion.

Why is remaining active in faith communities important to families affected by dementia?

Comfort

Faith connections results in an increased sense of hope, meaning, familiarity, and belonging

Fellowship

Connecting with others helps families maintain good spiritual and brain health

Brain Enrichment

Participating in familiar spiritual practices and activities such as singing, praying, and listening to readings can help maintain health, improve mood, and lower stress as these practices activate multiple senses and areas of the brain

WHAT CAN MY FAITH COMMUNITY DO TO HELP?

How can faith communities be welcoming to families affected by dementia?

- Consider offering a shorter, sensory-based service periodically.
- Invite persons with early-stage and moderate levels of dementia to volunteer for tasks that may bring them satisfaction such as folding newsletters, handing out flyers, or performing light housekeeping or gardening activities.
- Host a support group for families caring for their loved ones, or list local family caregiver support groups and other dementia services in your newsletters or website. Host a memory café to provide social support to people living with dementia along with those who care about them.
- Encourage retired nurses, social workers, health educators, and others in your faith community to develop a wellness program, or encourage healthy lifestyles to reduce the risk of developing dementia.
- Develop a program that eases the stress of family caregiving such as providing visitors to help out in the home or provide companionship a few hours a week.
- Encourage your community members to be a resource for families in need.

How can the physical space be improved for people living with dementia?

- Be sure signs are easy to read and mark important areas.
- Create a separate space that is quiet and comfortable for use when being in a group setting is too challenging.
- Make comfortable seating available to accommodate the needs of people with physical, sensory, or cognitive challenges.
- Provide a designated family bathroom for those who require assistance.
- Provide adequate lighting for safety and to minimize confusion.

Offer ways for other members of the community to help...

Tips you can offer the family for support

- Offer to sit together at services and help with spiritual practices.
- Offer transportation to/from your faith community's services and social gatherings.
- Visit families outside of formal services, particularly if they are unable to attend.
- Offer support and conversation to persons living with dementia. Your interest will be reassuring even if you don't receive an explicit response.
- Help relieve family stress by visiting the family, providing companionship or help in the home.
- Offer to take a walk in a safe location, providing friendship and exercise for the person living with dementia.
- Be kind, patient, compassionate, welcoming and inclusive of people of all abilities.
- Be an advocate and talk to your faith leader about ways to be more inclusive.

Tips you can use to engage well with someone with dementia

- Speak directly to the person, include them in conversation. Make good eye contact, if able sit next to the person, and/or get to their eye level.
- Introduce yourself using your first name, state your connection to the person, e.g., "I'm your friend, James." Consider wearing a name tag.
- Speak clearly, in short sentences, and at a slow pace. This allows the brain to keep up.
- Ask questions one at a time. Offer choices for answers if necessary.
- While listening, consider the meaning of tone of voice, body language and words. Provide comfort by nodding and going along with their reality without correcting or disagreeing.
- Go beyond words and use music and spiritual symbols to engage the senses.
- Promote a sense of belonging, offer hugs or hand holding as appropriate. Help the person feel loved and valued, which will help.
- Recognize there are more than just memory challenges associated with dementia, such as reduced decision-making ability and confusion about the year or place.

How can your faith community become more informed & spread awareness of dementia?

- Build a relationship with the Massachusetts/New Hampshire Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, and receive information by calling their 24/7 Helpline: 800-272-3900, or visit www.alz.org/manh
- Host or participate in free events around topics such as aging, family caregiving, and dementia by connecting with your local senior center and Alzheimer's Association. Remain connected to attain up-to-date educational offerings and resources
- Invite a person living with Alzheimer's, or a family care partner to give a talk about their experience living with the disease
- Spread awareness of dementia by hosting or participating in a free Dementia Friends Information Session. Learn how by visiting: <https://dementiafriendsma.org/>
- Learn more about hosting or co-hosting programs that have been specifically designed to support families affected by dementia. Some examples include:
 - Memory Cafés (www.jfcsboston.org/MemoryCafeDirectory; www.jfcsboston.org/MemoryCafeToolkit)
 - Alz Meetups (is there a URL that explains what they are and how to host one?; and
 - Memory Sunday (<http://brainhealthcenterforafricanamericans.org/memory-sunday>).
 - Help make your city or town become dementia friendly by joining the Dementia Friendly Massachusetts grassroots movement
 - To learn how, visit: www.mass.gov/dementia-friendly-massachusetts