



Dementia Friendly Faith Communities

Faith communities provide comfort, connection and spiritual support for people living with dementia and their families. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that clergy, staff, volunteers and congregants can take to create welcoming and accessible experiences for people living with dementia and their care partners, with simple steps to strengthen communication, adapt worship and support community life.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a general term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect memory, thinking, communication and decision-making in ways that interfere with daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In worship settings, dementia may make it harder to follow services, keep track of printed materials or participate in rituals.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for clergy, staff, volunteers and entire congregations through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops.

Display and distribute resources—brochures, posters and online links—about dementia, brain health and family support in visible areas.

Share personal stories and examples in sermons, newsletters or discussion groups to normalize conversations about memory loss and reduce stigma.

Host an annual Dementia Sunday, Memory Sunday or Awareness Sabbath to preach, pray and educate about dementia and brain health.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. Say the person's name, make eye contact and face them directly.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time.

Use a warm, friendly tone of voice. Be calm, positive and respectful.

Smile and be kind. Friendly expressions help the person feel safe and supported.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices, like yes/no or "Would you like to sit in the front or near the back?"

Give the person extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently—avoid rushing or finishing sentences.

Repeat or rephrase if something is not understood. Use simple words or shorter phrases to support understanding.

Reduce distractions. Minimize background noise so it is easier to focus.

Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Watch for signs of confusion, stress or discomfort and respond calmly and supportively.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Provide large-print, high-contrast signs. Use simple words and familiar icons (e.g., restrooms, exits, sanctuary), placed at eye level to guide people.

Keep floors safe and dry. Avoid shiny or patterned floors that can cause glare or confusion and mark stairs or ramps with bright, high-contrast tape or paint.

Keep lighting bright and even in all areas, especially hallways and restrooms. Reduce glare and shadows to help people see clearly and feel safe moving around.

Provide comfortable, stable seating that is easy to get in and out of. Place sturdy chairs with armrests in worship, fellowship and meeting areas. Create a quiet space for reflection or rest.

Make restrooms easy to find and safe to use. Post clear signs and maintain bright, even lighting. Install grab bars and offer single-use or family restrooms when possible.

Post clear signage and visual cues. Use large-print, high-contrast signs with simple words and familiar icons, plus arrows guiding people to entrances, restrooms and sanctuary areas.

Keep floors safe and dry. Avoid shiny or patterned surfaces and mark steps or ramps with high-contrast tape or paint.

Provide comfortable, accessible seating. Use sturdy chairs with armrests in worship, fellowship and meeting areas. Create a quiet space for reflection or rest.

Make restrooms easy to locate and safe. Post readable signs, maintain good lighting and sturdy grab bars and offer single-use or family restrooms if possible.

Ensure clear sound. Use microphones and sound systems consistently so everyone can hear services and announcements comfortably.

MAKE WORSHIP DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY

Provide large-print worship materials and train worship companions and ushers to offer discreet assistance.

Offer simplified or “Sacred Memory” worship services with shorter liturgy, familiar hymns.

Observe remembrance services such as “Memory Sunday” or “Memory Shabbat” to honor and pray for those living with dementia and their care partners.

PROVIDE ONGOING SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL CARE

Preach and lead faith discussions that emphasize the dignity and sacred worth of those living with dementia.

Use memory aids—photos, hymn cards, prayer beads or tactile symbols—to evoke recognition and comfort.

SUPPORT CARE PARTNERS AND FAMILIES

Share national and local resources such as the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer’s Association Helpline.

Partner with local organizations or recruit volunteers to offer support groups or brief breaks for care partners.

FOSTER COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Invite people living with dementia to serve as greeters, readers or helpers to promote belonging and visibility.

Host social and creative programs such as Memory Cafes, TimeSlips, dementia-friendly choirs, art or music workshops and shared worship gatherings that build connection and joy.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer’s Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



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