

Churches are well placed to lead change and demonstrate inclusion in communities where 2/3rds of people with dementia live. The Christian faith teaches all have equal worth and value. Jesus showed compassion and care particularly for those that society considered had very little worth.

There are 3 aspects of need relating to dementia friendly churches:

Education - Buildings - Support

When I first developed dementia I struggled in church. I did not recognise the minister, I couldn't find my way back to my pew after communion or cope with sudden changes in services or loud noise.

People thought people with dementia wouldn't remember visits, but they remember the feelings of being cared for. Some believed people with dementia who said the family never visited them, not understanding they had just forgotten.

Education

Basic dementia understanding for ministers, staff and congregations.

I wrote leaflets for everyone at my church explaining about myself and gave talks to the staff. All need to understand how and why, behaviour changes, the loss of understanding and social inhibitions, the communication issues, and to know that the person IS still there until the end, before they can really make people with dementia feel welcome.

I have 3 simple headings:

- 1. *There is always a reason for everything***
- 2. *Feelings remain when facts are forgotten***
- 3. *Familiar patterns continue past / present***

Use the people in the churches already involved in health & social care, private & voluntary sectors who can share their expertise. We can all learn from others, and Alzheimer's Society also do training.

Buildings need to be accessible

Toilets are a major problem. How do I find them? How do I turn the light on? How do I lock the door? Or better still - unlock it? How do I turn on the taps or get soap? How do I dry my hands? How do I get out of this place? We need pictures not words.

Services used to have too many books, now pieces of paper, or paper with gaps - assuming we know what they mean, but we don't. So we get lost, and which version of the Lords Prayer? Services need to be positive, supportive and enabling, not patronising.

Churches can give us a role, providing **Support & Purpose.**

We can continue to serve, not delegating us to the creche or Sunday School with its noise and chaos. We can still help with the tea and coffee, still pray, do the Bible reading. I can't remember afterwards where I was sitting so I ask someone to wave! We can help with flower arranging, cleaning, even maintenance under supervision.



Churches often don't realise there are almost certainly people attending, particularly in the older age range, who already have dementia which is often undiagnosed. Unless they make their churches dementia inclusive, these people may stop coming. Churches can do so much to make a difference to their lives!

Possible special shorter services for those of us with dementia, familiar hymns are needed, and we can't cope with long sermons. But Jesus was very good with his parables which were understandable by all strata in society at different levels!

Churches can visit people, also provide transport. Provide support for carers who are often ignored. Host memory groups, luncheon clubs, be a social knowledge and resources hub.

Provide carer support, enabling time off dealing with grief. Simple practical support, cut the grass, change a light bulb.

Even provide a quiet place for us which is so often needed.

Ten ways for a church to be more inclusive of people living with dementia:

No two people experience dementia in exactly the same way. What may be a help for one person may not be for another. Jennifer offers ten ways to overcome the 'no one-size-fits-all' approach when considering what churches can do to journey alongside people who are living with dementia, as well as those affected by it.

1. Believe people living with dementia can still walk with God and be spiritually alive.

People living with dementia are still able to learn and still have something worthwhile to contribute even if there needs to be some help to facilitate this.

2. Provide a warm, inclusive welcome for everyone.

Have friendly people introduce themselves with context and who will be willing to sit alongside the person living with dementia if they are alone. It also helps to have a warm welcoming building!

3. Ensure the service has a clear structure.

Avoid unexpected or unannounced happenings and participation – for example moving into small groups, having to go up to the front or lighting a candle.

4. Provide a role for the person.

Many people living with dementia are still able to read a Bible passage aloud so they can contribute,

even if the passage has to be typed out in a large font. Some people might like to help with pouring teas and coffees, others may enjoy helping with creche if mobile.

5. Include familiar hymns or tunes.

The use of a projection screen is also recommended, removing the need to find one's way around books. The Lord's Prayer and liturgy needs to be in a familiar format or the words shown on the screen, as some people may find the new translations difficult.

6. Try to keep the noise before the service to a minimum.

This means no last minute loud band practice, or children running up and down the aisle screaming. There should also be a quiet space where the person living with dementia can regroup, if necessary.

7. Some people living with dementia appreciate crosses and candles.

Those of a non-Anglican background may be confused by these if they are too prominent, though don't assume either way.

8. The sermon needs to have one clear simple point.

The person living with dementia could be overwhelmed with multiple messages to digest, even if more is offered for others within the same sermon.

9. The church needs to be willing to accept interruptions.

Some people may walk around during the service. This is less likely if there is someone familiar sitting with them or they are in their favourite spot in the church.

10. Make socialising after the service as easy as possible.

If there are refreshments served after the service it may be confusing for people with dementia to find them or to compete with a group of unfamiliar people in a queue. It would be much easier and more appreciated for someone to bring the refreshments to the person living with dementia.



Dr Jennifer Bute is a retired GP, diagnosed with dementia aged 63. She is a campaigner and regular speaker at events. Through her Christian faith she sees dementia as a Glorious Opportunity while acknowledging the challenges it brings. Jennifer is able to provide a doctor's perspective on dementia, while experiencing it from the inside.
www.gloriousopportunity.org