



Working Towards Being Dementia Friendly: 40 Suggestions for Church Action Plans

A dementia friendly church is:

- ✓ A church that is welcoming and inclusive towards people with dementia and their carers;
- ✓ A church where the church leadership and other members of the congregation help people with dementia to feel safe and orientated within the church environment;
- ✓ A church where it is OK to get confused and forget things;
- ✓ A church where people with dementia and their carers feel that they are valued members of the congregation, stay involved in church activity, and do not ‘fall off the radar’.

(Dr Elizabeth Anderson, Diocese of Leeds)

Getting Started

Your efforts to create a dementia friendly church are unlikely to succeed if they do not take into account the perspectives of local people with a lived experience of dementia. Before you do anything, identify people in your church and community who can help you prioritise. This might be through identifying a local group willing to act as ‘mystery shoppers’ (walking the building or attending a service and reporting back on their findings). Or your congregation may have people with dementia, carers or former carers of people with dementia, willing to be part of the process.

Adapting Buildings

Lighting and surfaces

Visual perception may be affected in dementia, alongside age-related sight loss. It helps to provide:

1	Good lighting in all areas of buildings and at entrances	X / ✓
2	Diffused light, rather than areas of glare and shadows	X / ✓
3	Plain floor coverings, rather than patterned	X / ✓
4	Floor coverings that are not shiny (can appear like water)	X / ✓

Signage

Feeling lost or disorientated can be a frightening experience in dementia, so good signage is important in helping navigate. It helps to provide:

5	Directional signs, e.g. to toilets	X / ✓
6	Signs on doors with straightforward pictures or symbols, alongside the appropriate words in clear font & contrasting colour. e.g. toilet or kitchen cupboard door	X / ✓
7	Signs that show the way out of toilet facilities	X / ✓

Sound

Struggling to filter unwanted sound, people with dementia can be bombarded by background noise and feel stressed. When hearing fails memory loss can mean the person struggles using hearing aids effectively. It helps to offer:

8	Quiet corners that offer a peaceful alternative space	X / ✓
9	Signage indicating hearing loops, and regular reminders	X / ✓

Familiarity

Drawing from earlier memories, people with dementia may struggle with furnishings that do not look like objects with which they are familiar. It helps to provide:

10	Décor associated with church, e.g. paintings, crosses	X / ✓
11	Layout of worship space that makes sense	X / ✓

Safety

People with dementia are less able to protect themselves from harm. They are not as clear thinking as would have been the case and sensory changes can cause a greater risk of things like falls. It helps to consider:

12	Reducing risk of trips and slips, e.g. clutter, loose carpet	X / ✓
13	In later dementia danger areas being out of bounds	X / ✓
14	Entrances and exits to the building being monitored	X / ✓

Being Informed and Working in Partnership

Making Dementia Friends

Under the Prime Minister's Challenge on Dementia, hour-long Dementia Friends sessions are a way to raise awareness. People who come can sign up as Dementia Friends and take a Dementia Friends badge. It helps to offer:

15	Dementia Friends sessions for church welcome teams	X / ✓
16	Dementia Friends sessions for pastoral teams	X / ✓
17	Dementia Friends sessions open to anyone	X / ✓

Links with others

Other community groups are also working to create dementia friendly communities and increase the support available. We can help by:

18	Hosting groups run by, e.g. Age UK, Alzheimer's Society	X / ✓
19	Researching support, e.g. through Dementia Connect	X / ✓
20	Signposting support, e.g. noticeboards, magazines	X / ✓
21	Joining collaboratives, e.g. local Dementia Action Alliance	X / ✓

Supporting Faith and Adapting Worship

Incorporating elements conducive in dementia through regular services

As language becomes less easy to follow in dementia, services which involve lots of listening to people talking may be challenging. If the person with dementia becomes bored and restless, their carer might struggle to keep them in their seat and decide in the weeks to come it would be better to stay away from church. It helps to build in:

22	Visual prompts linked to the theme of the service	X / ✓
23	Familiar rituals that involve moving as well as listening	X / ✓
24	Ways of engaging all the senses	X / ✓
25	Songs and prayers familiar from earlier life	X / ✓
26	Congregational tolerance when staying quiet/still is hard	X / ✓

Providing worship and prayer tailored to the needs of those with dementia

Where the capacity to engage in regular Sunday services is limited, or circumstances mean the person is no longer able to attend, offering occasional dementia friendly services at a convenient time of day (such as a weekday afternoon) allows them to continue to worship and feel a part of

their Christian community. Taking worship into the local care home similarly offers this continuity of Fellowship. You might offer:

27	A short service of the word with an interactive message	X / ✓
28	Songs of Praise with invitation to choose a favourite song	X / ✓
29	Communion adapted to needs of those with dementia	X / ✓
30	Care home worship created with staff around residents	X / ✓

Support to continue using gifts and sharing faith insights

As members of the Body of Christ, people with dementia continue to make an invaluable contribution. A diagnosis of dementia does not automatically require a person to relinquish ministry roles they have held, nor does it preclude them from finding new ways to serve. We can offer:

31	Support to continue in roles as long as possible, if desired	X / ✓
32	Opportunities to share faith in appropriate small groups	X / ✓
33	Encouragement to explore new roles in church life	X / ✓
34	Support for carers to continue in roles, if desired	X / ✓

Offering Friendship and Support

One to one support

Through a combination of every member caring for everyone else, and individuals with special responsibilities for those with dementia, we can help avoid the loneliness and social isolation which is a very real risk. We can:

35	Establish Anna Chaplaincy ministry focussed on dementia	X / ✓
36	Have 'buddies' to sit alongside and support in services	X / ✓
37	Assign individual pastoral links for ongoing news/prayer	X / ✓
38	Appoint a church 'dementia co-ordinator' as initial contact	X / ✓

Group contexts for support and friendship

Staying connected with your local community is a key to living well with dementia, and to ensuring carers stay positive. Bringing people in the community together is something churches do effectively. We can:

39	Invite people with dementia to lunch clubs, community café groups, Places of Welcome that happen at church	X / ✓
40	Set up groups for those with dementia and/or their carers, e.g. dementia café or singing group, carers support group	X / ✓