



Section 2:

Developing a Dementia-friendly Church



The aim of this section is to assist chapels to establish just how dementia-friendly they currently are, and identify those features in the life of the church that could be developed further so that it can become more dementia-friendly.

We are fully aware that circumstances and resources vary immensely from chapel to chapel, and it is highly unlikely that all chapels are able to offer the same level of support for those living with dementia and their carers. We hope, however, that these guidelines will offer some guidance in prioritising those elements that can be realised. The section focuses on four core elements in developing a dementia-friendly church, namely:

- **Buildings**
- **Pastoral Care**
- **Services and Activities**
- **Community Networks**

The importance of family and friends in the lives of those living with dementia cannot be over-emphasised, and chapels have a responsibility also to provide practical support to these carers when developing dementia-friendly churches.

When designing the resource, we were fully aware that the term 'dementia' refers to several different 'conditions' that have an impact on the way the brain functions. Consequently, the symptoms of those living with dementia are not uniform, and care must be taken to avoid over-generalising about their needs.

Nevertheless, over the next two pages an attempt has been made to provide a basic list of the main signs of dementia and how to respond to them.

Section 6 lists and briefly describes the main charities and organisations that are active in the field of dementia, together with a list of digital resources and printed books that can be consulted should anyone within the chapel community require further information or advice.



Dementia: What to look out for and how to respond

Signs	→	Suggested response/s
Staring blankly or daydreaming.	Observe and tactfully offer support where needed.	
Memory loss. Forgetful. Unsure what to do.	Observe and tactfully offer support where appropriate.	
Confused look. Unable to focus.	Gently offer help and reassurance.	
Spatial awareness. Bumping into objects. Lacking in confidence.	Observe and tactfully offer support with a helping hand.	
Stammer. Stutter.	Be patient and tactful. Occasionally it may help to lead the person to what you believe they wish to say.	
Repeating themselves several times. Clock-watching, e.g. asking over and over what time is it.	Be patient and offer support.	Allow them to repeat themselves several times – it will help their self-esteem if you don't interrupt them mid-sentence.
Uncertainty when managing cash, e.g. at the checkout. Repeating payments by cheque.	Be patient and supportive. Tactfully offer help without being intrusive when counting their money. Don't rush them or show impatience.	Accept one cheque and reassure them that everything is fine.
Over-ordering purchases (OCD). Compulsive buying	Make sure that the person needs more than one item.	

Suggested Advice

Adopt a friendly approach

Maintain good eye contact throughout

Speak slowly and clearly

Allow sufficient time for a response – possibly you will need to repeat yourself several times

Be patient and don't hurry them

Do not disagree with them or correct them

Be gentle and kind

You should treat a person living with dementia as you would treat a family member

Further advice can be found in the list of charities and organisations in Section 6.

Self-assessment Toolkit

This toolkit is heavily indebted to a project undertaken by Churches Together in Greater Bristol, a multi-denominational grouping 'committed to supporting a regional, strategic approach to developing dementia-friendly churches in the Bristol area'. Its aim is to assess what measures have already been adopted and to identify what additional measures to adopt to enable a church to be more dementia-friendly.

The toolkit consists of four assessment exercises that form key elements of chapels: buildings, worship, pastoral care and community. Each exercise is made up of four steps:



On completing the self-assessment of the four elements, select those you wish to prioritise when preparing an action plan for your church.

Buildings

Reflect:

What discussions have been held with those living with dementia and their carers about how welcoming and safe the chapel buildings are, and what modifications would help people?

How do your buildings offer a welcoming environment for people living with dementia?

Have you discovered whether or not your buildings include challenging features if they are to provide a welcoming location for those living with dementia?

Review:

Discuss all the questions below and answer by noting positive replies with a ✓, negative answers with an X, and 'Maybe' with a ?.	✓	X	?
Is the signage sufficiently clear and does it contrast well with any symbols and pictures? Remember that signs for toilets and exits are very important.			
Are the signs attached to the correct doors and not to nearby doors? Are they at eye level and well-lit? Are there clear signs at strategic points of the building?			
Are the entrances well-lit and make maximum use of natural light? Avoid areas with bright lights and dark shadows.			
Are the floor surfaces level and not slippery? Are any changes to the floor level clearly indicated?			
Are the toilets accessible and clearly signposted?			
Is suitable seating available for those with mobility challenges, including some comfortable chairs?			
Has an accessibility audit been performed?			

Explore:

Discuss the list of suggestions for action provided in the table below. These ideas are based on examples of good practice that have been adopted by dementia-friendly chapels and churches. Can you think of any other ideas you might wish to develop?

	✓	X	?
Could we organise a meeting to consult those living with dementia and their carers to collect views regarding the improvements that could be made to the buildings?			
Could improvements be made to the signage in the chapel so that they are clearer?			
Are there any uneven surfaces or other hazards that could lead to a fall, that we could improve or make more visible?			
Could we improve the seating arrangements in the chapel by adding some comfortable chairs with cushions and arm rests?			
Could we make the toilets easier to use by using contrasting colours, pictorial signage on the doors, lock/unlock and alarm?			

Develop:

Having reflected, reviewed and explored possible ideas, note those tasks you wish to develop so as to make your chapel buildings safer and more friendly for those living with dementia. These tasks could address questions posed in the 'Review' table or suggestions from the 'Explore' table, or any other tasks you have noted during the exercise.

Tasks to be adopted	Who will be responsible?	Target date for completion

Pastoral Care

Reflect:

What discussions have been held with those living with dementia and their families of their experiences of pastoral care in your church?

What pastoral care plans, if any, do you offer to those living with dementia and their families?

What elements have you found to be challenging in providing pastoral care to those living with dementia?

Review:

Discuss all the questions below and answer by noting positive replies with a ✓, negative answers with X, and 'Maybe' with a ?.	✓	X	?
Have we assessed who needs to have a DBS check because of their involvement with individuals with dementia?			
Have those who provide pastoral care received awareness training such as that offered by Friends of Dementia? (See Section 5)			
Do we provide any support to the carers of those with dementia?			
Do we offer outreach ministry to local residential homes?			
Do we know where we can direct people for expert information and support?			
Are our chapel buildings used to hold events welcoming those living with dementia and their carers?			
Have we considered the possibility of nominating a Dementia Coordinator at the chapel, i.e. an individual with a specific responsibility to ensure that there is a warm welcome for those living with dementia and their carers?			

Explore:

Discuss the list of suggestions for action provided in the table below. These ideas are based on examples of good practice that have been adopted by dementia-friendly chapels and churches. Can you think of any other ideas you might wish to develop?

	✓	X	?
Is it possible to nominate a Dementia Coordinator for the chapel?			
Could the chapel establish a pastoral care team if one doesn't already exist?			
Could we arrange a Friends of Dementia awareness session for the whole congregation so that everyone has a better understanding of dementia?			
Is it possible to arrange a safeguarding training course for members of the pastoral care team?			
Could we arrange a collection of memory boxes, activity quilts and sensory bands in the chapel to offer to those living with dementia?			
Could we arrange an event – e.g. a welcome café or film night – for those living with dementia and their carers?			
Could we develop an outreach ministry for a local care home?			
Could we organise lifts to chapel for those living with dementia?			

Develop:

Having reflected, reviewed and explored possible ideas, note those tasks you wish to develop so as to improve pastoral care for those living with dementia and their carers. These tasks could address questions posed in the 'Review' table or suggestions from the 'Explore' table, or other tasks you have noted during the exercise.

Tasks to be adopted	Who will be responsible?	Target date for completion

Services and Activities

Reflect:

What discussions have been held with those living with dementia and their families about their experience of church services in your chapel?

Are you aware how many people within your congregation are affected by dementia?

In your experience, which elements have been the most challenging when preparing services that are more dementia-friendly?

Review:

Discuss all the questions below and answer by noting positive replies with a ✓, negative answers with X, and 'Maybe' with a ?.	✓	X	?
Are our welcomers aware of the most appropriate way to support those living with dementia and their carers when they greet them at a service or other gathering in the chapel?			
Have we considered how those living with dementia understand and access services and special gatherings?			
Will the content of our services – the music, language and activities – be familiar to those who have attended chapel at some stage in their life?			
Do our service and announcement handouts contain illustrations that offer a visual focus for those living with dementia?			
Do our services occasionally include prayers for those living with dementia, their carers and members of their family?			
Is there sufficient flexibility in our services to enable those living with dementia to express their faith in the manner that best befits them?			
Do we provide dementia-friendly services?			

Explore:

Discuss the list of suggestions for action provided in the table below. These ideas are based on examples of good practice that have been adopted by dementia-friendly chapels and churches. Can you think of any other ideas you might wish to develop?

	✓	X	?
Could we arrange a designated dementia-friendly service either occasionally or on a regular basis, e.g. a service that includes familiar hymns?			
Could we assess how dementia-friendly our current services are?			
Could we explore how we might adapt our handouts so that they are more user-friendly?			
Could we produce a Welcome Card (or equivalent) for newcomers and visitors, that contains general information about the chapel and drawing attention to group-specific information?			
Can we explore ways to support those living with dementia to play a role in some of the social gatherings so that they continue to have a role within the chapel community?			
Could we provide opportunities to hear the testimonies of older people in our services?			

Develop:

Having reflected, reviewed and explored possible ideas, note those tasks you wish to develop so as to present church services that are more dementia-friendly. These tasks could address questions posed in the 'Review' table or suggestions from the 'Explore' table, or other tasks you have noted during the exercise.

Tasks to be adopted	Who will be responsible?	Target date for completion

Community Networks

Reflect:

How aware are the leaders and members of our church of the needs of those living with dementia?

How aware are the leaders and members of our church of the plans that we wish to develop around dementia?

What is the relationship between our church and the resources and activities available locally for those living with dementia?

Review:

Discuss all the questions below and answer by noting positive replies with a ✓, negative answers with X, and 'Maybe' with a ?.	✓	X	?
Do we know who the dementia contacts in the local community are?			
Do we share information with our members regarding the dementia resources that are available in the community?			
Do we have a Dementia Coordinator who acts as our point of contact within the church?			
Do we include any dementia charities in our charity collections?			
Do we hold 'Dementia Friends' sessions in the chapel?			
Is there anyone in our chapel linked to a local dementia charity and/or any other local grouping for those living with dementia?			
Are the chapel buildings used for any events such as 'Singing for the brain'?			
Have any others who use the chapel buildings received any awareness training on dementia?			
Do we invite people who don't live with dementia to attend dementia-friendly events?			

Explore:

Discuss the list of suggestions for action provided in the table below. These ideas are based on examples of good practice that have been adopted by dementia-friendly chapels and churches. Can you think of any other ideas you might wish to develop?

	✓	X	?
Could a member of the church receive training to become a Dementia Ambassador so that they can offer Dementia Friends awareness?			
Could we organise an event for those living with dementia, their carers, family and friends – including children – to establish contacts across the generations?			
Could we arrange a Dementia Friends session at one of our Sunday services?			
Could we produce a list of books on dementia and establish which titles can be borrowed from the local library?			
Could we use the national Dementia Awareness week in May to organise an event or special service?			
Could we provide a notice board in the chapel dedicated to displaying information about dementia?			
Could we invite all those who use the chapel premises to participate in a dementia awareness session?			

Develop:

Having reflected, reviewed and explored possible ideas, note those tasks you wish to develop around dementia. These tasks could address questions posed in the 'Review' table or suggestions from the 'Explore' table, or other tasks you have noted during the exercise.

Tasks to be adopted	Who will be responsible?	Target date for completion

Summarise the Tasks

Use the table below to summarise those tasks from your self-assessment exercise you wish to prioritise. For each task, note the date by which it should be completed and who is responsible for ensuring that this will happen.

	Task	Completion Date	Who is Responsible?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

Digital Publications on Developing Dementia-friendly Churches

Dementia inclusive church guide: travelling together. Livability.
www.livability.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Travelling-Together_webFINAL.pdf

Dementia friendly church resource pack. Prama Foundation, 2019.
<https://www.dementiafriendlychurch.org.uk/resource-pack>

My faith matters: a resource to support the spiritual journey of people living with dementia. Livability.
<https://dementiamatterspowys.org.uk/can-you-help/dementia-friendly-churches>