

Session 1: FURTHER REFLECTION AND ACTION

Optional extra material for you to read and reflect on after the session

Five simple ways in which we can be aware and show our support for those affected by dementia:

(from the article on the Embracing Age website)

<https://www.embracingage.org.uk/caring-for-carers.html>

- **Seeing the caregivers:** Do we feel we have already identified some of the caregivers in our church/fellowship? Are there more that we can think of?
- **Listening:** To what extent are we engaging with them and learning about their situation? Have we been able to discuss their situation with them – if not, how could we begin to do it? That isn't always easy, as the article below points out. But there are also people who are doing extremely well and we want to learn from them.
- **Praying:** how can we pray for them and with them, as a church, as individuals? Can we build that into our church's life – in ways that are sensitive? Not all want to be identified as a caregiver or 'carer'.
- **Enabling & Including:** how do we include those living with dementia in our church life? Perhaps even more important, are we including them in this conversation about their support?
- **Offering practical support**

These things aren't always straightforward, but we need to take the initiative.

Some of us may feel ill-equipped and unsure how to relate: what help can we offer? Maybe we will make mistakes?

Living with dementia, and caring for a person living with dementia, are strange situations. The disease may come in stages: sometimes not noticeable at all. There may still be a certain stigma to acknowledge it openly. At what point do we speak about it? There are no rules; like any relationship it needs our respect and sensitivity.

Similarly, giving practical help doesn't always seem straightforward. What can we offer and when? People may be reluctant to ask for help, or even to acknowledge their situation.

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But I believe we can be more open and intentional. When people clearly recognised our situation, and spoke to support us or ask how we were (and meant it), I always found it encouraging.

So church leaders, individual members, friends – all need to take the initiative to give support. Don't wait to be asked, but find out what will be helpful – from food to financial matters, health issues, going for a walk, transport, and more. One of our friends turned up from time to time, bringing a complete meal which he left with us.

Responding to Dementia, Church Times, 14 May 2021

Some activities that churches are already doing:

- * Raising awareness: helping church members to understand dementia and how they can respond.
- * Offering friendship: this is basic and we need to be proactive.
- * Support groups: these can be local, providing a place for people to share or pray. Some also include simple worship. Other groups operate on Zoom, which can have advantages. For some carers it is a vital hour in their week, 'time for me...' Some churches run drop in sessions, or lunches, or memory cafes, where anybody can come to relax and meet people.
- * Working with the wider local community: some churches are working very effectively with other local community groups.
- * Visiting care homes: this could be for one-to-one visits, for informal groups or for times of worship.

All these activities are good and needed, because each situation is different. People are affected in different ways.

Churches need to focus on those most affected, particularly the caregivers – typically a spouse, sibling, children, other close relatives or friends.

We need to see how activities like these can best support caregivers and enable them to build their own support team, in the way that is best suited for them.