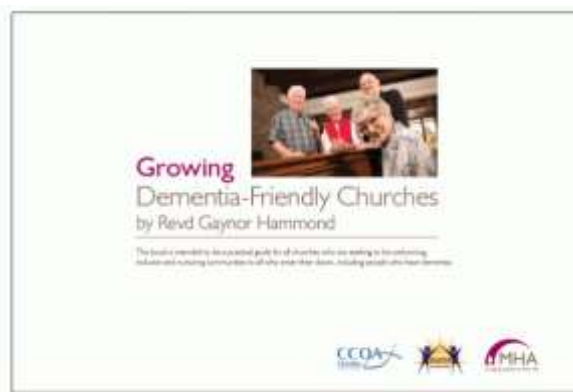


Here's an article on [Dementia Friendly Church](#) that will appear in *plus*.

Churches are increasingly aiming to be welcoming, inclusive spaces in which all people can be spiritually supported. In doing so, many churches are asking how they can be more 'dementia-friendly'.

It's not that anyone would intentionally exclude people with dementia from the life of the church, but sadly a lot of what churches do isn't always 'dementia-friendly'. Many are beginning to realise that, unless people with dementia (and their family and friends) are treated positively and have their needs met in their local church, many vulnerable people may be prevented from experiencing 'life in all its fullness'.



Dementia-friendly churches understand that everyone has unique spiritual needs, and that those with memory problems will require a sensitive approach to their spiritual care. If someone feels isolated because the church has been unsure how to respond best to those needs, that person may experience depression or loneliness, or may leave church altogether.

Loneliness is something that affects many people with memory loss. Responding to this, Parkgate and Neston URC has set up [CAMEO](#) (Come And Meet Each Other), aimed at supporting people with Alzheimer's. Running for four hours every Thursday, [CAMEO](#) provides an opportunity to meet new people and enjoy lunch and welcomes carers and family members.

Other churches are finding opportunities to welcome people affected by memory loss through similar inclusive approaches. Mal Breeze, a Community Minister based in Blackburn, was instrumental in establishing a bi-weekly cafe in Blackburn. He explained: *"Dementia and Alzheimer's are a pressing issue not only for society but also for the church. It's so easy for us to jump to conclusions and forget that there are many reasons for Memory Loss – that's why we decided to call it a Memory Café and not a Dementia Cafe."*

"We need to acknowledge that memory loss affects us all at some stage whether it's forgetting where we've left our keys, what we went into the shop for or the name of someone we've known for years. It's important to remember that it isn't always a sign that people have Dementia or Alzheimer's."

“The reason our Memory Cafe is so successful is because it’s contextual, meeting a local need. It’s ecumenical, it’s non-threatening, not ‘Church’ and we have a great team of enthusiastic and committed volunteers with a common interest.”

It isn’t just through projects like this that churches can make a difference. Small changes can have a positive impact; for example, shortening services or creating a new style of service in which people experiencing memory loss can more easily engage. There are few churches that won’t have an ‘all-age talk’, but how many of these are delivered with dementia in mind? More importantly, churches can find ways of affirming the lives of people with dementia, listening to them and their carers, educating the congregation in positive ways to approach dementia or providing ‘dementia friends’.

Churches don’t become dementia-friendly overnight – it’s an ongoing process. The objective of dementia-friendly churches will be to enable people affected by dementia to live as God intended. They will be accepting, caring and will ensure that no-one is ‘invisible’• . Dementia-friendly means that experiencing memory loss will never be an impediment for anyone to be part of their church community and enjoy opportunities to be fully involved in all aspects of church life.

Ultimately, as many are discovering, it’s about showing practically that God cares for everyone. Can we afford not to be dementia-friendly?

Original article written by Andrew Page for [‘Lookout’ October 2017, URC Mersey Synod.](#)