“And now that I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, Till I make known your strength to this generation And your power to all who are to come... You have showed me great troubles and adversities, But you will restore my life And bring me up again from the deep places of the earth.”

Psalm 71
What is dementia ministry?

Not to fix, but to be with, be present, to say God is here, “Come and see” (John 1:39) “Yes, I can learn something of God here, deep things about God.”

How do we reach someone who has dementia?

One approach: place the emphasis NOT ON THE LOSSES associated with the illness – yes they exist and are serious - but on WHAT REMAINS.

The person’s relationship with God ALWAYS REMAINS
Many illnesses cause dementia

Dementia:
(2 or more of the following)
Forgetfulness, Memory Loss, Confusion,
Poor reasoning and logic, Personality changes,
Poor judgment, Ability to focus, Visual perception

Alzheimer’s Disease accounts for about 60-80% of dementia.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alzheimer’s Disease</th>
<th>Normal Aging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Forgetting recently learned information</td>
<td>• Forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Asking for the same information over and over</td>
<td>• Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficulty following a plan, working with numbers, completing daily tasks</td>
<td>• Misplacing things, retracing steps and finding them later.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Losing track of seasons and dates. Forgetting where you are, how you got there</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Putting things in unusual places and losing the ability to retrace steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Poor decision making</td>
<td>The memory-related Hippocampus loses 5% of its cells every decade due to normal aging (peaks at age 25 😞)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mild Cognitive Impairment

- Forgetting appointments or social events
- Losing train of thought, thread of conversation
- Feeling overwhelmed by making decisions, interpreting instructions
- Having trouble finding your way around familiar environments
- Becoming more impulsive or showing poor judgment
- Your family and friends notice
- But it’s not severe enough to interfere with day-to-day activities

Estimated that 10-20% of adults over 65 may have MCI.

About 30% of those with MCI developed Alzheimer’s in 5 years. In some individuals, it reverses or remains stable.
Alzheimer’s Disease – occurrence of plaques and tangles in and around neurons (no one knows the cause)

Plaque – beta-amyloid protein outside cells
Tangles – tau protein inside cells

http://www.alz.org/braintour/plaques_tangles.asp
Understanding the Stages of Alzheimer’s

Early stage
- Loss of short-term memory
- Difficulty executing tasks: e.g. checkbook, phone
- Repetition and confusion
- Wanting to “go home”
- Wandering, sundowning
- Person and caregiver likely in distress about the illness – anger, fear, etc.

Middle stage
- Use of long-term memory - may think they are in their childhood
- Difficulty with speech
- Difficulty with travel, walking, continence
- More impulsive
- As person forgets, it can become easier on them...harder on carers.

Late stage
- Pronounced decline in cognition
- Lots of sleeping/eyes closed
- Inability to communicate
- Needs assistance with all tasks
- Prone to infections, pneumonia
- When brain stem affected, life not possible
- The death can be painless & peaceful
- Caregivers in grief

80% of Alzheimer’s patients are at home.
Why the stigma?

Dementia results from a brain disease. We don’t stigmatize, say, diseases of other organs.
• Stephen Post: we live in a culture that prizes rationality, productivity and independence, and we lose status if we don’t conform. BUT:

• Our culture could learn that these are not the most important things!

• God “re-members” us

• We retain our families and community who function in an important role – maintaining our identity

• Abilities and capacities remain – not all is lost

• Emotional sensitivity and spiritual awareness possible

• People are LIVING WITH dementia for a long time
Karl Barth’s concept of the God’s overflow:
- God seeks us more than we seek God
- God recognizing us as a person, therefore, depends less upon our own particular state, since God seeks and creates fellowship with us

David Kelsey:
- the basis for the value and relationship of the human being lies in God, that is, it comes from outside the human beings themselves
- our personhood is entirely a function of how God relates to us in creating us...and hardly at all from anything else.
Brain Map

Where is the “self”? Where is spirituality?

No evidence that dementia can destroy the self or spirituality
What can Church do?
Church can be welcoming and affirming. All need some education to understand dementia. Important to ask the person and their family *what they need*.

Ideas for Liturgies:
- A regular worship service for people with dementia and their caregivers – brief! familiar hymns and scripture
- Once a year Dementia Friends Sunday service
- A ceremony to mark the transfer of care of a family member; blessing of their new home
Memory Café

• Provides a relaxing environment for people with dementia and their care partners, a respite from the illness; provides “normalcy”
• Not a support group
• Dr. Bere Miesen in the Netherlands in 1997 – social engagement for quality of life
• Hugely successful in England, just starting in U.S.
• Helps to end the isolation of people with dementia and fight the stigma
• Usually once a month
• Often light food and drink, activities, entertainment, especially music
• Caregivers build bonds with others for peer support and friendship and may experience renewal
• Volunteers can become advocates; “Everyone LOVES LOVES LOVES LOVES having student volunteers!”
Resources

www.spiritualityanddementia.org

Book and DVD

To preorder:
https://www.churchpublishing.org/redeemingdementia