Lifespan
Ministry with Older Adults
A mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

call/text 617-257-8169
https://www.diomass.org/ministry-older-adults

"With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation." -Psalm 91:16

Is Your Church
Age and Dementia Friendly?

Becoming a Lifespan Faith Community
Steps in forming, planning, and doing

Lifespan Ministry is dedicated to assisting congregations in meeting the growing and diverse priorities of aging adults, their care partners and their congregations, supporting age inclusivity in the life of our churches.

The following pages outline a process for creating and sustaining an age & dementia-friendly outreach program. You may want to adopt the entire process outlined, or taking elements that work for you and build them into an existing outreach program you already have.

Members of the Lifespan mission team are available to assist you in this process.
Rev. Deacon Phil Flaherty: philflaherty@outlook.com
Rev. Deacon Marilee Comerford: comerfordmarilee@gmail.com

I.   The Formation Phase

1. **Learn**: Schedule a presentation of informational sessions for your congregation. A gospel related Sunday homily by the Lifespan Ministry missioner or associate missioner, followed by an initial coffee hour discussion group is one way to kick start the conversation. Advertise this through announcements and your church bulletin, and by making available to your congregation the program trifold leaflet "Is your Church Age & Dementia-Friendly?" Encourage everyone, especially your home eucharistic visitors, ushers, greeters and vestry members attend. Also reach out to members of your congregation who may be caregivers of, along with persons experiencing dementia or other disabilities. This session will provide content but also an opportunity for attendees to share their experiences and concerns. This session will be facilitated by your "Lifespan" consultant. Following this initial meeting, schedule follow up learning sessions.

2. **Follow up educational offerings**
    a. <u>The Faith Dimension</u>: Where is the scriptural basis for creating inclusive communities? How is the Baptismal Covenant relevant to this work? One approach is to offer a session or series of bible studies reflecting on elders in scripture.

    b.   <u>AARP's "framework"</u>: What makes a community age friendly and dementia friendly?

    c. <u>Dementia overview</u>: the Alzheimer's Association's "Know the 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease", and "Communication Strategies".

    Identify those persons who show an interest in getting involved in joining your age & dementia-friendly team and invite them to your initial team meeting (see step 2) .

3. **Prayerful Formation:** Call a follow up open meeting and specifically invite those members whom you may have identified during your learning sessions (step 2) who will be effective team members. A leader (if you don't already have one) will emerge and needs to be formally named. This is a prayerful discernment process. Formation sessions should open and close with prayers for guidance inspiration and open minds. Include a sharing session. Everyone has a story, so sharing is important. Why are they here? How in their lives have they been touched by age-ism, disability, memory loss, or care-giver stresses? Make sure people from all age groups feel welcome, including persons and their care givers who may be experiencing dementia or other disabilities.

    a. Make sure someone is taking notes during the sharing sessions. Areas of special interest or concern may emerge that will guide your prioritization in the assessing and planning phase.

    b. At this point, you should be forming your core team. Ask for a commitment from those you have identified as potential team members. Commitments should not be open ended; ask for a specific renewable term of service. Ask them to attend your next meeting, where you will begin the assessing and planning process. Make sure your follow up meetings are open to all. This should not be an elitist group.

II. Assessing and Planning Phase

1. **Develop a meeting schedule:** Determine a schedule for your meetings and stick to it. Your team's task is to assess your congregation's age & dementia friendliness using the "Is your congregation Age & Dementia Friendly" check list (on the following pages), It's a long list. This will become an on-going process.

2. At this point, there may be individuals who are ready to "dive in and fix things". Here's where you may want to pause and think about "prophetic listening". How will you go about listening to congregation members about perceived obstacles to participating in the life of the church. One to one conversations can be helpful, especially to people who may be shy in a group. You may want to delegate interested individuals to engage in conversations with their parish acquaintances, gathering information that will help strategize priorities. There are likely ideas out there that you have not previously identified.

3. **Plan:** Create an action plan based on your review of the check list and conversations. Make sure your plan identifies the What, Where Why, Who, When of your planned actions. Unless specific responsibilities are identified, things don't get done. You are probably already doing many of the items listed. Start with the things you are **not** doing that are most easily fixed. Then proceed to the things you have identified as being addressed "somewhat". How can you improve in these areas?

   a. **What** are the areas of your checklist assessment that you found you need to address?
   b. **Where** in your physical environment are the problem areas (buildings, grounds, lighting, acoustics, accessibility, safety, transportation)?
      i. What are the virtual information sharing challenges? Have you identified those individuals who lack the technology for "virtual" internet based sharing, and are unable to physically attend services and activities?
   c. **Why** are these areas important to the health of your community?
   d. **Who** is going to lead the development and implementation of interventions for each area identified in step (a), who will be on your project team, and who else may be able to provide resources and assistance?
   e. **When** will you implement interventions and when will you re-assess your progress and success?

NOTES

III. The Action Phase

1. **Act:** Don't bite off more than you can chew. You may only have resources to address one issue at a time. Don't over-commit to too much at once, but accountability is important. Start with the "low hanging fruit", the most obvious and easy to fix problems. Implement improvements in those areas. Scheduled periodic review of progress is important in preventing interventions from falling by the wayside. Make sure to schedule follow up meetings at regular intervals to make sure things are getting done, and evaluate new issues that may be identified as a result of your activities. Your team can then work its way down the problem list bit by bit and avoid getting discouraged, over stressed, or burned out.

2. **Re-Assess**: Formulate a plan for periodic review of compliance with your plan. It cannot be stressed enough that this is not a "one and done" project, but rather a continuous process improvement model. Are the interventions you have put in place working? It's important to continually be evaluating the results of your efforts by going back to Assessing and Planning Phase (above).

NOTES

IV. Civic Involvement

Your church is a vital part of the wider community, and can have a positive influence. Identify someone in your congregation who will be willing to get involved with your local town or city administration to find out if your city/town is involved in becoming an age & dementia friendly community, and build a relationship with your town's/city's Council on Aging. Remember, our baptismal covenant calls us to "serve Christ in **all** persons", not just the ones who attend our churches. And while your church grounds and buildings may be welcoming, your members still need to navigate the public spaces like curbs, sidewalks and crosswalks to get there.

NOTES

Age & Dementia Friendly Check List

SUNDAY SERVICES AND OTHER LITURGIES

☐ Are all ages invited to serve at services as readers, ushers, acolytes, greeters, etc?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are hearing devices on hand should someone request them?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Could lectors/intercessors read from their seats using a handheld mic?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are there large-print prayer books, hymnals, Bibles, and bulletins available?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Is your church (inside and out) well lit for reading and safety?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Have you considered recording your services for home visits?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ When the congregation is asked to stand or kneel, are the words "as you are able" included?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do ushers offer to help people to their seats in church, assist during communion, help navigate stairs, elevators and doorways, and otherwise assist at coffee hour?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Is there easy access to receive communion?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you have chairs available for easier seating, and accommodation for assistive devices such as walkers and wheelchairs?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

NOTES

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATION

☐ Is your signage well-placed and does it use universal symbols?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you use name tags (and with large print)? YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Is your website in a large font size and easy to navigate?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are services being made available remotely for those unable to physically attend?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are you assisting those without technical experience to connect remotely?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you have everyone's phone number and address, and is all your email and web based information is also made available in print for those without computers?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Have you considered navigation of your church by walker, wheelchair or scooter?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are church doors equipped with long-handled door knobs?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do restrooms and all areas with steps have grab bars or hand rails?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Does your church offer transportation assistance getting to and from church?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Does your church provide priority parking spaces for easy access?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you have a parish nurse? Are your parishioners knowledgeable about first aid and emergency resources, have a first aid kit, an AED (defibrillator)?
YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you have information available about local health, wellness and community resources? YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

_____
_____
_____
_____

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

☐ Do you offer faith formation programs that respond to the spiritual needs of older adults? YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you offer programs that are relevant to adult children who are helping their parents?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are older adults consulted/included on program development and vestry? YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are committees intergenerational?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Are programs held in easily accessible locations and at easily attended times, and being remotely offered? (Remember even otherwise healthy people may not be comfortable driving after dark).   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you honor your elders with any type of celebration? YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

☐ Do you reach out to individuals to support engagement as their physical or cognitive abilities change?   YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

Does your church have a relationship with a retirement community, assisted living or nursing home? YES__ SOMEWHAT__ NO__

NOTES

DEMENTIA SPECIFIC IDEAS

Everything in the check list above, PLUS some things to keep in mind when addressing the needs of those with Alzheimer's and other dementias:

- ☐ Continue to be warm, relaxed and friendly.

- ☐ Speak clearly and directly, and listen closely.

- ☐ Ask questions that are easy to answer.

- ☐ Be attentive to body language (of all involved, including you).

- ☐ Offer shorter services with familiar hymns and music.

- ☐ Use service and scripture translations that are relevant to the listener.

- ☐ Provide a quiet area during services and events.

- ☐ Identify and support families and other care partners of those experiencing dementia through support groups, Memory Cafés, and pastoral care visits

- ☐ Identify congregants who are trained and available to assist.

- ☐ Stay connected with the person (and their family).

- ☐ Promote awareness and education to your congregation, utilizing available supportive services such as Alzheimer's Association and your local Council on Aging.

- ☐ Remember that we all need spiritual nourishment.

NOTES

Lifespan
Ministry with Older Adults
A mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts