

## **St Cuthbert's: Dementia Friendly Small Church.**

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### **Model for Dementia Friendly Church. Fabric of the church.**

- St Cuthbert's has a Lichgate which is recognisable and pleasing to the eye. The use of Bright coloured hanging baskets can create a pleasing and welcoming sight to the person living with Dementia. They may identify with the colours or the flowers and identify with a feeling of comfort.
- The church yard if well maintained and free of rubbish may be a pleasant journey and could create positive emotions and meaningful conversation. In this particular church yard there is a fenced off tomb of a local benefactor of the church and the village which will be engrained in early memory therefore more lasting in dementia. This will create meaningful conversation.
- The walk up to the church is safe with an anti-slip surface. It is long and has an incline. It may benefit people living with dementia to have a seat placed half way up the path to enable them to rest.
- No visible locks on the front door apart from mortice locks. This may cause feelings of discomfort i.e. a forbidden place or rattling of the door to get in?
- Doors open as much as possible. People need to see into the next destination point?
- Consider glazed /partial glazed primary or secondary doors to allow people to see what lies beyond.
- Bright lighting in the lobby as people living with dementia require 2 to 3 times more light than normal to enable them to see well and perceive accurately. This is because brain damage impairs both perceptual ability and visual acuity.

- Carpets and mats should be same or similar colour as the contrast of dark and light creates the concept of a void or an obstacle and may instill unnecessary fear, anxiety and increase the risk of falls.
- Carpets should be plain and free from objects such as leaves, small pieces of paper as a person living with dementia may perceive patterns as creatures and be afraid of objects to pick up as with the leaves etc. This will increase anxiety and the risk of falls as they attempt to pick them up or step over them.
- Walls need to be kept minimalistic as too much information is confusing. It may be that plaques would benefit from a frame if they blend in to the brickwork or plaster as they may not be visualised by the person living with dementia. Think contrast!
- Notice boards need to be tidy and information well-spaced. It is best to use words and pictures as some people especially with a vascular dementia may have lost the ability to recognise one or the other.
- If there are doors you do not wish people to enter, then make them invisible? i.e. paint out / camouflage. Remember it is all about contrast, similar colours mean that there is less chance of it being recognised.
- Signs! Are they necessary? Keep them to a bare minimum. The symbol of a man or woman is universally recognised and more than adequate for the toilets. Use real items as signs and this is easy in a church as they are universal and engrained in the early memory? The crucifix is enough recognition for the Alter, the robes of the clergy are recognisable. If there is a children's area, then the items within will be recognised as such, but you could simply place a large item in view.
- Destination points are important as hidden things create intrigue and will unsettle a person living with Dementia. If an area is clearly visible i.e. not behind walls, then the person will be satisfied. A barrier or opening is simply enough separation.

- It is essential to offer a quiet area for the person living with dementia as they may become tired, be uncomfortable with someone's approach or their looks. They may also be confused by background noise or simply not like to be amongst people yet still want to feel included. A quiet area does this and allows inclusion as they can still be part of what is going on without being amongst other people they are not familiar with or feel comfortable with. It may be that your quiet area is separated by a barrier or it may be a separate room, preferably with a window or vision into the main body of the church. If not, there would need to be something meaningful in the room to create meaningful occupation such as a memory box, tactile objects or items on a wall. Please remember that the peripheral(sideways) vision is reduced with people living with dementia so it is best to be facing such objects or be guided to them.
- If you have a kitchen and all else fails a cup of tea, coffee, juice etc. and the offer of a biscuit may help to regain comfort and confidence.
- A memory box is something that is filled with meaningful objects. It doesn't need to be so big it cannot be carried by the person, and would benefit with a visible symbol on the container itself or be of a recognised shape. If not, then leave something of interest hanging out of the box to create intrigue. The contents may be a holding cross, prayer beads, book marks can be bright and visual but avoid ornate writing, keep it plain and bold. Post cards of god, apostles a memorable bible story, a church may create interest or a meaningful conversation. A bible, holy water, there are many items you can add and tailor to your place of worship.
- Seating in the church should have enough knee room for people to be comfortable and not feel trapped or hemmed in. The person living with dementia may need added comfort however such as a cushion to sit on.
- Draughts are not easily accepted and cause the person to be unsettled. It is a good thing to keep a few blankets to cover knees, etc. The little fleecy type used in cars are inexpensive and ideal.

- Toilets preferably need space to allow room and not to make people feel hemmed in. It may also be that a carer needs to attend with them. It is the ideal to have a disabled toilet to allow wheelchair access. It may be wise to consider a sanitary bin for clinical waste as there could be a need for incontinence product disposal.
- This is by no means exhaustive to address the fabric of the building. You will note that not all changes are big or expensive.
- What is evident is that the simple changes will help many people in your congregation with physical and mental impairment as well as people living with Dementia.