What You Should Know

People who have Alzheimer’s disease, especially those raised in faith-based households, can be uplifted by worship services and clergy visits. They can often enjoy age-old rituals and hearing favorite hymns and scripture passages.

Some people with the disease may stop attending regular worship services to avoid social situations they fear or no longer understand, while others find peace and comfort in a place of worship.

Family members also have spiritual needs. Caring for a loved one can span many years, leaving family caregivers weary, isolated, frustrated, and depressed. At the same time, they may grieve the loss of who the person once was.

Some families may feel embarrassed or reluctant to ask for help from their place of worship. Don’t wait for them to ask. Although frequent offers of support may be turned down, one day, an offer may be accepted.

Tips For Spiritually Engaging a Person With Alzheimer’s

- Use older scriptures or translations and encourage interaction; the person may no longer relate to the newer, international versions
- Foster an atmosphere of joy, trust, and comfort
- Make connections through music – traditional songs or old hymns may be better received than modern spiritual music
- Create a spiritual connection during a home visit with a familiar prayer or scripture – or recount a familiar special event at your place of worship
- Get the person involved in activities that connect him or her with others, and that match the person’s changing abilities, like:
  - Attending choir concerts or taking part in Sunday school
  - Doing tasks that are repetitive; e.g., stuffing bulletins, filing, sorting
  - Creating an album or filling a “memory box” with special items
  - Participating in intergenerational programs

How You Can Help

Regardless of where the person with Alzheimer’s is in the disease process, your compassion will help fulfill spiritual needs.
Tips For Supporting the Caregiver

- Encourage family caregivers to stay strong by eating right, getting regular exercise and rest, and accepting help from others
- Suggest ways to take a break (respite) from daily caregiving responsibilities; respite services can be informal, like having congregation members make home visits, or formal services, like adult day care
- Encourage family caregivers to express feelings of loss, frustration, joy, and love
- Form a support group with help from your local Alzheimer’s Association

Tips For Being a Welcoming Congregation

- Always be respectful to the person with Alzheimer’s
- Greet the person warmly, using simple sentences and a calm voice
- Wear name tags
- Help unite the person with the family if he or she appears to be disoriented or lost
- Be patient and accepting of behaviors and appearances
- Respond in calm and supportive ways
- Ask family members how they are and how their loved one is doing
- Offer to assist the family to get the person ready for worship services or help arrange transportation
- Express a willingness to spend time with the person so family members can run errands or take a break
- Send thinking of you notes and cards; include worship bulletins and newsletters to help the family stay connected
- Be a willing listener
- Provide ongoing prayer support for the person with Alzheimer’s and family members

How You Can Help

Your presence and support for family caregivers throughout the caregiving journey can be a tremendous source of strength.