In his book *Who Dies? An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying*, Stephen Levine wrote: If you walked into a room and all of a sudden your memory dissolved, you would experience “a new loveliness” in each previously familiar object. You would be seeing with fresh eyes a glistening reality. Your familiarity gone, knowing nothing, all would have a new life. In each moment, you would see the miraculous.

Could it be that way for someone with dementia? It would be for that person to say that it was so. But perhaps we can adopt a fresh attitude ourselves, and begin to realize that there is enough “newness” to go around for all of us, enough of the miraculous to suffice. Years ago, I had a poster with a beautiful autumn scene depicted on it, along with the words, “For each of us there are miracles. We have only to step aside and look upon everyday things.”

Not long ago, in the community in which I live, our interaction with one of our men changed. Someone named our reality in what seemed to be a helpful phrase: a “new normal.” The people involved were still the same people, but the dynamics had changed, so that what had been normal behavior and interaction was no longer so. But rather than bemoan the changed situation, we could adopt a different attitude, and accept that we were living in a “new normal.”

So often, when we're dealing with someone with new limitations, that “new normal” is forced upon us. It's easier, apparently, when those limitations are physical ones, and we adapt as best we can, even though it changes our daily rhythms. But when it's a matter of memory loss due to dementia, those in the same house or extended relationship might be hanging on to the “old” person, to the one who used to recognize people and furnishings as being familiar. We seem to not adjust as easily to the change, and still expect the person to strive mightily to recall everything.

Maybe it's a challenge mostly to be focused in the present moment, where we experience each thing and each person as we meet them. We see a plant in the room, and are invited to see not just “a plant,” but a living, vibrant reality. We don't need concepts and past preferences to appreciate a living plant. We just need to look at it appreciatively, and perhaps feel it with our fingertips.

Yes, we all very much like to be remembered for who we are. But it isn't the worst situation to live in the present, to see things through new eyes along with the person with dementia. It may frustrate a person with dementia that he or she can't remember who someone is, but perhaps we can help to establish a “new normal,” where things are new and fresh, where people are cute and caring in new and unexpected ways.

One of the men in my community has some form of dementia that interferes with his ability to figure out what page we're on or what song we're going to sing at a prayer time, or which plate is his at the dinner table when he comes back from getting coffee. I haven't asked him in a while what he thinks and feels about his condition; if I ask him again, he might admit being somewhat frustrated by it. But what I see clearly is his appreciation of the help anyone gives him in pointing out the page number or song, or pointing to his plate. He is so gracious in seeking that help, and in receiving it. If I come down with dementia some day, I hope I will have the same kind of attitude as he does.

We don't expect him to be the way he was. We try to anticipate his needs. Well before anyone came up with the phrase, we found ourselves living in a “new normal” with him. It all comes down to trusting that, in looking at everyday things (and people), there are miracles for each of us … if we have the eyes to see things and persons as they are … not as they were, or as we wish they were, but as they are.

Fr. Greg Poser, OSC, team member for Re-Membering Matters at Mille Lacs
Taking Action:

Re-Membering Matters at Mille Lacs ACT on Alzheimer’s action team will be busy conducting Dementia Friendly @ Work trainings for Isle, Wahkon, Onamia, and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe businesses interested in holding a training for staff. “The ACT on Alzheimer’s® Dementia Friendly @ Work training is a 45-minute to one hour educational session for staff of business and service organizations and all other community settings. The training focuses on understanding dementia and taking action to create an environment that is safe, respectful, and welcoming for people living with dementia. The Dementia Friendly @ Work training helps organizations heighten their awareness of dementia and equips them to respond warmly and effectively when serving people living with dementia and their care partners.

Training Objectives

• Learn what dementia is and some facts about Alzheimer’s
• Recognize the signs of dementia
• Learn tips for communicating and interacting with a person who has dementia
• Learn tips for creating a dementia-friendly physical space
• Get familiar with resources in your community”

Taken from http://www.actonalz.org/dementia-friendly-work

Area businesses interested in becoming a Dementia Friendly business may contact Kathy at 320-676-1050. Those businesses with the majority of its staff trained will receive a Dementia Friendly window decal to display in the business’s window.

Upcoming Events:

Action Team meeting: April 19th 1:00 pm @ the IREC in Isle
Action Team meeting: May 17th 1:00 pm @ the ROC in Onamia

AARP Presentation

Presentation is on how to protect oneself from fraud, identity theft and scams. May 18th 2:00 pm in the IREC Community Room, 610 Mille Lacs Avenue, Isle MN and 4:30 pm at Holy Cross Center, 104 Crosier Drive, Onamia, MN. Please contact Kathy Young to sign up at 320-676-1050

Caregivers Support Group

Meets 3rd Tuesday of the month
10:00 am
East Conference Room
Mille Lacs Health System
Long Term Care
Contact: 320-532-3873

ACT on Alzheimer’s
http://www.actonalz.org/

ACT on Alzheimer’s/
Mille Lacs
http://www.actonalz.org/mille_lacs

Alzheimer’s Association
http://www.alz.org

Re-Membering Matters at Mille Lacs Facebook Page
https://www.facebook.com/rememberingmattersatmillelacs
Faith Communities

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

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 care giving 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


For more resources, check out http://www.actonalz.org/faith-communities

Is your community prepared?
TAKE ACTION NOW!

ALZHEIMER’S FACTS:
• 89,000 Minnesotans age 65+ live with Alzheimer's disease and the number is growing.
• One in nine people age 65 and older has Alzheimer's disease.
• The annual number of new cases of Alzheimer's and other dementias is projected to double by 2050.
• Young onset Alzheimer’s, occurring in people under age 65, is also on the rise.

ALZHEIMER’S BOOKS have been purchased by Re-Membering Matters at Mille Lacs and are available for loan at the Mille Lacs Lake Community Library in Isle, Onamia Depot Library and Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Elder Service Department.

RESIDENTIAL RESpite SERVICES
Scandia House Assisted Living & Memory Care – Isle 320-360-1223
Mille Lacs Health System - Home Care and Hospice; Long Term Care/Memory Care, and Senior Care Geriatric Psychiatric Unit 320-532-3154
Lake Song Assisted Living and Memory Care 320-532-2000
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Assisted Living Unit – District 1 320-532-7565

Re-Membering Matters at Mille Lacs offers the following ACT on Alzheimer’s trainings:
Dementia Friends Training: Dementia Friends take action to change the way we think, talk, and act about dementia. In this 60-minute training, people learn about dementia and the small things they can do to make a difference. Dementia Friends is a growing initiative and network of people creating dementia-friendly neighborhoods and communities.

Dementia Friendly at Work Training: This is a 45-minute to one-hour educational session for staff of business and service organizations and all other community settings. The training focuses on understanding dementia and taking action to create an environment that is safe, respectful, and welcoming for people living with dementia. Any business, organization, faith community, etc. interested in either of these training may contact 320-676-1050.

ACT on Alzheimer’s is a volunteer driven statewide collaboration preparing Minnesota for impacts of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

Action Community contact:
Kathy Young, Isle Community Education
Email: kyoung@isle.k12.mn.us