

DEVELOPING DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CHURCHES

We know that we have an ageing population profile in our country and within our Diocese, this is even more pronounced as we attract people who choose to retire to our wonderful counties along the Marches. Within our church congregations we too show a steeply ageing profile and this means that we will be seeing more and more people in our churches and communities living with dementia. It is estimated that currently around 850,000 people are living with dementia in the UK and this figure is expected to rise to over one million by the year 2025.

How can we in our churches respond? Churches can offer; empathy and understanding; deeper wider friendships; a sense of belonging and inclusiveness; a safe place, a haven, a place of peace; laughter and companionship; hospitality, understanding and caring. To support those who are living with dementia, churches can learn to become more **dementia friendly**. St Mary's Church in Ross on Wye in Herefordshire are taking the first steps, along with the Methodist churches in the area, to become more dementia friendly churches. They have held two Dementia Friends awareness sessions open to those from the church and the community and are planning two more in the near future. Following on from this they have two Dementia Friendly workshops planned to consider how they can integrate their learning into their services, pastoral care, their buildings and community networks.

Hereford Diocese is working to encourage and support our churches to consider how they can be more dementia friendly. Your church can choose to be part of that, like St Mary's, with a few simple steps that can lead to actions that enhance the quality of life and physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of those who are living with dementia and their carers.

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