

## SoundBytes

### Beacon \*Shining Light on Dementia

#### *An initiative to build an inclusive congregation at Pacific Spirit United Church*

A dedicated group of congregation members at Pacific Spirit United Church worked together over the course of a year to create an incredible and insightful four-part series on dementia that you can access online. The process that got them there, though, is the fascinating part. They had noticed church members struggling with cognitive decline, and family members worried about finding extra care, so they dove in to try and determine how best to offer support. But they weren't entirely sure where to begin. How did one go about approaching this kind of honest, hard conversation? The group knew intuitively these situations often involved an element of fear or shame, and they were sensitive to wanting to maintain dignity and personal comfort for all. But at the same time, doing nothing meant congregation members would suffer alone. So the group met to discuss a way forward, and began telling their own stories about friends or family members with dementia. They all had a story. Some had several. And that's when it hit them. The way forward was through story. The way forward was through dialogue and remaining open and flexible to what came up.

They met weekly for a year, each time entering their discussions with a focus and leaving with an intention. The process was very organic and slow, but it needed to be so the group could be comfortable with pushing their own comfort boundaries enough to expand and see the possibilities. They had to learn to be okay with letting ideas go in favour of better or different ones, scrapping plans and making new ones. One member said at a recent conference, "If you'd have put me in charge, I'd have planned and executed the whole thing in under three months. But thank goodness I didn't get my way."

Instead, the group offered a collaboration of ideas and resources that materialized into a powerful four-part series of dialogues. The depth of reflection in the series is a direct result of the time this group allowed themselves to sit with the questions and the not-knowing. The series focuses on supporting people living with dementia, reducing stigma, and staying engaged with communities, activities and friends. It's a wonderful testament to the power of collaboration, authentic love and concern for community members, and a deep commitment to making things better for all the people in our lives. This group's dedication to fostering a dementia friendly culture at their church has since inspired many other groups to take action too.

For more details go to [www.pacificspirituc.com](http://www.pacificspirituc.com) and click on "ministries." The series is under "Beacon \*shining light on dementia."