

Faith Community Changing the Face of Dementia Care

*by Rosanne Burke, PAC Certified Independent
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First United Methodist Church of Fort Worth, Texas (FUMCFW) is changing the face of dementia care within their faith community and surrounding area with a progressive and innovative project. Over the next two years, they will be offering a series of educational events that will culminate with a live performance by Teepa Snow, one of America's leading educators on dementia.

Sylvia Ostby, a member of FUMCFW, has lived with Alzheimers disease for more than ten years. Her husband, Bernie, cared for her until he died last year at the age of 92. After he passed, her son and daughter-in-law, Gary and Peg Ostby, learned about Teepa Snow and her Positive Approach® to Care techniques including Hand-under-Hand®. They were so touched and inspired by the difference it immediately had on them, they decided to make a generous bequest from the Ostby family. Their gift will support dementia education for other families who are also on the dementia journey. "I think Bernie would be thrilled that his gift will provide others with the knowledge they'll need to change their journey with dementia for the better," says Peg.

As the Ostbys describe it, learning Hand-under-Hand gave them a way to communicate with Sylvia and receive feedback from her. "She was already in late-stage Alzheimer's and had lost all skills to interact with her world. We didn't know if she was aware that we were visiting her," says Peg. "Today, when you reach your hand out, she takes it and moves into Hand-under-Hand and begins palm-to-palm pumping. There is no doubt that you are connecting with her and it is deeply satisfying and heartwarming to really know she is aware that we are there with her," adds Gary.

The project has rapidly expanded and gained momentum. What began as a vision to serve the 7,000 church membership has grown into numerous partnerships with a variety of organizations including the Alzheimer's Association of North Central Texas, the Tarrant County Council of Churches, local media, community organizations, non-profit associations, community members, and the Mayor.

The team at FUMCFW also includes four librarians who are passionate and clear on the need to provide dementia education to the congregation as well as to the Fort Worth community. Their library now has a focus on dementia and includes a window display of Teepa Snow resources.

Linda Abel, a Certified Trainer in Positive Approach® to Care, is leading the project for FUMCFW. As the vision continues to grow, the question now being asked is: How can we be a dementia friendly church, healthcare community, and city? The Mayor, city leaders, healthcare representatives, church leaders, and families are being invited to come together to explore the answer to this question.

Abel explains, “As Christians, we believe that all persons are loved by God. This does not change with the onset of dementia. As a thriving, downtown church, we are uniquely positioned to serve our community. Our goal is to give people a better understanding of dementia and how to relate to persons living with dementia so that we can more effectively share God’s love. We are excited about the possibilities that lie before us.”

Teepa Snow says, “In many ways, dementia is our present day leprosy. It is feared, avoided, and those who live with it are all too often shunned and isolated. Unlike leprosy, it is not contagious. Like leprosy, it has a terrible stigma and social rejection associated with it. As people of faith, where do we stand? Can we not learn more, do more, care more?”

The faith community of FUMCFW and its partners are well poised to make a significant difference in the lives of persons with dementia and their care partners as they provide hope, education, and resources to those who need it most.

[Click here](#) for more information and for the full schedule of Alzheimer’s and Dementia Support presentations and workshops being offered in 2017-2018.