



Pictured is the Life Team of Messiah Lutheran Church, Lakeville.

Understanding dementia

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps. **Proverbs 16:9**

The Lutherans For Life Team at Messiah Lutheran Church, Lakeville, sponsored a presentation from Dementia Friends Minnesota (dementiafriendsmn.org) on Oct. 28. After listening to the presentation earlier in the year at a senior living community, the Life Team was eager to host this presentation at Messiah, as many know someone with dementia — family member, friend, church member or neighbor. The free event was attended by more than 110 church and community members, from confirmation-aged youth to adults.

Following time for refreshments and fellowship in the Family Life Center, and an opening prayer from Rev. Kurt Klaus, Messiah pastor, Colleen Fritsch of Dementia Friends Minnesota gave information and answered questions. Fritsch has dedicated the past two decades to aging services, focusing on helping communities better understand, engage with and support older adults. Ten years ago, she became a Dementia Friends Champion, helping to contribute to Minnesota's progress toward becoming a dementia-friendly state. Fritsch has also become a Dementia Friends Master Trainer.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, "Dementia is a general term for loss of memory, language, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia" (alz.org/alzheimer-s-dementia/what-is-dementia).

During the information session, Fritsch talked about 10 early signs and symptoms of dementia, the difference between a healthy brain and an advanced Alzheimer's brain, communication practices and conversation tips to support someone living with the disease, and community resources. Five key messages Colleen noted in the presentation are:

- Dementia is not a normal part of aging.

- Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain.
- Dementia is not just about having memory problems.
- It is possible to have a good quality of life with dementia.
- There's more to the person than the dementia.

Fritsch was happy with the turnout and reaction.

"The people in the room that evening were so attentive and genuinely engaged in the information I shared," she said. "At its heart, Dementia Friends is neighbor-to-neighbor and friend-to-friend — working together to build a supportive, connected community for people living with dementia. I think the friendship and camaraderie in the room that evening gave everyone a sense that we truly are in this together."

If your congregation or organization is interested in hosting a Dementia Friends Presentation, contact Fritsch at cfritsch@trellisconnects.org. For more information on planning this event, contact Carrie Strauch, Messiah's Life Team Leader, at cstrauch17@gmail.com.

Attendees found the event very helpful.

"I've heard Colleen give this Dementia Friends presentation three times and each time something has stood out and impacted me," said Kristin Scott, a Messiah Life Team member who led the event. Colleen's genuine care for people living with dementia and the information provided inspires me to be better when interacting with my mom ... to be more patient, more loving and to help her feel loved and cared for."

"I was the leader of the team, but I was not in charge," said Carrie Strauch, Life Team member and leader. "I was there enjoying the moment, the people and their smiles of appreciation as they listened to the speaker. But who was in charge? After days of reflecting on this question, it was so obvious. God was in charge. We were all there doing His work."

— **Submitted by Michele Hartshorn**

Assistant Director of Volunteer Relations, Lutherans For Life