

Monthly Gathering FAQs for Caregivers

Q: My spouse/partner/parent/other family member does not think they have a dementia-related issue; can I come by myself?

This meeting is for all people who are on the journey of living with dementia -- both caregivers and their loved ones. However, we acknowledge that there may be some who are affected but do not believe they have an issue and who are not at a stage where they are interested in or open to coming to a gathering such as this. Thus, caregivers are encouraged to come on their own to learn about available resources and find support and value from sharing with others who are walking a similar path.

The session starting at 11 am is a joy-filled time of fellowship, and caregivers are invited to join for the entire time; however, you are welcome to attend only for the support group session from noon – 1 pm if that fits your schedule better.

We wish to emphasize, however, that the gathering is simply that -- a time of wonderful fellowship, and hopefully, your loved one will enjoy the opportunity to be with others in the church. We intentionally call this "the Gathering" and do not refer to it as a dementia care program, nor do we discuss dementia-related issues in front of participants. We recognize everyone is on a different stage in this journey, and we are sensitive to that in the language we use, etc. Each participant is received as a beloved child of God, and volunteers seek to make meaningful connections with each individual as they engage in conversation and other activities. We pray that we are able to create moments of joy for those living with dementia through the time together!

Q: I cannot attend the Gathering, but I think my loved one would enjoy the fellowship time; may they attend without me?

In most cases, yes. However, this may vary based on individual circumstances and the needs of the participant. As described above, the Gathering is designed to be a time of fellowship, support and encouragement for caregivers and those living with dementia; we would encourage you to attend together with your loved one for the full two hours if at all possible.

Q: What happens at the Gathering?

11 am – Noon – Refreshments are available as people arrive and the first hour is a time of group activity, including music led by a Certified Music Therapist and other activities such as *Memory Joggers* (finish the lines), *Celebrations* (e.g., recognizing the various seasons and holidays) and/or *Remember When* (reminiscing/story sharing related to various photos or object prompts). Volunteers, caregivers and loved ones will enjoy this fellowship time together. (We hope caregivers would still plan to attend this time with the group even if your loved one will not be accompanying you, but it is also okay if you can only attend from for the caregiver support group time at noon.)

Noon – 1 pm – Break for a light lunch.

Caregivers move to the next room for a caregiver support group meeting. In addition to sharing about pertinent resources and getting your input on what other topics/needs for resources you have, there is

time for open sharing and discussion about various challenges and experiences you are encountering on this walk as a caregiver.

Loved ones/family members living with dementia stay in the activity room. Skilled volunteers engage with your loved one immediately to invite them to get food and will assist with that as needed. (This happens naturally as volunteers are spread throughout the room so that they can easily pair up with participants they have met upon arrival.) There are a variety of activities available, including puzzles, drawing and watercolor supplies, adult coloring books, cards, dominoes, checkers and other games. Volunteers are prepared to engage participants either in individual or small group activities based on interest and response. Our intent is that this time is enriching for all participants in the gathering, most especially your loved ones, and that all will know that there is a place for them in our VPC family and can experience connection in the body of Christ.

Q: Who are the volunteers?

We are blessed to have enough volunteers to provide 1:1 support during the activity session. Our volunteers are members of the VPC community and have received training on working with people with dementia. Many have personal experience with either a spouse or parent who has in the past or is currently living with dementia.

We realize that everyone who is living with dementia may be at a different place in the journey, and we seek to recognize those differences in order to engage with each person on the level where they are.

Q: How do I know who is in what role at the meeting?

You can recognize volunteers at the meeting by the green border on our nametags; caregiver nametags have a yellow border, and nametags of loved ones living with dementia have a blue border.

Q: Is it necessary to register to attend?

While walk-ins are welcome, registration is requested in order for our volunteer team to be best prepared to welcome you and your loved ones with set up, food and activities that are planned!