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**“We Are Because God Sustains Us in God’s
Memory”: A Pastoral Response to Dementia**

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Thursday, January 21, 2021 @10am

FOR MORE INFO AND ZOOM LINK VISIT: [TINY.CC/CATHOLICSEIGNOR](https://tiny.cc/catholicseignor)

Opening Thoughts

- Who we are
- Objectives
 - Raise awareness & understanding
 - Consider a theological and ethical response to dementia
 - Ideas and resources
 - Open up the conversation



What is dementia?

“The loss of cognitive functioning -- thinking, remembering, and reasoning -- and behavior abilities to such an extent that it interferes with a person’s daily life and activities.”

– *National Institutes of Health*



What is dementia?

- Progressive and irreversible loss of neurons and brain functioning, including loss of
 - memory
 - language skills
 - visual & hearing perception
 - problem-solving ability
 - emotion control
 - self-management ability
 - focus and attention.
- Stages-early, middle, late.
 - In severe stages, person depends completely on others for even the most basic activities of daily living.



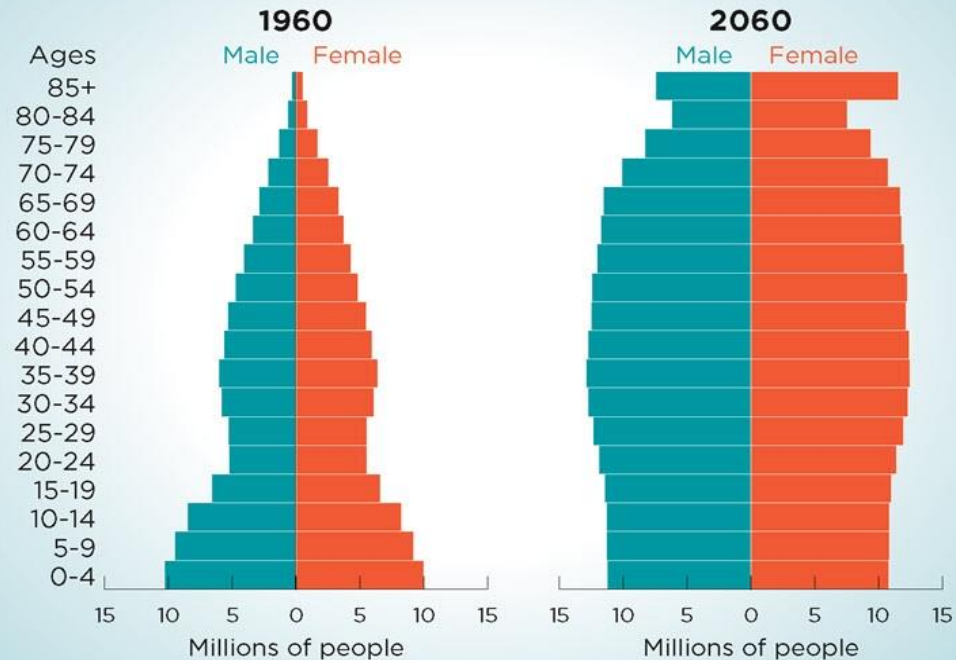
What is dementia?

- “Umbrella” term
 - Alzheimer’s Disease, Lewy-Body, vascular, frontotemporal disorders, Parkinson’s-related, etc.
 - Also referred to as “progressive cognitive impairments”
- Diagnosis affects a community of people



From Pyramid to Pillar: A Century of Change

Population of the United States



United States[™]
Census
Bureau

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
[census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

Source: National Population
Projections, 2017
www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popproj.html

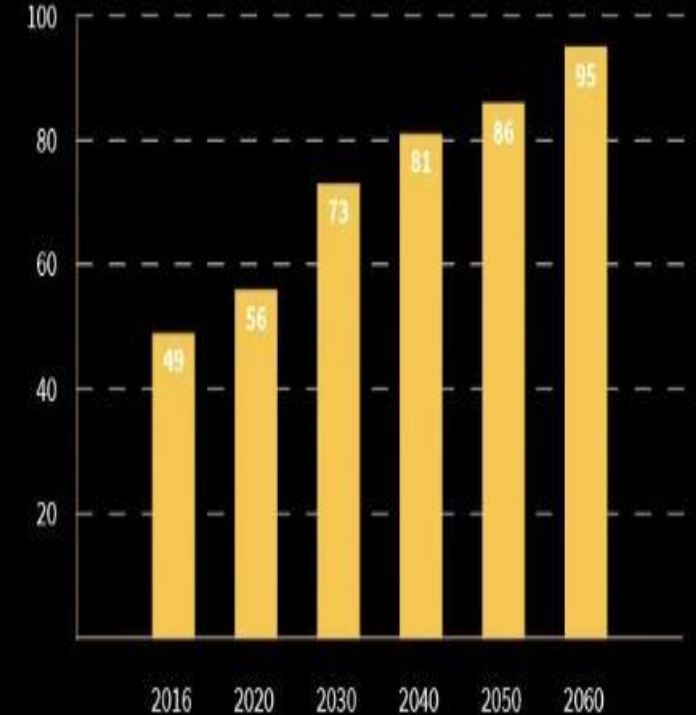
The **proportion** of older people with dementia is **declining 1-2.5% per year.**¹



However, as Americans live longer and the baby boomers age, the **number of people** with dementia is **increasing.**²

The Number of People Ages 65 and Older Will Nearly Double Between 2016 and 2060.³

Projected Older People Population (in Millions)



Source: Population Reference Bureau

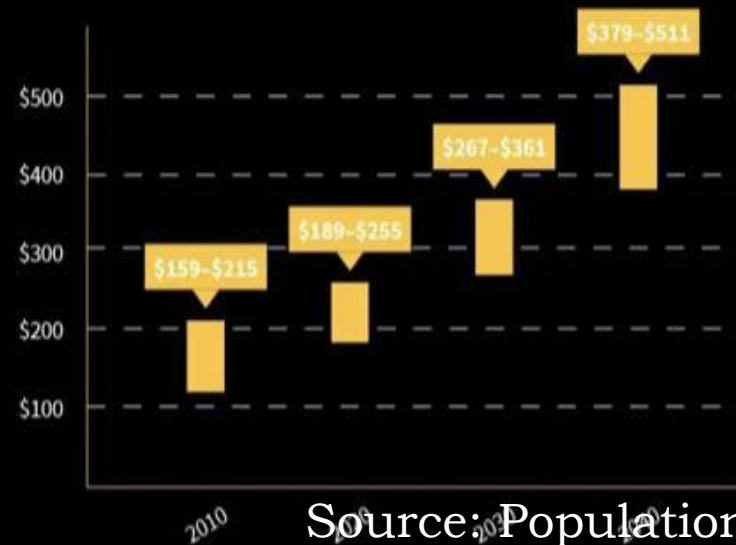
Key Statistics

- Alzheimer's 6th leading cause of death in US (2019)
- Approximately 1 in 3 older people die with some form of cognitive impairment present
- Around 16 million people -- mostly women -- currently offer unpaid care to persons with progressive cognitive impairments.

Cost

Dementia is one of the **most expensive** U.S. health conditions.

Estimated Total Cost of Dementia in the United States (in Billions)⁹



Estimated yearly costs reach **\$215 billion** and could **more than double** by 2040 as the large baby boom generation ages.*

*The estimated total U.S. dementia costs for 2010 range from \$159 billion to \$215 billion, depending on how unpaid caregivers' time and lost wages are valued. For 2040, the range is \$379 billion to \$511 billion in 2010 dollars. Families tend to provide nearly all unpaid care.

Source: Population Reference Bureau



Persistent Gaps

Racial and socioeconomic disparities in dementia are **large and persistent**.

Among Americans ages 55 to 69, rates of cognitive limitation are:

3x-4x

higher for black people than white people.⁷

7x-10x

higher for the poorest quarter of the population than the richest quarter.⁸

Education

Education gives adults an edge, reducing their dementia risk.



Older adults who do not complete high school are **3x as likely** to experience dementia as college graduates.⁴



Less-educated older people are **more likely to develop dementia and spend more years with the disease** than their more-educated peers.⁵



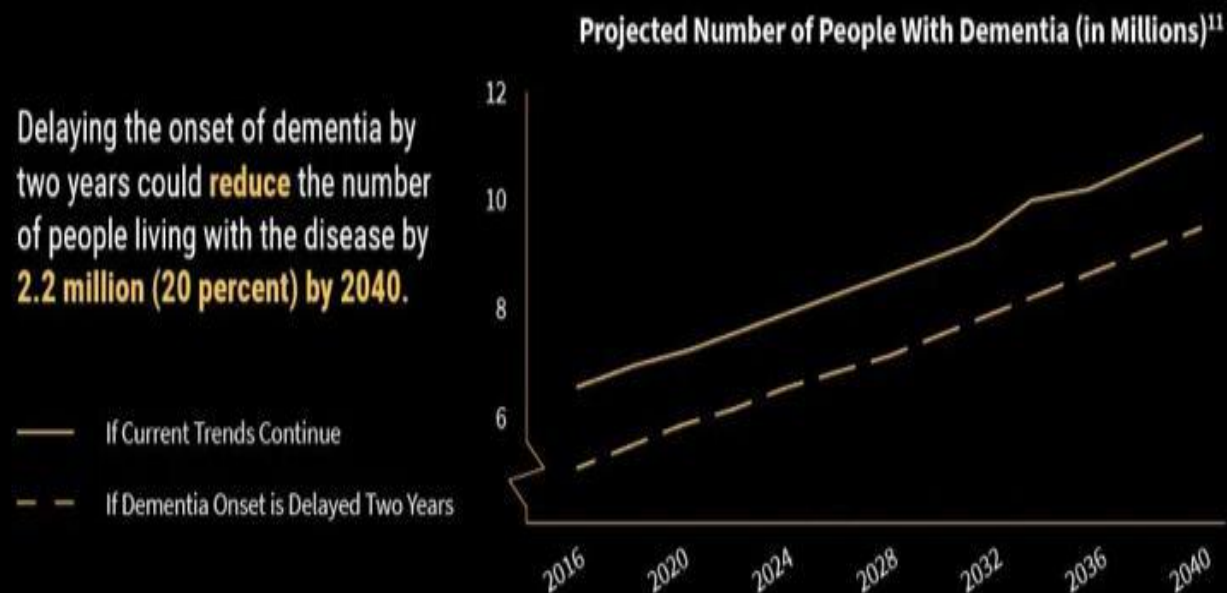
Older people today are **more educated** than earlier generations—contributing to the dementia decline.⁶

Source: Population Reference Bureau



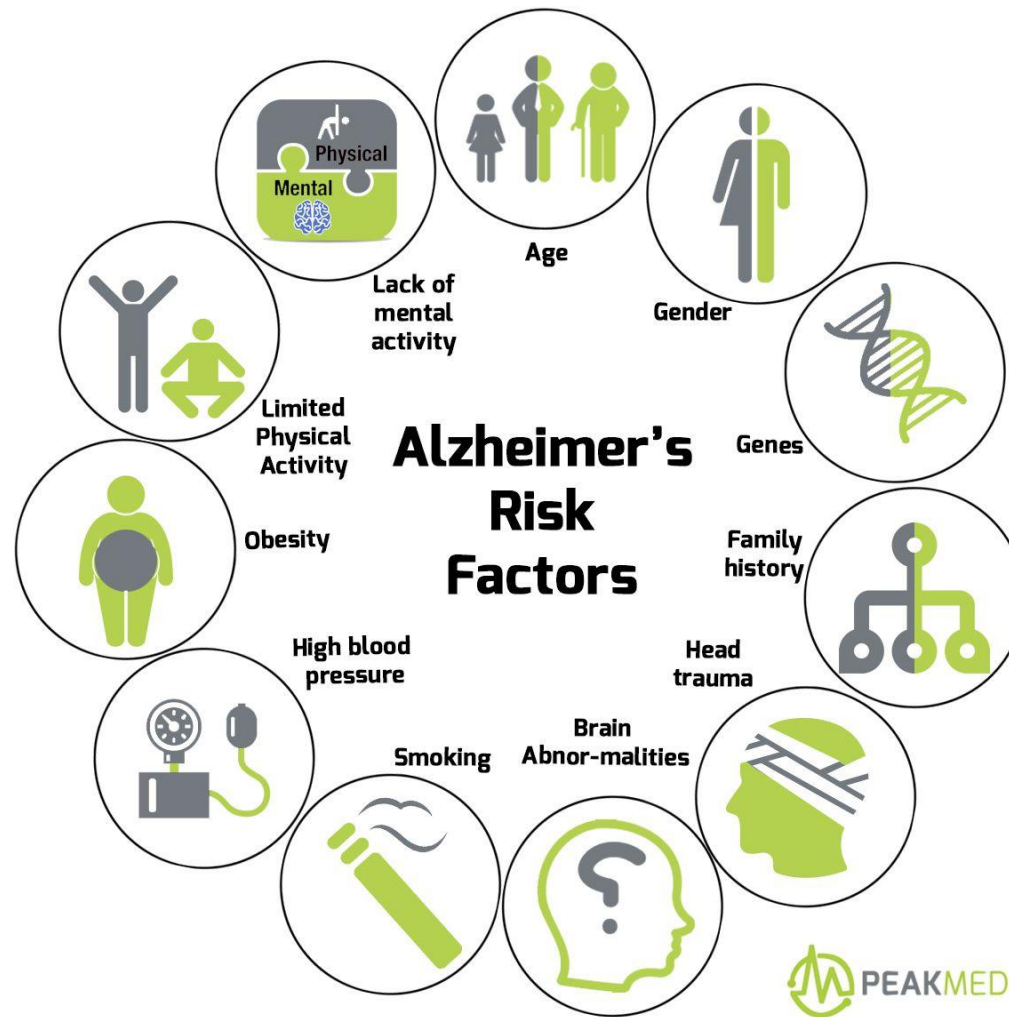
Looking ahead

The most effective way to reduce dementia prevalence in the future is to postpone its onset through **preventive strategies and treatments**.¹⁰



Source: Population Reference Bureau





A Moral Challenge

“[T]he care of people with dementia...will severely test the moral fabric of the family and society. The moral basis of our commitment to those with significant progressive and irreversible loss of cognitive function must be reaffirmed and rearticulated. [There is] a new urgency of the ethics of dementia.”

- Stephen Post, bioethicist and theologian -- *The Moral Challenge of Alzheimer Disease*

Being Remembered by God

“Our hope lies in the fact that we are living in the memories of God. As long as God remembers us, who we are will remain: ‘I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palm of my hands (Is. 49:15-16).’ ”

John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*



Foundational Principles

- Intrinsic dignity and worth of human beings
- Unity of the being
- Identity of the human being
- Human relationships
- Stewardship of human life
- Human limitations
- Solidarity, Social Justice, and Self-Giving Love (Caritas)



- International Association of Catholic Bioethicists, *Caring for and Giving Hope to Persons with Progressive Cognitive Impairments*

Ethical Principles

- Respect intrinsic dignity
- Encourage participation
- Ensure that care is holistic and person-centered
- Human relationships
- Support families and other caregivers
- Judge appropriate limits of treatment
- Allocate according to demands of social justice



International Association of Catholic Bioethicists, *Caring for and Giving Hope to Persons with Progressive Cognitive Impairments*



Recommendations to Cultivate Respect

- Avoid language, attitudes and behaviors that depersonalize
 - Fear, “taking over”, ignoring
- Encourage interaction and befriending
 - Especially intergenerational
- Protect against neglect or abuse
- Challenge cultures and ways of thinking that hold that aging, disability, dependency on others, suffering and death lack meaning.
 - Never a burden!
- Support a different response to human limitation and suffering than assisted suicide and euthanasia



International Association of Catholic Bioethicists, *Caring for and Giving Hope to Persons with Progressive Cognitive Impairments*

A Pastoral Response

“Catholic parishes are encouraged to develop structures to provide pastoral care for persons living with progressive cognitive impairments and their caregivers that address their material, psychological, social, spiritual needs.”

- International Association of Catholic Bioethicists, *Caring for and Giving Hope to Persons with Progressive Cognitive Impairments*

Promote Holistic, Person- and Family Centered

- Involve persons living with dementia in decisions regarding their care to the extent they are capable
 - May require supports because of specific vulnerabilities
- Pay attention to person's expressed wishes, affective and behavioral cues, and involvement of those who know the person well



Safety

- If the safety of a person living with dementia is of concern
 - Least intrusive and restrictive options appropriate for the person's needs should always be tried before more intrusive & restrictive
 - MedicAlert
- Safe Environment policies apply
 - archatl.com/ministries-services/safe-environment/safe-environment-compliance/



Praying for Needs

- Prayers of the Faithful
- Masses
 - Considering plans for AoA Mass on September 21, 2021 – World Alzheimer's Day or another patron saint day
- Rosaries, Divine Mercy Chaplets
- Adoration
- Novenas
- Include family members, caregivers, and others



Facilitating Reception of the Sacraments

- Eucharist to the homebound
 - Recruitment and training in encountering people living with dementia
 - www.usccb.org/committees/divine-worship/policies/guidelines-sacraments-persons-with-disabilities
- Transportation
- Accommodations for reconciliation
- Anointing of the Sick
 - Serious illness
 - Suggest to person and make arrangements
 - Healing service



Encourage Advance Healthcare and End-Of-Life Planning

- Ideally addressed while the person is still capable
 - Surrogate decision makers, advanced directives, etc
 - Trusts, Wills, Estate
 - Preferences
 - General organization of personal & business affairs
 - Funeral planning
- Do in consultation with spouse, family, other caregivers, etc.
- Resources at archatl.com/ministries-services/respect-life-ministry/end-of-life-issues/Assistance in facilitating conversations
- Legal and Financial Professionals
- Counselors



Counseling, Support Groups, and Education

- Caregivers support groups
- Stephen's Ministry
- Talks - Senior groups, Knights of Columbus, Children, Teen & Young Adults, too!
- Provide mental health resources & info
- Georgia Memory Net gamemorynet.org



Assistance With Activities of Living

- Meals, household repair, yard work, shopping, etc
- Where to turn for help in finding/selecting
 - Home care assistance
 - Long-term care options
 - State of Georgia, Department of Human Services, Division of Aging Services

aging.georgia.gov/locations



Social Events & Respite

- Regular gatherings for those living with dementia and their caregivers
- Art classes, dances, concerts, pet therapy
- Involve younger generations!
 - Polka party
 - Fish fry table dates
 - Adopt a retired priest
- Consider a launching a day program
 - Or knowing ones in your area



Support Healthy Behaviors

- Physical activity!
 - Walking group
 - Exercise classes
- Nutrition classes/dinner club
- Reduce isolation and loneliness



Let's Talk!

- Questions?
- Comments?
- Stories?
- Challenges?
- What do you want to know more about?

