

UMRC offers

Dementia awareness training for Ann Arbor District pastors

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According to recent statistics, more than five million Americans currently live with Alzheimer's disease. The risk for getting this progressive and fatal disease increases with age. By age 85, half of all people have Alzheimer's. While there is still no cure for this disease, early detection and treatment can make life better, both for those with Alzheimer's and for their families. In order to detect the disease in its beginning stages, it is necessary to understand the disease and its early symptoms.

On March 25, United Methodist Retirement Communities (UMRC), in conjunction with the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (MADRC), hosted a special half-day workshop on Dementia Awareness for United Methodist pastors in the Ann Arbor District. UMRC is proud of its partnership with MADRC, part of the University of Michigan Health System and one of only 32 such research centers in the country.

Ann Arbor District superintendent, and UMRC Board member, the Rev. Thomas Macaulay, welcomed pastors, spouses, and residents of Chelsea Retirement Community (CRC) who attended the workshop. "As pastors, we have all known parishioners who are dealing with dementia, whether themselves or a spouse or parent," said Macaulay. "Pastors can play a key role in helping with early detection and in providing support and counseling to the person with the disease, as well as their loved ones."

Dr. Bruno Giordani, Clinical Core Director of MADRC, taught the workshop, entitled "The Fundamentals of Dementia," which fo-



Ann Arbor District Superintendent the Rev. Thomas Macaulay (l), and Dr. Bruno Giordani, Clinical Core Director of MADRC, discuss the workshop.

—umrc photos/Lisa French

cused on the early warning signs of Alzheimer's and how to identify them. "Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of growing older," emphasized Giordani. While healthy aging includes forgetfulness, physical changes, such as hearing or vision loss, and slowed response times, "dementia involves impairment in a person's thinking ability that impacts everyday activities. It is a decline from the person's previous level of functioning." Warning symptoms of Alzheimer's can include: difficulty

learning new information; inability to handle complex tasks, such as balancing a checkbook or preparing a meal; getting lost in familiar places; difficulty with language; and behavioral changes.

Giordani called Alzheimer's disease a "looming crisis." By 2050, as many as 16 million Americans will be affected by Alzheimer's disease if no cure is found. It is currently the 6th leading cause of death in the U.S., and a new case is diagnosed every 70 seconds.



The Rev. and Mrs. Alan DeGraw enjoy a tour of the chapel at Towsley Village with Marketing Coordinator, Kim Tanner (c).



The Revs. Thomas Macaulay (c), Chris Brundage (r), associate pastor at Adrian: First UMC, and retired pastor and CRC resident Robert Brown, discuss what they've learned at the Dementia Awareness training workshop.

Following the training session, Giordani shifted his emphasis to "Alzheimer's Research – Today and Tomorrow." Research studies and clinical trials are ongoing, and there are currently 21 drugs in Phase II and 10 drugs in Phase III clinical trials. Immunotherapy is also being studied and may hold promise for the future.

The use of brain imaging techniques, including MRI and PET scanning, offer vital information to help researchers check for biochemical markers that indicate Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. "It's important to protect the healthy brain," explained Giordani. "To do that, we need to understand what occurs in the brain before disease symptoms occur. By the time symptoms are prevalent, the disease has already done much damage to the brain. Advances in brain imaging will help researchers detect the disease much earlier."

Giordani also talked about studies showing the importance of a brain-healthy diet, exercise and social engagement in staving off memory loss.

CRC resident, Nancy Mecartney, had personal reasons for attending the presentation. Her husband, the Rev. John Mecartney, passed away

from the effects of Alzheimer's disease in 2004. "As someone who watched her husband deal with the effects of Alzheimer's, I found Dr. Giordani's talk to be particularly inspiring and encouraging for those who are on that journey with a loved one," commented Mecartney. "There is hope."

Last spring, MADRC opened its only mobile clinic on the CRC campus. Mecartney and many other residents at CRC have taken advantage of the opportunity to participate in MADRC research studies in the comfort of their own

home. "Advances in health care would not be possible without individuals willing to volunteer to take part in research," said Giordani. "The MADRC is very grateful for the invaluable time offered by current and future research volunteers at CRC. Their participation in memory and aging research will help solve our most vexing health problems in the years to come. We commend UMRC for its support and commitment to bringing this oppor-

tunity to CRC."

This was the first workshop offered by UMRC to United Methodist pastors, but executive director of the UMRC Heritage Foundation, Marie Seddon, says there are plans for additional training workshops in the future. "On June 4, we will host a similar dementia training program

for United Methodist Women. We hope to expand these training workshops to reach more people."

Giordani urged the pastors in attendance to help in the battle against Alzheimer's disease by offering educational programs to their congregations, promoting participation in research studies, and encouraging parishioners to seek medical evaluation if they're experiencing any of the warning signs. Symptoms of dementia may mirror those of other illnesses or conditions that may be treatable.

Following Giordani's presentation, pastors were served lunch, and tours were offered of CRC and Towsley Village, UMRC's state-of-the-art memory care center.

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—Dr. Bruno Giordani