

JIM GULLEY

Alzheimer's Association National Early-Stage Advisor

Jim Gulley was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2015 at age 65.

Jim enjoyed a 40-year professional career in network technology and computer programming, including work for NASA in support of the Apollo-Soyuz Mission. Following retirement in 2011, Jim earned a Master's degree in theology and pastoral care, after which he secured a position at a local church.

Jim began noticing signs of cognitive decline a few years ago when he experienced difficulty addressing weekend worshippers at the end of church sermons. He suffered bouts of stuttering and experienced problems with his short-term memory during routine conversations with parishioners and friends.

During an annual physical in 2015, Jim marked "memory issues" as an area of concern in his pre-exam paperwork. He quickly crossed it out; unsure if he wanted to broach the subject with his doctor. During his appointment, however, Jim's physician pressed the issue, asking him: "Are you sure there is nothing you want to talk about?" in reference to the crossed-off item. This prompting opened the door for discussion about Jim's concerns and a follow-up visit with a neurologist was scheduled.

A series of tests including cognitive testing, a neuropsychological evaluation and MRI confirmed what Jim had suspected – Alzheimer's disease.

"It confirmed what I had been thinking," he says. "My father had experienced symptoms of cognitive decline in his 60s. In addition, my grandfather was also diagnosed with dementia. Unlike many others who experience shock when diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia, acceptance for me was a bit easier given my family history."

Jim did what he could to comfort his wife, Rose, who accompanied him to the diagnosis. "She was more scared than I was," he says.

A few months after his diagnosis, Jim shared the news in his parish newsletter. He was impressed by the number of people who responded with questions about how he had been diagnosed and what the signs were leading up to it. "It was obvious that there were plenty of people concerned about their memory," he says.

As a member of the Alzheimer's Association 2017-2018 National Early-Stage Advisory Group, Jim says he will leverage the insights gained from his own public disclosure.

"I want to reassure people who have concerns about their memory to seek help and get a diagnosis," he says. "I am particularly interested in raising awareness, especially in the underserved areas of my community."

Currently Jim is immersed in wide-ranging activities at the Rochester-Finger Lakes Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. He participates in fundraising, legislative advocacy and public awareness efforts. He has enrolled in the Alzheimer's Association TrialMatch® and hopes to participate in a clinical trial in the near future.

"Doing all I can to end this disease is my full-time job now," he says. "I have the support of a wonderful care partner - my wife of 45 years - as well as my family, our church community, friends, and those in our neighborhood. I remain physically active, and I continually challenge myself to remain mentally alert through reading, discussions, classes, band participation, and leading Bible study. I welcome and appreciate the opportunity to do more."

Jim and his wife Rose reside in Penfield, NY and have two adult children.

