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Educating for Inclusive, Caring Communities

What kind of education do clergy and ordinands require in order to include and care for people living with dementia and their carers and supporters?

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What was the purpose of this research?

This research project focused on Christian communities across selected denominations and theological education as it is carried out by their guiding bodies.

It assessed the current situation with a view to exploring examples of good practice and uncovering gaps in the preparation of clergy for the task of ministering alongside people living with dementia.

Research Objectives:

Primary:

To significantly improve the experiences of people living with dementia and their carers and supporters within religious communities, enabling their participation to enhance the life and development of religious communities in which they belong.

Secondary:

To better equip clergy and religious communities to compassionately and effectively support people living with dementia and those who provide care, enabling formation of communities that embody such compassion.

Other relevant information about the research project:

The study was conducted in the United Kingdom and Australia.

One-to-one interviews were conducted with Christian educators as well as people living with dementia and/or their carers.

- Fifteen (15) theological institute teachers in the United Kingdom
- Ten (10) people living with mild dementia and/or their carers in the United Kingdom
- Sixteen (16) theological institute teachers in Australia

- Fourteen (14) people living with mild dementia and/or their carers in Australia

Brief Summary of the final report:

The final report is structured into three main sections: Dementia, Faith and the Church; Dementia in Theological Education; and A Way Forward. These are followed by a summary of recommendations and a list of resources to further build understanding.

Section Summaries:

Dementia, Faith and the Church explores people's experiences of living with dementia, or caring for someone living with dementia, within various spiritual and church contexts encompassing:

- relationship with God
- aspects of physical and material accessibility
- worship, liturgy and sacraments
- visiting and community ministry
- gifts and service
- fellowship
- ethos, attitudes, and understanding.

The report illustrates varied experiences in each of these domains. It also highlights that participants considered dementia as an indicative issue, pointing to broader ways in which churches needed to examine and consider inclusivity and accessibility for diverse Christian communities, including people living with dementia.

Dementia in Theological Education builds a case for giving dementia focused attention in the context of ministerial training and formation. It examines the role of a church leader, and their ability to respond correctly to norms, cultures and trends which can tend towards exclusion.

The report also examines the current and potential role of Tertiary Education Institutions (TEIs) to equip prospective ministers to support people living with dementia and their carers. It specifically considers where dementia education might be incorporated within modular teaching structures, practical placements and reflection, and extra-curricular spaces. Additionally, it examines the feasibility of embedding dementia-related content across multiple curricula.

A Way Forward – rejecting one single solution, this section proposes five ‘options’ which, when used together, might see TEIs take realistic, incremental steps towards increasing dementia provision.

Key Findings

- There is a growing need for clergy and church leaders to be well-equipped to support people living with dementia in the community.
- Dementia shines a critical light upon many aspects of spiritual and church life, making it a key indicator of the inclusivity and accessibility of church practices.
- Current theological training on dementia varies widely and often lacks depth or practical application.

Recommendations

- TEIs should integrate dementia education into their curricula to better prepare future clergy for inclusive ministry.
- A multi-faceted approach to training is necessary, combining modular teaching, placements, reflection, and extracurricular learning.
- Churches should engage in continuous dialogue and education to foster environments that are welcoming to those living with dementia.

Actionable Steps

- **Evaluate Current Programs:** TEIs to conduct self-assessments on current dementia-related content in their courses.
- **Curricular Integration:** Incorporate dementia-specific content and ensure cross-curricular references to dementia-related issues.
- **Practical Placements:** Provide hands-on learning experiences for ordinands in settings that support individuals with dementia.
- **Continuing Education:** Encourage ongoing training for ordained clergy to keep abreast of best practices in dementia care.
- **Community Engagement:** Facilitate workshops and create resources to help church communities become more inclusive.

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The Full Report and Resource list can be found at this site:

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/divinity-religious-studies/educating-for-inclusive-caring-communities-2872#panel2888>



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