

Dementia and the Church: Creating a Dementia Friendly Church & Dementia and the Church: Memory, Care and Inclusion

Rodgers, Jade. *Dementia and the Church: Creating a Dementia Friendly Church*. Maryborough, VIC: JADMA Publishing, 2023, 118 pages.

Cail, Mary McDaniel. *Dementia and the Church: Memory, Care and Inclusion*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress press, 2023, 226 pages.

The World Health Organization says that there are 55 million people living with dementia today and this number is increasing. Dementia Australia explains that dementia is the biggest killer of women in Australia. This is a huge challenge, not simply for those

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living with dementia and their loved ones, but for communities and churches.

Many churches and Christians, however, are either unaware of the need to love people impacted by dementia or unprepared to engage in dementia ministry. Indeed, as an aged care chaplain/advocate I believe sharing Jesus with people living with dementia (and older people) will only happen when the church becomes passionate about loving these people. Thus, I was excited to discover that there were not one but two books about Dementia ministry published in 2023.

Confusingly both have the same main title. *Dementia and the Church: Memory, Care and Inclusion* by Mary McDaniel Cail, comes out of the USA while *Dementia and the Church: Creating a Dementia Friendly Church*, by Jade Rodgers, is an Australian offering. Both books are written at a popular level, are easy reading, rightly highlight the importance and challenges of dementia ministry and have some great practical tips. The limitations of each were also shared: there was only a superficial engagement with Scripture/theology and the academic work on dementia spirituality. For example, Rodgers' chapter on Reminiscence did not even mention Mackinlay's pivotal work on Spiritual Reminiscence.

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So, what are the differences? Rodgers' offering is shorter (90 pages) and has numerous links to websites. This is an enhancement for people who purchase the e-book edition, but may date it as websites change. I particularly liked the chapters on the sensory impact (sight and sound) of dementia. Theologically I struggled with the suggestion that 'Christian attributes can provide some protection against dementia,' although I certainly affirm the value of prayer, hope and community which are intrinsic to Christianity. There is also some research suggesting social interaction has some protective value regarding dementia which church gatherings provide.

Cail's work is longer (200 pages). Her book's greatest strength is probably also its greatest weakness, in that it is written with brutal honesty and incredible vulnerability. This made for powerful stories, but at times highlighted issues without providing answers. Another key feature of Cail's work was the extensive activities designed to help prepare, educate and equip churches for ministry in the midst of dementia. The effectiveness of this material will vary across readers and churches. In terms of critique, I struggled with the chapter on counselling as I felt it failed to separate counselling, pastoral care and spiritual direction.

Overall, while I am thankful for these authors' advocacy and passion for Christian engagement with dementia, I would not list

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either of them as general must-reads. However, eBook readers who are keen to get weblinks to dementia resources will benefit from Rodgers' work while people who want a detailed church program to start to build a dementia program will find Cail's work interesting.

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