

## Discovering Dementia

“Dementia” covers a whole range of related symptoms of ongoing decline in brain function. In 2014, 1 in 79 people across the UK lived with dementia and 1 in 6 of the over 80s are likely to live with it. The scale of dementia will increase with our aging populations. It is a huge part of modern life amongst us and our communities. My step-mother in Australia has lived with it for 10 years now, the last five leaving her immobile and speechless in the nursing home my dad visits every other day. There are barely words to describe the pain and loss.

But finding words matters. And talking openly about what dementia is, what it can do to people and what it means to live with it, find life within and through it and care for one another as it touches and transforms is important work. It's work

Westminster and the Faraday Institute shared in on Saturday, 2nd November, when we welcomed around 60 folk from across the URC and beyond to consider living with dementia. It's a topic alive in our communities, families and churches. And we had a blessed and moving day exploring it together. Westminster, as ever, offered outstanding welcome and hospitality and we were hugely helped by some great contributors.

Dr Rodger Charlton is a GP and teacher and deeply involved in the URC. Mhari McLintock is a URC minister with early onset dementia. She and her husband were joined by Charlotte Overton-Heart from the Christian charity **Livability** with whom they've done much to explode myths and ensure, as Mhari said, that she lived life to the full with her dementia. I think all of us left



the day humbled, moved and changed by all we discovered, what we shared and how these good people offered of their deepest selves to us.

Dementia demands much from everyone: from those living with it and their carers and families and friends; from the NHS and government; from churches; from local communities; from researchers. This was a day when the scale of it all hit me, but also when the profound capacity of people to do good, to show care, to walk together into the storm and to believe and hope blessed me. God most certainly is in this, even as faith meets tough questions.

“Alzheimer’s is the cleverest thief, because she not only steals from you, but she steals the very thing you need to remember what’s been stolen.”

Jarod Kintz

## A Third Year’s Muslim - Christian Encounter



Adam Woodhouse is training with us for URC ministry. Last summer he shared in an intensive Muslim-Christian encounter programme running in Oxford. He reflects:

“The thing I’ve learnt from the course is that the barriers are very thin, if you are willing to give it a go and push up against them. When we visited some churches, they turned us away because they didn’t want people to

attend the service who would not be taking part in the worship. This really challenged me in my ministry to think through how my church would have responded. Other churches were really open and friendly and welcoming. It’s a real challenge to church leaders to be welcoming and to build those bridges. We don’t have to agree on what we believe to be friends and work on community together.”

What truth, and what a calling we share! This sort of barrier-breaking is deep within Westminster’s DNA and our work for the URC in a world so often fractured.

