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Ford, Ford, and Randall's "A kind of upside-downness: Learning disabilities and transformational community" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Ford, D. F., Ford, H. D. & Randall, I. (Ed.). (2020). *A kind of upside-downness: Learning disabilities and transformational community*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 232 pp. ISBN 9781785924965

A Kind of Upside-Downness centers around a community home located in Cambridge, England, that is affectionately called Lyn's House. Nearly all of the contributors to this book are theologians and academics in Cambridge who either lived in Lyn's House or served on the steering group that helped found and maintain the community. The authors dive into the complexities and joys that center around the concept of developing an intentional Christian community where individuals with learning disabilities will be welcomed, cherished and seen as Christ sees them.

Lyn's House was inspired by Jean Vanier's L'Arche communities. Vanier's L'Arche communities welcome everyone, especially those with learning disabilities whom Vanier felt were the most marginalized people in society at that time of its founding in the 1960s. In 1992, Jean Vanier challenged Deborah Hardy Ford to establish an L'Arche inspired community in the Cambridge area. Vanier sensed a need in Cambridge, "where there is a great concentration of people with learning abilities, and...it is desirable for them to have relationships with people with disabilities" (p. 192). About 20 years later, Vanier's challenge was fully realized with the founding of Lyn's House. One of the critical differences between L'Arche and Lyn's House is that Lyn's House is not a professional service provider for people with learning disabilities.

The book has three parts. Part one is titled "Called into Community." The contributors in the first part of the book discuss how the community began, how Lyn's House differs from the L'Arche communities, stories about the "Core Friends," their name for those with learning disabilities at Lyn's House, and vignettes about those that lived in Lyn's House. Part two is called "A Wisdom of Community." In this section, the authors reflect on how to let go of the 'us and them' mindset, especially how we perceive and receive individuals with disabilities. This perception often centers around their needs and not their gifts. Section two also dives into the paradoxical view of Biblical wisdom where Christ calls us to be more like children, and the authors discuss how their relationships with the Core Friends have humbled them despite their academic prestige. The third part of the book is entitled "Discerning

Community Today.” In this final part of the book, the authors look at the historical developments of living and working with individuals with learning disabilities. The authors show that the concept behind Lyn’s House allows individuals with learning disabilities to develop relationships that are free from dependency on a caretaker. This freedom is not lost on the Core Friends. The book contains two appendixes that look at the nuts and bolts of what Lyn’s House does from providing a schedule on how an event with the core friends runs to the larger picture of how a Christian community functions. An extensive bibliography section is located in the back of *A Kind of Upside-Downness*.

Upside-Downness challenges the reader to deny oneself what the world values by entering into relationships with individuals that cannot hold their own in doctrinal debates but who have much to teach us. It is recommended for seminary and academic libraries.

Reviewer

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