



Supporting Ministers-in-Training with AuDHD: A Guide for Incumbents

Introduction

This guide supports incumbents in accompanying ministers-in-training who are both autistic and have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AuDHD). It offers a brief overview of this dual neurodivergence, outlines common strengths and challenges, and provides practical strategies for inclusive ministry training. People with AuDHD experience the world in unique ways, and this guide encourages a person-first, flexible approach that honours their gifts and needs. By fostering inclusive environments, we affirm the Church's call to welcome and empower all who are called to ministry.

Understanding AuDHD

AuDHD is a term used to describe individuals who are both autistic and have ADHD. While each condition is distinct, they often co-occur and interact in complex ways. Autism may affect sensory processing, social communication, and preference for routine, while ADHD may impact attention regulation, impulse control, and energy levels.

Together, these traits can create a dynamic and sometimes contradictory experience. For example, a person may crave structure (autism) but struggle to maintain it (ADHD), or may be highly focused on a passion but find it hard to switch tasks or manage time.

It's important to remember:

- AuDHD is not a disorder to be fixed, but a neurodivergent way of being.
- Each person is unique, and their experience of AuDHD will vary.
- Person-first language (e.g., "a person with AuDHD") affirms identity and dignity.

Common Strengths and Challenges

Strengths Often Seen in Ministers-in-Training with AuDHD

- Deep passion and focus on areas of interest, especially theology or justice
- Creative and original thinking
- Strong empathy and integrity

- Resilience and adaptability, especially in dynamic ministry contexts

Challenges That May Arise

- Sensory sensitivities and overwhelm in busy or unpredictable environments
- Difficulty with executive functioning, including planning, organisation, and transitions
- Social communication differences, such as interpreting tone or body language
- Emotional regulation struggles, including anxiety or frustration
- Attention variability, with periods of hyperfocus or distractibility

These traits are not universal, and each person's experience will differ. The goal is to support individuals in ways that help them thrive.

Ministry Training Context

Ministry training often involves placements, group learning, theological study, and reflective practice. These environments can be both enriching and challenging for people with AuDHD.

For example:

- Group settings may be socially and sensory overwhelming.
- Academic tasks may be difficult to initiate or complete without external structure.
- Placements may require multitasking and adaptability that feel exhausting.
- Reflective practice may be hard to engage with if it lacks clear structure or relevance.

Incumbents can help by offering clarity, flexibility, and encouragement, and by advocating for reasonable adjustments in training pathways.

Practical Support Strategies for Incumbents

Here are some ways incumbents can support ministers-in-training with AuDHD effectively:

- **Provide structure and predictability:** Share schedules in advance. Break tasks into manageable steps. Use visual aids and checklists.

- **Create sensory-safe environments:** Be mindful of lighting, noise, and physical space. Offer quiet areas or allow breaks.
- **Communicate clearly and directly:** Avoid ambiguous language, idioms, or sarcasm. Follow up verbal instructions with written summaries.
- **Support executive functioning:** Help with time management, organisation, and transitions. Encourage use of digital tools and reminders.
- **Be flexible with social norms and expectations:** Understand that communication styles may differ. Focus on intent and content rather than delivery.
- **Encourage self-awareness and self-advocacy:** Support the minister-in-training in identifying what helps them stay regulated and focused.
- **Collaborate with training institutions:** Ensure accommodations are in place. Share feedback constructively and advocate for inclusive practices.

Theological Reflection

The Church is called to be a body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12), each contributing uniquely to the whole. Ministers-in-training with AuDHD bring gifts that reflect God's creativity, depth, and compassion. Their presence challenges the Church to grow in understanding, flexibility, and grace.

Jesus welcomed those who were misunderstood or excluded. In following Christ, we are invited to create spaces where neurodivergent individuals are not merely accommodated, but celebrated.

Conclusion

Supporting ministers-in-training with AuDHD requires patience, creativity, and a willingness to adapt. Incumbents have a vital role in nurturing vocations and modelling inclusive leadership that reflects the radical hospitality of the Gospel.

By learning, listening, and responding with compassion, we build a Church where all can flourish in their calling.