



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

Introduction

This guide supports incumbents in accompanying ministers-in-training who have Dysgraphia. It offers a brief overview of the condition, outlines common strengths and challenges, and provides practical strategies for inclusive ministry training. Dysgraphia is a neurological difference that affects written expression, but its impact can extend beyond handwriting to include spelling, organisation of thoughts, and fine motor coordination. By adopting a person-first, strengths-based approach, incumbents can help ministers-in-training with dysgraphia flourish in their vocation.

Understanding Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a specific learning difference that affects the ability to write coherently and legibly. It can involve:

- Poor handwriting or difficulty forming letters
- Spelling challenges, especially with phonetic consistency
- Difficulty organising thoughts on paper
- Slow writing speed, which can affect note-taking or timed tasks
- Fine motor coordination issues, which may also affect other tasks like liturgical movement or using tools

Dysgraphia is not a reflection of intelligence or effort. Many people with dysgraphia are articulate, insightful, and creative thinkers who simply struggle with written output.

Common Strengths and Challenges

Strengths Often Seen in Ministers-in-Training with Dysgraphia

- Strong verbal communication skills
- Creative and original thinking
- Empathy and pastoral sensitivity
- Resilience and determination
- Big-picture thinking and strategic insight

Challenges That May Arise

- Handwriting difficulties, which may affect note-taking, liturgical writing, or form-filling
- Written expression challenges, including spelling, grammar, and organising ideas
- Fatigue, especially after extended writing tasks
- Low confidence, particularly if past experiences involved criticism or misunderstanding
- Difficulty with fine motor tasks, which may affect ceremonial roles or practical ministry tasks

Each person's experience of dysgraphia is unique. Some may have mild handwriting issues, while others may struggle significantly with written communication.

Ministry Training Context

Ministry training often involves written assignments, note-taking, liturgical preparation, and placements. These can present barriers for individuals with dysgraphia.

For example:

- Writing essays or reports may be slow and stressful.
- Taking notes during lectures or meetings may be difficult.
- Preparing written liturgy or sermon notes may require alternative formats.
- Completing forms or paperwork may be frustrating or time-consuming.

Incumbents can help by offering practical support, flexibility, and encouragement.

Practical Support Strategies for Incumbents

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

- **Allow alternative formats:** Encourage use of audio recordings, mind maps, or verbal presentations instead of written assignments.
- **Support assistive technology:** Tools like speech-to-text software, grammar checkers, and digital note-taking apps can be invaluable.

- **Be flexible with expectations:** Allow extra time for written tasks. Focus on content and insight rather than presentation.
- **Encourage verbal processing:** Offer opportunities to discuss ideas aloud before writing. Use conversation as a tool for reflection.
- **Avoid unnecessary handwriting tasks:** Use typed forms or digital tools where possible. Allow others to assist with ceremonial writing if needed.
- **Celebrate strengths:** Focus on creativity, insight, and pastoral gifts. Affirm progress and effort.
- **Collaborate with training institutions:** Ensure accommodations are in place. Advocate for inclusive assessment methods and feedback.

Theological Reflection

The Church is called to be a place of welcome and belonging for all. Ministers-in-training with dysgraphia reflect the diversity of God's creation and bring gifts of creativity, empathy, and resilience.

Scripture reminds us that God equips those whom God calls. The ability to write fluently is not a prerequisite for ministry, what matters is the heart, the calling, and the willingness to serve. Dysgraphia is not a barrier to ministry, it is a different way of engaging with God's call.

Conclusion

Supporting ministers-in-training with dysgraphia requires understanding, flexibility, and encouragement. Incumbents have a vital role in nurturing vocations and modelling inclusive leadership.

By adapting our practices and listening with compassion, we build a Church where all can flourish in their calling.