



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

Introduction

This guide is designed to help incumbents support ministers-in-training who have Dyspraxia, including Verbal Dyspraxia. It offers a brief overview of the condition, outlines common strengths and challenges, and provides practical strategies for inclusive ministry training. Dyspraxia affects coordination and planning of movement, and verbal dyspraxia specifically impacts speech production. By adopting a person-first, compassionate approach, incumbents can create environments where ministers-in-training with dyspraxia can thrive in their vocation.

Understanding Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia (also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder) is a neurological difference that affects motor coordination, planning, and execution of physical tasks. It is not related to muscle weakness but rather to how the brain processes movement and coordination.

Verbal Dyspraxia affects the ability to plan and coordinate the movements needed for speech. This can result in inconsistent speech patterns, difficulty pronouncing words, or challenges with fluency.

Key points:

- Dyspraxia can affect fine motor skills (e.g., writing, typing), gross motor skills (e.g., walking, balance), and speech.
- It may also impact executive functioning, such as organisation and memory.
- People with dyspraxia often experience fatigue due to the extra effort required for everyday tasks.
- Using person-first language (e.g., “a person with dyspraxia”) affirms dignity and individuality.

Common Strengths and Challenges

Strengths Often Seen in Ministers-in-Training with Dyspraxia

- Empathy and emotional insight
- Resilience and determination

- Creative thinking and problem-solving
- Strong verbal reasoning (especially when not affected by verbal dyspraxia)

Challenges That May Arise

- Physical coordination difficulties, including handwriting, navigating spaces, or ceremonial actions
- Speech challenges, especially with verbal dyspraxia (e.g., pronunciation, fluency)
- Fatigue, especially after physical or cognitive effort
- Organisation and memory difficulties
- Low self-esteem, especially if past experiences have involved misunderstanding or exclusion

Each person's experience of dyspraxia is unique. Some may have mild coordination issues, while others may face significant challenges with speech or movement.

Ministry Training Context

Ministry training often involves public speaking, liturgical movement, written assignments, and placements in varied environments. These can present barriers for individuals with dyspraxia.

For example:

- Preaching or leading liturgy may be difficult for those with verbal dyspraxia.
- Writing or typing assignments may take longer or require assistive technology.
- Physical tasks (e.g., setting up for worship, navigating unfamiliar buildings) may be tiring or stressful.
- Organising schedules or managing multiple responsibilities may be overwhelming.

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 dyspraxia effectively:

- **Be patient and encouraging:** Avoid rushing or correcting in ways that undermine confidence. Celebrate effort and progress.
- **Offer alternatives for physical tasks:** Allow use of assistive tools (e.g., tablets, voice-to-text software). Be flexible with liturgical roles.
- **Support speech and communication:** If verbal dyspraxia is present, allow extra time for speech. Avoid interrupting or correcting mid-sentence. Consider alternative formats for preaching or presentations.
- **Provide structure and reminders:** Help with scheduling, task management, and memory aids. Use visual timetables or checklists.
- **Create accessible environments:** Ensure spaces are easy to navigate. Minimise physical demands where possible.
- **Encourage self-advocacy:** Support the minister-in-training in expressing their needs and preferences.
- **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 dyspraxia reflect the diversity of God's creation and bring gifts of empathy, creativity, and perseverance.

Scripture reminds us that God chooses the unlikely and equips the called (e.g., Moses, who struggled with speech). The Body of Christ is made up of many parts, each with a vital role (1 Corinthians 12). Dyspraxia is not a limitation to ministry, it is a different way of engaging with God's call.

Conclusion

Supporting ministers-in-training with dyspraxia 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.