



Supporting Ministers-in-Training with Tourette Syndrome: A Guide for Incumbents

Introduction

This guide supports incumbents in accompanying ministers-in-training who live with Tourette Syndrome (TS). It offers a brief overview of TS, outlines common strengths and challenges, and provides practical strategies for inclusive ministry training. Tourette Syndrome is a neurological difference that affects motor and vocal expression, and it is often misunderstood. By adopting a person-first, compassionate approach, incumbents can help ministers-in-training with TS flourish in their vocation and feel fully welcomed in the life of the Church.

Understanding Tourette Syndrome

Tourette Syndrome is a neurodevelopmental difference characterised by involuntary movements and vocalisations called tics. These tics can be:

- **Motor tics:** blinking, head movements, shoulder shrugging, etc.
- **Vocal tics:** throat clearing, sniffing, words or sounds

Tics vary in frequency, intensity, and type, and may change over time. TS often co-occurs with other neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD, OCD, or anxiety.

Key points:

- Tics are involuntary and often worsen under stress or fatigue.
- TS does not affect intelligence or capability.
- People with TS may feel self-conscious or anxious about their tics in public or formal settings.

Common Strengths and Challenges

Strengths Often Seen in Ministers-in-Training with TS

- Resilience and perseverance
- Empathy and compassion, especially for those who feel marginalised
- Creativity and humour
- Strong verbal and interpersonal skills

Challenges That May Arise

- Tics during public speaking or worship, which may cause embarrassment or distraction
- Anxiety or stress, especially in unfamiliar or formal settings
- Fatigue, particularly after suppressing tics or managing social expectations
- Misunderstanding or stigma from others

Each person's experience of TS is unique. Some may have mild, occasional tics; others may experience frequent or complex tics.

Ministry Training Context

Ministry training often involves preaching, leading worship, group learning, and placements. These settings can be both enriching and challenging for individuals with TS.

For example:

- Leading worship may be stressful if tics are frequent or noticeable.
- Group settings may increase anxiety or self-consciousness.
- Placements may involve unfamiliar environments or expectations that heighten tics.
- Academic tasks may be affected by co-occurring conditions like ADHD or OCD.

Incumbents can help by offering understanding, flexibility, and reassurance.

Practical Support Strategies for Incumbents

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

- **Create a safe and accepting environment:** Reassure the minister-in-training that tics are not disruptive or inappropriate. Model acceptance and understanding.
- **Be flexible with public roles:** Allow alternative formats for preaching or leading worship if needed. Offer opportunities to build confidence gradually.
- **Support stress management:** Help identify triggers and offer strategies for reducing anxiety (e.g., breaks, quiet spaces, predictable routines).

- **Educate others:** If appropriate, help congregations or peers understand TS to reduce stigma and foster inclusion.
- **Encourage self-advocacy:** Support the minister-in-training in expressing their needs and preferences. Respect their choices about disclosure.
- **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 radical welcome and grace. Ministers-in-training with Tourette Syndrome reflect the diversity of God's creation and bring gifts of empathy, resilience, and authenticity.

Scripture reminds us that God chooses and equips those whom the world may overlook. Paul speaks of strength being made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). TS is not a barrier to ministry, it is part of a person's unique journey with God.

Conclusion

Supporting ministers-in-training with Tourette Syndrome 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.