

Autistic Christians Support Community

AuDHD (Autism & ADHD) and Faith

Presenter: Rev. Emma Speake

Chair: Stewart Rapley

13 December 2025

AGENDA

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. 11.00 – 11.05 | Welcome and Introduction |
| 2. 11.05 – 11.15 | Emma: AuDHD (Autism & ADHD) and Faith |
| 3. 11.15 – 11.45 | Discussion (30 mins) |
| 4. 11.45 – 11.55 | Community Update |
| 5. 11.55 – 12.00 | AOB |
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| 12.00 - 12.30 | Social time |

AuDHD (Autism & ADHD) and Faith

Rev. Emma Speake

EMMA'S NOTES - 1

AuDHD – a term that until recently, I resisted. It's not a medical term, but a way of naming that dual diagnosis of both autism & ADHD. In fact, until fairly recently, it wasn't even a diagnosis thought possible – yet over half of autistic people are thought to also have ADHD.

To have this dual diagnosis, as I do, is to live one's life in paradox. At least that's how I feel.

Our autistic self needs routine and order, and the clarity to do & be what is expected of us, but our ADHD means we can often feel we have no means to achieving, or maintaining, those things.

Something I hear so very often from those with AuDHD is that we constantly feel we are failing, which then impacts negatively on our mental health, anxiety levels, general sense of wellbeing and even our sense of identity. This sense of failure can often occur in our spiritual life & faith too – something I've personally felt a lot over the years.

So, this morning I'm going to share my own experience of this and some ways in which I'm pushing through it...

EMMA'S NOTES - 2

I came to faith in my early 20's and for many years, I tried very hard to be the kind of Christian the church was teaching me to be - the kind, I was told, Jesus longs to mould us into.

And of course, because I'm autistic, I have both a tendency and need

- to play by the rules... 'if it's said, I must'
- to think literally... 'there are rules I must follow'...
- to think in absolutes – 'it's all or nothing'...
- and to be - & do what is expected...

Therefore, as the church taught the importance of setting aside regular time with God each day, a time for bible study & prayer, and the development of a relationship with God, and that during this time - we should close our eyes & to be still...leaving behind the things of home... & work... & the profane... to focus on God alone...

I believed this is what I *must* do to be a Christian disciple.

So, I tried & tried & tried to implement these things and failed miserably...

EMMA'S NOTES - 3

Because I also have ADHD - it's a struggle to maintain routine, no matter how hard I try; I can't still my mind. I'm even challenged by closing my eyes and sitting still; and praying the daily offices, as I'm tasked to do as an ordained Anglican - saying words that aren't living to me (I reluctantly admit) cause me disconnect & even boredom.

Then as the executive dysfunction kicks in, it leaves me unable to *begin* regardless of how hard I *will* myself to do so.

Which for many years has left me with a huge sense of failure in my spiritual life, as well as in other parts of my life too, which is sadly a common neurodivergent experience.

Looking back – this sense of failure affected my identity as a Christian person. I just wasn't good enough, or acceptable enough to God. Not like those who could 'do' Christianity the right way.

Those who are able for instance, to set aside time each day for study & prayer
Or those who are able to still themselves & focus solely on God
Or those who are able to just sit still

EMMA'S NOTES - 4

And those who are able to pray the Anglican offices alone – regularly, consistently & find sustenance in it! So even as an ordained person there was a sense of failure.

As well as hypocrisy and frustration - I knew what I should do but I just couldn't do it.

The change came about from three experiences:

1. **Diagnosis** – as an adult and the subsequent understanding of how my brain works and the differences in neurotypes.

How we relate to others & the world around us.

How we communicate (neurodivergent communication is different).

What motivates us.

How for instance that sense of failure and frustration may actually have been RSD (rejection sensitivity dysphoria) which is very common in those who ADHD and autism... understanding RSD, can in itself, be liberating.

Perhaps diagnosis for neurodivergent people is one practical way in which God is saving and liberating us.

EMMA'S NOTES - 5

2. **Developing Understanding** - when I took part in some research into ADHD and prayer. And realised that although I can't meet this expectation to set aside a specific time each day to pray and be still, that I *probably* **pray more than most**.

Because the way that my ADHD works, I have a constant whirling going on in my head. 'Attention deficit' is a poor description of the ADHD brain; we don't lack attention - we have too much of it. Our attention is on everything all at once. My mind is a constant stream of consciousness, conversation, ideas, thoughts, connecting dots, processing and theologizing (if that's a word).

So, when I the researcher asked the question, 'when do you pray', my answer was – 'constantly', because what I'd actually began doing was just directing the whole lot of stuff, to God, & with God. I'm constantly in a state of prayer and yes, it's messy... but that doesn't really matter because God seems to work very well in mess.

How many neurotypical people can say that they are constantly in a state of prayer?

EMMA'S NOTES - 6

3. **The Stories of Others** - the third experience was **hearing another AuDHD Christian**, a congregation member, report very similar experiences of paradox and failure in their spiritual & wider life too. The need to have to **respond pastorally & compassionately to someone else**, meant I needfully had to find a way to respond to myself in the same way.

This allowed me to rethink just about everything really, but especially what we say through our church culture and teaching about prayer and how our spiritual lives 'should' look. That we must model difference and encourage the exploration of finding ways to pray and to relate to the divine that are natural and congruent to the individual AND their neurotype.

My hope is that others with AuDHD (or any other type of neurodivergency etc. etc.) can discover that even in the paradox and chaos of dual diagnosis one can have a thriving and flourishing faith and spirituality.

I wonder if any of my own experiences resonated with you and if you have any other ideas about how we can help those with AuDHD...

Or those working with AuDHD folk – like spiritual directors of accompanying...
Find flourishing in their spiritual lives?

COMMUNITY NEWS

Discussion Schedule 2026

DATE	DAY/TIME	CFE-Autism DISCUSSION TOPIC	SPEAKER	CHAIR	CHAT
17 Jan	Sat/11am GMT	Long Covid and Autism - overlapping communities	Grant	Stewart	Sue
21 Feb	Sat/11am GMT	Beating alcohol dependence	Courtney	Sue	David
21 Mar	Sat/11am GMT	Autistic burnout	Sue	David	Stewart
18 Apr	Sat/11am BST*	Seeing, noticing, valuing	Stewart	Sue	David
16 May	Sat/11am BST	Humour, Faith and Autism	Jonathan	Stewart	Sue
20 Jun	Sat/11am BST	Appreciating Anglo-Catholic liturgy	Catherine	David	Stewart
18 Jul	Sat/11am BST	?	?		
Aug		Summer Break – no meeting			

CHURCH FOR EVERYONE - LIST OF POSSIBLE DISCUSSION TOPICS			
No	Topic	Lead	Schedule
7	Helping churches become more 'autism friendly' (Case Studies)	Stewart?	
8	Update from Peter Coxe at L'Arche	Peter	
9	Rules and Tricks for Autistic flourishing: Can project management ideas help?	Stewart? Rebecca?	
10	Building helpful and 'impactful' relationships outside meetings	Neil?	
13	Autism and Other Faiths	Chris?	
14	Battling with Diagnosis and Govt benefits bureacracy	Special Session?	
15	Coping with (or avoiding?) formal exclusion (from ministry, job etc.)	Franceska?	
18	Learning from close family and friends: Can they help us find 'ways through'?	Stewart?	
21	Sexuality and Autism in a changing landscape	Sue?	
23	Intersection of autistic and Christian identity	Sue?	

Discussion Schedule: Dates for your diary

Magdalene Community Church's post


Magdalene Community Church
3 December at 10:00 · 🌐

Neurodivergent adults and children can struggle in mainstream spaces because of their needs not being understood or accommodated.

Sensory overload
Unclear social expectations
Room layout
Unclear communication
Too fast transitions

Church should not be another place people have to struggle through, feel unwelcome or unable to authentically be themselves, or entirely avoid.

On 18th December we're running a webinar about how our church is trying to pave the way for better inclusion of all, and be a place ND adults and children can flourish and be their full selves, whatever that looks like.

Join us. Share this. Comment. Let's get this message out there. Post it in your ND networks. You never know who is wanting to explore their faith but is prevented by barriers that aren't their fault.

Zoom 5788731916 AND streamed on Facebook live.

1200 and again at 1930
18th December

With [Mandy Moo](#) and [RevRachael Phillips](#)

[#nd](#) [#neurodiversity](#) [#neurodivergent](#) [#autismawareness](#) [#autismacceptance](#) [#autism](#)
[#audhd](#) [#adhd](#) [#inclusion](#) [#InclusionMatters](#)

[Diocese of Durham The Neurothentic Network CIC Inclusive Church](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1UYM1FFyeF/>

Working to continue the journey of Belonging?

Supporting Hidden Differences
Building Church Culture for 'Belonging'

Free webinar by St James and Emmanuel in partnership with the
Centre for Autism and Theology

Wednesday 4 March 2026 (7.30pm to 9.30pm GMT)

Webinar Outline and Registration at:
www.zzzzzzzzzzz (Available in the New Year)