

VESTRY PAPERS



To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations

Sabbath & Stress

by the Rev. Leonard Freeman

In the times of our lives that are stressful, there is often, if we listen, something that calls us away...that calls us to come apart and to wait...to reflect on what is going on in our lives, and to be open, so that we might be given something new, something unexpected to work with, that we didn't have before.

What that is about, I believe, is the whole biblical understanding of Sabbath, and of the need to take Sabbath time out of an otherwise always chock-full and never-ending, demanding, day-to-day world.

When I was a little boy, the whole Sabbath thing seemed much easier. I grew up in mill-town New England, and we had what were then called "Blue Laws", which forbade any working on the Christian Sabbath — Sunday.

In some ways it was a genuine pain. Other than church, there was no place to go to, nothing to do. Things like shopping malls were unheard of and the Blue Laws wouldn't

have allowed them to operate even if they had existed. My Methodist mama would never let me go out with the guys on the corner on a Sunday to those dens of iniquity like the bowling alley or the movies. So you almost HAD to spend time with your family, maybe visit a relative or two, take a drive in the family car.

But rest and time out you DID take, so that a rhythm was set up that you were not often consciously aware of, but which affected the other arenas of your life.

If nothing else, the Sabbath gave you a kind of permission — to take a break, to do a retreat — to go away and just think. To hang out, "go fishing," — to spend time alone with your family, alone with your thoughts, to spend time with God. It was the expectation of the culture, and the understanding — that to take time off, to cease and desist, to come away and to wait — was OK. In fact it was

continued on page 6

Sabbath. A Biblical time-honored concept, Sabbath time is essential for the health of God's people. In both your vacation travel and fall planning, we wish you a happy — and holy Sabbath.

What Has Sabbath Got To Do With The Vestry?

by the Rt. Rev. Catherine Waynick

When I became the rector of All Saints' Parish in Pontiac, Michigan, I claimed Thursday as my Sabbath. I set about to provide teaching about the ancient roots of Sabbath-keeping and the essential place it held in the history of our faith.

Sabbath-keeping was mandated in the Law of Moses precisely because human beings need such time. Our bodies need to rest. Our spirits need to be revived. We need to remember who we are before God. We need to spend

time in prayer and study, with our friends and families. For that very reason Sabbath was to be observed not only by the Jews, but by any foreigners living among them, by their servants, slaves and animals. Sabbath-keeping was counter-cultural in the days of Moses. It helped the Jews to maintain their unique identity as a people in covenant with God even when they were captives and in exile.

continued on page 2



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Sabbath And The Vestry?

continued from page 1

Sabbath Time is Holy

I explained that Sabbath is time is holy — given over to God's purposes; it makes us available to God's agenda for our souls and lives. It is not the time when errands are run, the laundry done, grocery shopping accomplished, or the lawn mowed.

The parish was very good about not infringing on my Sabbath time. In fact it was listed as such in the parish calendar, and unless someone was dying, no one called me on Thursdays. They knew that if my presence at a gathering was important it could not be scheduled on Thursday. (Holy Days, were, of course, exceptions.)

About a year into this routine the vestry confronted me. "We understand Sabbath," they said. "We know we're benefiting in a number of ways because you spend time in study and prayer and intentionally making yourself available to God. But what we want to know is, when is your day off?"

It was a fair question, and in order to satisfy them that my Sabbath wouldn't be eroded by "tasks" and errands, I agreed to be intentional about taking time off. The understanding those vestry members had gained about the value of Sabbath time made it possible for them to hold me accountable for something they counted as important to our common life. Then it was my turn to ask them, "And when is your Sabbath?"

Vestry Members are Spiritual Leaders

Vestry members, whether they are entirely aware of it or not, are spiritual leaders in their parishes. They are not the Board of Directors whose personal lives and disciplines have no bearing on their work together. Weekly attendance at worship, regular personal prayer, nurture of their families, financial support of the Church, living life as mission and ministry — all these things are expected of every member and especially of those in leadership positions. (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 856)

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A caveat — we need to be careful not to think of Sabbath-keeping as the "balance" to other activities. It has never been a matter of keeping Sabbath in order that we might do whatever we liked with the rest of the week. Sabbath-keeping ensured that a large enough portion of time was given over to God's purposes (made holy) to remind us that all time belongs to God, just as tithing reminds us that all wealth belongs to God and must be used faithfully. Sabbath does not "balance" the rest of life, but rather informs it.

So it is right and good that vestries should hold clergy accountable for taking both Sabbath and time off. It is also right and good that vestries begin to claim their own need for Sabbath time. Yes, it's still counter-cultural, but don't let that stop you. God is longing to bless you in that holy time.

The Rt. Rev. Catherine Waynick is the Bishop of Indianapolis.

Editor's Note

In preparation for this issue, we came across an outstanding brochure by a small congregation in Texas that answered such questions as: How long will our rector be gone during his sabbatical? Will he be in contact with us? Who will pay for it? It is specific, reassuring, informative, and can be personalized for your congregation, should you be planning a sabbatical. To request a copy, write or call: St. Thomas the Apostle Church, 6525 Inwood Road, Dallas, Texas, 75209, Rector: Stephen Waller. (214) 352-0410.

HEALTHY CLERGY, HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS

Setting Boundaries Where There are None

by the Rev. Susan Moss

"We thank you, O Lord, for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments which satisfy and delight us." This portion of the Great Thanksgiving (*Book of Common Prayer*) captures a reality of parish ministry: it is both satisfying and demanding. "Church work" is boundaryless. It will take all we have to give and come back for more. Vestry members must partner with their clergy to create, nurture and maintain a balance of action and reflection, giving and receiving, Sabbath time and service. If we don't, we may, as Wayne Muller writes in *Sabbath*, "loose our way and miss the compass points that show us where to go, the nourishment that gives us succor and the quiet that gives us wisdom."

Given the wide range of demands and expectations on parish leaders, what can vestries do to create, nurture and maintain

a balanced ecology of parish life? Here are some practical suggestions to get you started.

Vestries can initiate conversations with clergy that articulate your wellness and balance values. Once you have identified them, allow them to be a lens through which you make decisions. You may even want to create a Rule of Life for yourselves. Consider, for example, The Great Commandment: *Love God, love your neighbor, love yourself.* We often neglect the third component. How might you practice self love as well as love of God and neighbor? The apostle Paul teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. What values are reflected here in this scripture? How may they inform the ways in which you care for the needs of your bodies? How could you create Sabbath time in your household of faith?

continued on page 5



In your annual ministry review with your priest, revisit your values and wellness initiatives. Ask yourselves: Were there times in the church year that clergy, staff or lay leaders were seriously overburdened or not given adequate resources for the work they were given to do?

Helping Clergy & Congregations Do Sabbatical Preparation

by the Rev. George Martin

In the Episcopal Church the average stay for a priest in a congregation ranges between four to seven years. (It is actually less in some other denominations.) A cost related to this turnover is certainly born by the congregations that find themselves in more interim periods and having to conduct frequent searches for new clergy leadership. A less obvious, more hidden cost, may be discovered by talking to the clergy themselves. Often a priest will move to another congregation simply to find the energy and inspiration needed for ministry.

Sabbaticals for clergy is a relatively new concept. When I was ordained in 1967 there was a norm of offering clergy a month's vacation and that was about the end of it. No one was even talking about continuing education in those days and it was the rare seminary that even offered a Doctor of Ministry degree. Much has changed in all fields since then.

Most professional and technical people now understand, for example, that they must continue to learn new skills in order to stay current. It is no less true for clergy.

Currently in the Episcopal Church it is often up to each congregation to set the guidelines for their priest in regards to a sabbatical. (A few dioceses, however, have established norms regarding this matter and frequently require such study leaves as part of the process for churches issuing a call to a new priest.) The purpose of this article is to suggest to a congregation some ideas to consider when negotiating the terms and conditions of a sabbatical. Early thinking about this matter, even at the time a call is made, will actually be most helpful. No matter when discussion about a sabbatical takes place, though, it is important to consider the issues that will arise.

continued on next page

Helping Clergy & Congregations Do Sabbatical Preparation

continued from previous page

Sabbatical Issues for the Clergy:

Goals: What skills would enhance my ministry or life? Which areas of my ministry will be most enhanced by a sabbatical?

Focus: What will I do? Will I attend some study courses at a university or seminary? Will I attend some spiritual retreats? Will I work on a Doctor of Ministry degree? Will I travel? Will I learn a new skill or hobby? All of these are legitimate areas of pursuit for a sabbatical.

Costs: What extra costs will this sabbatical require? Fees? Travel? Keeping up my home if I leave?

Timing: What would be the best time for me to leave as it relates to my ministry and the needs of my congregation?

Sabbatical Issues for the Congregation:

Goals: Which areas of our congregational life will be most enhanced by offering our priest a sabbatical?

Communications: What issues will we need to deal with so that the majority of our congregation will support our priest taking a sabbatical?

Costs: While we pay our priest a regular salary during this time, what can we offer to help with his or her costs related to the sabbatical? What will it cost the church for supply clergy to help out during this period? Are there funds available in the diocese or from other sources to help our priest and congregation with the costs of this sabbatical? (Some churches set up an asset account for a sabbatical and accrue the money over a six year period of time!)

Ministry: How can we organize ourselves to carry on the essential ministry of the church while our priest is on sabbatical?

Agreement about the Sabbatical and Evaluation:

At least six months prior to a sabbatical it would be most helpful to have addressed most of the above questions. This will give the priest and the congregation time to prepare for the sabbatical.

The sabbatical time, by the way, should be seen as a benefit both to the priest and to the congregation. Many, if not most congregations, discover new resources for ministry when their priest is away for three or four months. At the end of the time, they are often pleased with the new energy and vision of their priest, but most especially happy with what they have learned about themselves during the same period of time. Such congregations are nearly always pleased to welcome back a priest who is excited about the things they've learned or experienced while on sabbatical. The members of such churches reap the important benefits which accrue by having a priest renewed in mind and spirit.

George Martin is the interim rector of St. Andrew's Church, Amarillo, Texas. His article, Clergy Sabbaticals: For the Health of the Whole Church appeared in the June 3, 2001 issue of The Living Church.



Sabbatical Resources

Clergy Renewal, The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning, A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, Alban. ISBN 1-56699-223-0.

On Pilgrimage, Douglas C. Vest; Boston, Cowley, 1999.

Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest, Wayne Muller. Bantam.

Six Months Off, Glegozia, Hope, James Scott and David Sharp; New York, Henry Holt, 1996.

Why You Should Give Your Pastor a Sabbatical, Video. Roy Oswald, Alban. ISBN 1-56699-247-8.

The Lilly Endowment invites applications for its National Clergy Renewal Program, in which up to \$30K may be awarded for sabbatical study. Contact Lilly at 317-916-7302 or email: clergyrenewal@yahoo.com

HEALTHY CLERGY, HEALTHY CONGREGATIONS

Setting Boundaries Where There are None

continued from page 3

Your stated wellness and balance values can give shape to the responsibilities and expectations of parish leaders. You may for example, decide to limit the number of required evening meetings, the tenure of a key office or how many offices a parish member may hold at the one time. Carefully examine a season like Advent with its invitation to reflect, listen and prepare. Some parishes schedule so many greens hanging parties, pageant rehearsals, concerts and budget meetings they may actually contribute to the secular burdens of the season, thereby creating even more obstacles to accepting Advent's invitation to make room in the inns of our lives for God.

Vestries and clergy could also weave wellness and balance values into their priest's Letter of Agreement. It would be a key expression of your joint expectations and assist your priest in setting the limits and ministry priorities of a boundaryless profession. It will communicate the wellness ecology you hope to create, nurture and maintain; and ecology that includes spiritual, physical/emotional and financial wellness throughout the fabric of parish life.

In your annual ministry review with your priest, revisit your values and wellness initiatives. Ask yourselves: Were there times in the church year that clergy, staff or lay leaders were seriously overburdened or not given adequate resources for the work they were given to do? Where do adjustments

need to be made so that no member of the parish — clergy staff or lay person, gets used up? Were there special circumstances that should be revisited? Was there a death or medical emergency in a leader's family that changed the way responsibilities were met? What did you learn that could improve the way you care for one another when a personal crisis occurs?

Clergy are expected to provide spiritual direction, encouragement and inspiration. An annual ministry review is also the occasion to ask your clergy leader if they are receiving adequate spiritual nourishment and refreshment. One who is called to feed another must be continually fed, lest their spiritual well become dry. What time and financial resources could your vestry approve and support to enable your priest's spiritual wellness? The ability, for example, to see a spiritual director or make a retreat. Other important wellness and balance topics for clergy include financial planning, sabbatical planning, and continuing education support.

Work with your clergy to articulate your values for parish wellness and balance. Regularly communicate them to the congregation. Implement and support your values with concrete decisions. Review and evaluate your wellness initiatives. Being well in Christ is work God has given us to do and this too demands our best efforts.

The Rev. Susan Moss is the Metro Canon Missioner for the Diocese of Minnesota.



Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.
—Deuteronomy 5:12-14



Sabbath & Stress

continued from page 1

more than OK. It was special, it was important, it was eternally real.

The Loss of Rhythm

Those times are gone now. No use crying over spilt milk. But it is clear that we have lost the rhythm of rest and time-out from our daily lives. Dismantled it.

The Blue Laws and the like are long gone and for us, now, everyday is a work day, every moment another opportunity to punch in on the time-clock of life; the weekends just more hours to get something done, to catch up on that second job, or to work around the house on all those things that the busyness of the rest of our life and the two-income family has left undone.

Show some leadership to others so they know that Sunday is not to be messed with. Make the example with your own life and family. Don't give your children a choice about church on Sundays. Don't shop on Sundays. Don't "squeeze" church in. Try it. You'll like it.

Even the Sunday recreation, at the mall or the movie or the restaurant, has become in fact just more work hours for someone else who has to be there for our convenience from 9 to 9.

We have left behind the understanding and the internal permission that Sabbath is necessary. We have lost the rhythm, and the shared valuing of rest and time-out from our daily lives. Such a loss has made it all the harder for us to pay attention to the voice that says, "come away" when it whispers. It is more important than ever that we become conscious about listening for the voice, and heed its advice, because it can seem like we are the only ones hearing it, in a world that seems so otherwise preoccupied.

Leave Space for The Holy Spirit

What can we do to help ourselves? Three suggestions for vestry members, those who give leadership to their fellow believers in the pew.

1) Stand there. I recall a meeting at the National Cathedral in Washington — we were just about to finish building this "Great Church for National Purposes" after 83 years of construction — and the pressing issue for us on staff was: "Now that we've built it, what do we do?" Into the midst of our anxiety Loren Mead uttered helpful words. "Don't just do something," he advised us, "Stand there."

Parish life can often get hectic — and the urge to "do something" — make another committee, yell at someone, run around — can be great. Resist it. Stand there. Live with your anxiety a step further, and leave space for the Holy Spirit to drop in that something new.

2) Pray there. Come to church on Sundays. Regularly. Show some leadership to others so they know that Sunday is not to be messed with. Make the example with your own life and family. Don't give your children a choice about church on Sundays. Don't shop on Sundays. Don't "squeeze" church in. Try it. You'll like it.

3) Remember and affirm the simple truth that Rest is important. It is a gift, because we are NOT God. And the machine breaks down. The fuses blow.

The message of mortality can be a saving message if we hear its call correctly. It is saying: you are finite. Your life will be fuller and better if you pay attention to that.

Under all of this we need to remember that Sabbath is more than a matter of getting a day off. It is an attitude and an age-proven knowledge, that when in the middle of stressful times, there is a resource OTHER than to just "do something." The purpose of Sabbath is to let something else happen. There is Another at work, who will come, and who will help — if we will stop and wait to listen.

Don't just do something, stand there.

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