



Diocese of Bristol

Time off and Holidays in a Parish Setting

Foreword

I am pleased to write a short foreword commending this leaflet on Time Off.

One of the pitfalls for all vocational people is the tendency to overwork. Consequently, it is vitally important to focus on the *quality* of our work not just the *quantity*.

Looking after ourselves is not a luxury but a crucial way of nourishing our vocation.

Similarly time off is not to be regarded as a dispensable commodity but a time to energize ourselves spiritually, physically, emotionally and intellectually for our life and ministry.

I hope you will therefore apply the advice in this leaflet and create and guard your times of relaxation and recreation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The letter "M" is large and stylized, with a small cross-like mark above it. The rest of the name is written in a cursive, flowing script.

Valuing our Vocation

One of the important ways to stay fit and well, to maintain healthy relationships, and to renew our energy is by taking adequate time off for rest and recreation. It is also a good way of modelling a responsible lifestyle to those whom we serve.

We all have several vocations. With some this would include marriage and being parents. For all of us the most important vocation is *to be ourselves*. It is tempting when we have a vocation to the ordained ministry to become absorbed by that one thing, to the neglect of other important parts of our lives.

To be a good priest or minister also involves taking care of ourselves and our families and not to become victims of obsessive or destructive patterns of work. It is particularly easy to drift into these when living 'over the shop', as most parochial clergy do.

Working within Safe Boundaries

There is much evidence to suggest that people who work too much greatly increase their chances of physical, psychological or emotional ill-health. Working excessively long hours also dramatically reduces effectiveness and efficiency. This is particularly true where work involves emotionally demanding relationships.

To work for more than fifty hours a week on a regular basis can be dangerous. In fact fifty hours a week is the threshold at which many studies of 'Workaholic' behaviour begins. It is healthier to aim at a forty hour week. For clergy it is sometimes difficult to assess what is work and what is not. Generally speaking things that are done only or mainly in an official capacity are work. For example, private prayer and meditation does not constitute a work commitment but attendance at a Harvest Supper, or having churchwardens round to the vicarage for a meal does.

Single clergy may be seduced by the needs of others to the neglect of themselves. Married clergy in addition may find it tempting to give little time to their children or spouses. Sometimes it seems as if we have an adulterous relationship with the church.

In times of great change such as we are going through at the moment it may be tempting to do more and more in order to 'keep the show on the road'. By doing so we are bound to lose our effectiveness and exhaust ourselves.

Clergy Holidays

In such times it is more important than ever that we look after ourselves and find ways of sharing our tasks with others. We should also take adequate time off.

Ideally clergy in full time duty in parishes should take holidays of *six weeks a year which should include six Sundays*. This should include a week after Christmas or Easter.

It is hoped that church wardens will do all in their power to make holiday breaks possible. The payment of visiting clergy during holidays is the PCC's responsibility.

Regular Time Off

One day off a week is the absolute minimum. This should include the evening before. However, this is hardly enough to do all the jobs that come our way with a household to care for and possibly a family to look after. At least once a month the aim should be two days off together, again including the evening before. It is assumed that bank holidays, or a day in lieu are also taken off.

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Time off in a Tied House

It is recognised that for financial or practical reasons it may be difficult to take all holiday entitlement away from home. Individuals and families may also prefer to spend days off at home. This highlights the importance of regarding the clergy house as a home. If there are family responsibilities it is also important to keep a careful eye on the frequency of meetings in the clergy house, and the effect on members of the family when they feel marginalized in their own home environment.

It will usually be appropriate to install an ex-directory family telephone in addition to the parish line. This also simplifies payment of private telephone calls, and the entire parish bill can then be paid directly by the PCC.

Sickness Leave

When you are ill and need to take time off, it is important to do so, and not simply to soldier on. If you are unwell and need time off, you will get better much more quickly if you take it. Furthermore, you will not work well when you are sick.

If you are only ill for a week, you can self-certificate your time off. If you are off work for a longer time, you need doctor's certificates. All certificates should be sent to Jane Brookes at Church House without delay. She can also provide any further information which you may need in connection with sick leave.

If you are an incumbent and need cover for services during a period of sick leave, it is the responsibility of the churchwardens to make the necessary arrangements.

In the case of curates, arrangements will normally be made by their incumbent.

Some practical things to think about

In his sermon on Maundy Thursday 2004 Bishop Mike made these suggestions:

- a. Take time out as you need it
- b. Discover activities which refresh you
- c. Be discerning about friends who replenish you
- d. Make a conscious effort to slow down
- e. Learn to say 'no'
- f. Understand that 24 hour *availability* will undermine our *approachability*.

Some things to reflect on

- Am I living the life I am commending to others?
- Is my goal to control or empower?
- How far am I driven by the expectations of others?
- Do I have any clarity about the difference between what I want and what God wants?
- What time do I give to my family, friends and closest relationships?
- Am I aware of my own baggage?
- Do I have anyone I can talk to who loves me enough to tell me the truth?
- Am I happy about the direction of my walk with God?
- Am I leading well?

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that our best work is done when we look after ourselves and discover ways of remaining energised and fresh for the demanding task we fulfill.

'God give us the grace and courage to be still. For it is in stillness that we know God and it is in knowing Him that we may share him with our age.'

**Any questions arising out of the contents of this
booklet should be made to:**

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Please feel free to circulate this booklet to your church wardens and PCC.