

Well-being and the rhythm of life

'Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38 – 42)

'Work-life balance' is a frequently heard phrase but the reality is that work is all part of life. Indeed it is part of being human and created in God's image. In the second creation narrative when all is good, God places Adam in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Furthermore, in the first creation narrative we are presented with a Godly rhythm of work and rest: '*So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*' (Gen 2:3).

Being made in God's image includes living a pattern of work and rest with that Sabbath rhythm reflected in each day, week, month and year.

Busyness and/or exhaustion is not a virtue. Mary knew the one thing. It wasn't that labour was not valued by Jesus (and probably needed to occupy further hours that same day), but rather it was about understanding the present moment. There was time for domestic tasks, but the immediate moment was to sit at Jesus' feet and learn from him.

Dependency on God

'The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.' (Psalm 23:1-3)

'Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain... It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.' (Psalm 127: 1-2)

Walking God's rhythm requires developing a discipline of stopping which is not dependent on finishing. Of course, everyone recognises that there are times when urgent tasks and visits need to be completed before stopping, but we should be wary about an interpretation of God's Sabbath in creation which is about only ever taking rest once the task is done. The Jewish pattern of work, Sabbath, and religious festivals on prescribed days was and is about rhythm.

I find it helpful to draw a distinction between days that are 'full' and days which are 'busy'. Full days are burgeoning with the rhythm of God, and I know myself intentionally rooted in God, planted by streams of living water (Psalm 1:3). Those days feel decidedly different from

the ones when I am rushing, usually in my own strength, and failing to live in each present moment. Those are the days I call 'busy' and they are rarely days of which I am proud.

Responsibility

Well-being and a healthy rhythm to life is not about living to rules and regulations. Rather, it is about endeavouring to walk God's rhythm and receive God's love and generosity not least by ensuring that those things which delight and restore us are woven into the pattern of our lives.

This rhythm of life is important for all of us irrespective of whether we are full or part time stipendiary clergy ministering in many different contexts, or those designated 'Self Supporting Ministers' who live a variety of weekly patterns, which may or may not include paid employment in a different context.

At ordination, deacons, priests and bishops respond publicly to a number of questions with the words *'By the help of God, I will.'* These questions included: *'Will you endeavour to fashion your own life and that of your household according to the way of Christ, that you may be a pattern and example to Christ's people?'* The final question is: *'Will you then, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, continually stir up the gift of God that is in you?'*

Intrinsic to this is a responsibility for personal wellbeing as we receive that love which God has lavished upon us and seek to give glory to God in who we are and what we do.

Whilst it is helpful to identify people who have our permission to gently challenge as necessary, each of us needs to be alert to the danger of constantly working too many hours or not feeding our hearts, minds and souls as we seek to love God with the whole of our being.

Rt Revd Rachel Treweek

What follows can be found on the diocesan website and is a practical outline of what is expected and encouraged in this diocese regarding time 'off' and frameworks of support:

Annual Leave and Time 'off'

- **Every week:** Licensed stipendiary clergy are expected to take a full 24 hours off from the business of daily ministry each week and when possible attach that to a second day with a slower rhythm than the rest of the week.
- **Every month:** All clergy are encouraged to plan for two full days off once a month.
- **Every year:** Annual holiday allowance is six full weeks including 6 Sundays. Clergy are also expected to take 5 days for retreat each year (Continued Ministerial Development funds can help with costs)

Planning and communication: Taking time out of the usual routine and weaving in rest and refreshment requires planning well ahead of time to ensure that cover is in place, as well as communicating widely so that colleagues including wardens and other lay leaders are fully informed.

Support

There is an expectation that clergy will have the wisdom and courage to speak with someone in times of struggle. That person might be an Area dean, Archdeacon, Bishop or the Head of Human Resources. It is not good if people stay silent or assume that the responsibility for their well-being lies solely with other people.

The Sheldon Hub: An excellent resource for clergy: <https://www.sheldonthub.org>

Diocesan counselling: we have a helpful fact sheet that sets out how the service works: <http://www.gloucester.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Diocesan-Professional-Counselling-Service-FACT-SHEET-2018updated-jk-2.pdf> If you have any questions about it please don't hesitate to call Head of HR at Church House in confidence.

Spiritual direction: Clergy are strongly encouraged to have a spiritual director as an accompanier on their spiritual journey. If this is not a discipline to which you have been accustomed, you may wish to make contact with The Revd Chris Mason, Co-ordinator of Spiritual Directors - revd.chris.mason@gmail.com



Work is continuing regarding the provision of action learning groups, mentoring, coaching and other opportunities for support and development. More information will be presented in due course, but in the meantime please never hesitate to contact the Director of the Mission and Ministry Department to explore what is available to support you in your vocational and ministerial development. It is also intended that alongside chapter meetings and study days, ministerial and episcopal reviews provide a space for conversation around well-being and identifying what people find supportive and life-giving.



Creative work is currently being done by a group looking at Shapes of Living - A resource for reflecting on values for life and establishing a sustainable and nurturing shape for our life and calling. It will be available later in the year.