

## ***My vicar is going on sabbatical, what does that mean?***

### **Frequently Asked Questions answered for PCCs and Parishes**

#### **What is a sabbatical?**

The idea of Sabbath rest is a familiar biblical principle: Genesis tells us that God rested on the seventh day of creation and the Jews observed a day of rest, a Sabbath, each week. Sabbatical leave follows that principle of offering a time of rest, refreshment and renewal, every seven years. Sabbatical leave is a period of time away from ministry which may last six weeks (in the case of someone who has been ordained for seven years) or three months (in the case of someone ordained for fourteen years or longer).

#### **Isn't a sabbatical just a long holiday?**

Sabbatical leave is not holiday and your vicar will be entitled to take their normal holiday in addition to sabbatical leave. They may choose to add it on and so to be away for up to four months, or simply to take their annual holiday as normal.

#### **What is the value of sabbatical leave to the parish?**

Sabbatical leave will give your vicar time to study, to think, and to pray. In planning their sabbatical he or she will have been asked to think about the impact of the sabbatical leave on their future ministry; this might mean focussing on study that will impact on preaching, or visiting other churches with lively youth ministry, or spending time with a mission project overseas. Very occasionally, clergy take sabbatical leave in order to complete a piece of academic study such as a PhD thesis.

#### **Who gives permission for sabbaticals and who should be consulted?**

Sabbatical leave is a privilege not a right, and the Area Bishop gives permission to clergy to take sabbatical leave. Your vicar will usually have consulted the Area Dean and Churchwardens about the timing of the sabbatical.

#### **Who pays for a sabbatical?**

The vicar will receive their stipend as usual while on sabbatical leave, but will not be claiming any expenses from the parish. A grant towards the sabbatical is available from the Diocese, but the PCC may also consider giving a grant to the vicar to assist towards travel or training costs.

#### **What about covering services?**

The Churchwardens will be responsible for finding cover for services in the vicar's absence. If the parish has a curate or assistant clergy they may be asked to take on more responsibility during this time. The Area Dean may be able to help in finding clergy cover.

## **Can I contact the vicar while he or she is away?**

Your vicar may well choose to close down his or her email account and divert telephone calls during the period of sabbatical leave. The vicar will leave clear information about who to contact during his or her absence, but the first point of contact will usually be the Churchwardens. If your vicar is away and his or her family are still in the vicarage, please don't expect them to pass on messages or handle problems, however minor.

## **What will happen when the vicar gets back?**

Your vicar will want to share their learning with the PCC and the parish. They may do this by giving a presentation, writing a report, or you might hear about the sabbatical in sermons. You may find that the vicar returns wanting to change things and returns full of energy and new plans!

If he or she has developed unhealthy habits of overwork in the past, now is the time to set new patterns. It may take a little time for your vicar to settle back into the parish, remember there will be three months worth of stories to catch up, and don't expect them to have time to see everyone all at once.

## **How can I help?**

You can support your vicar by taking an interest in their plans beforehand, and their experiences afterwards.

During the sabbatical support your Assistant Clergy, Lay Ministers, and Churchwardens. Remember they are taking on extra responsibilities and thank them!

**Revd Canon Wendy Robins**

**The Department of Discipleship and Ministry**