

Editorial – Churches and Ministers Need Breaks

Paul Beasley-Murray

Back to work!

The holidays are over and the new church year has begun. Yes, I know that for the more liturgical churches the church year does not begin until Advent, but for all practical intents and purposes the autumn marks the time when most church activities and organisations get going again. So let me wish you, my readers, God's richest blessing for the new session that lies ahead. May it be a year of progress and development in your own ministry - let alone in the ministry of the church.

Churches need breaks!

These days, when an increasing number of our people are given 25 days off a year plus all the bank holidays too, the holiday period seems to extend from Easter right up until the end of September. During the summer there never seems to be a Sunday when the church is ever together (indeed, when 'twicers' tend to come twice a month rather than twice a Sunday, one might well ask is there ever a Sunday when the whole church is together?). The result is that most effective church work tends to be confined to the spring and autumn 'terms' - the summer is often a write-off. Certainly my experience is that small groups tend to function best in the spring and the autumn - although we keep them going for most of the summer, I really wonder whether it is worth the effort. Indeed, I think that people would be more committed to their groups if they were limited to particular times of the year.

When I first came to my present church, with the exception of the Sunday services, I tried to shut down everything during the peak six week summer period. I felt that breaks are essential if people are to remain fresh in the Lord's service. Indeed, I think there is a lot to be said not just for a decent summer break, but also for a decent Christmas and Easter break. However, I quickly discovered that for some church activities a break is not possible. For instance, we run two clubs for people with mental health problems. These clubs form such a life-line for their members that they have to function 52 weeks a year. Likewise we run a child contact centre for broken families referred to us by the courts - that too has to keep running whatever the time of the year. Fortunately we have

a sizeable number of volunteer helpers, with the result that even if the activities never take a break, a rota ensures that the helpers can take a break.

Ministers too need breaks!

Ministers too need breaks.. In the first place, of course, we need to ensure we too celebrate the 'sabbath'. My 'sabbath' day is a Friday. On most Fridays I try to get into physical shape by going to a gym, where I also have a swim. Friday is a day for stretching the mind by reviewing books for *Ministry Today*. It is also a day for developing friendships - many a Friday evening will see me happily exercising my culinary skills with the help of the blessed Delia!

Ministers also need to take decent holiday breaks. With all the pressures of life, I'm a great believer in having a long summer holiday. I know that there are some ministers who take off a week here and a week there, but for my money a holiday needs to be at least three weeks long if it is to be a true break - for many of us find it takes a week to forget the church! Traditionally ministers have taken off the whole of August - and in my judgement rightly so. Having said that, this year I took off three weeks in July - but then had two study weeks in the second half of August. Add to all this a few days off after Christmas and a week after Easter, and I find that I have sufficient energy to throw myself into the Lord's work for the rest of the year.

Thriving and not merely surviving

If we are to thrive in ministry, and not just survive, we need to take breaks. But if breaks are to happen, then time off needs to be booked. Hence my writing about holidays at this time of the year.

Paul Beasley-Murray