

have been helped by the provision of washing facilities when they cannot afford the cost of a visit to the laundrette.

In conclusion, churches have a central role in any community in creating and providing a 'safe place' for those who need support: a place to be themselves and belong. A 'sanctuary' in the best sense of that word. Creating such a community is demanding and needs a group of highly motivated people. They need to show the love of God rather than see such a community as an opportunity to 'preach'! Who we are is more important than what we say!

RAINY DAYS & MONDAYS

Paul Beasley-Murray

Traditionally Monday is the minister's day off, but not for me. Monday is my worst day of the week. It is the day when, after all the pressure of Sunday I experience the 'Monday blues'. On Mondays I feel tired, I feel depressed. It is not until Tuesday that I begin to recover my normal 'bounce' and energy. For some, that is a good reason to take Monday off. But for me the contrary is the case. Why should I take as my day off my worst day? In my book it makes sense to take any day but Monday as a day off.

More positively, Monday is the day for catching up on Sunday. For although there is never a day when I am not meeting people, Sunday is the day par excellence. It is then that I pick up so much news about what is happening in the lives of people. As together with my pastoral deacon we stand at the door - both before and after the services of the day - people share confidences. To encourage this sharing we have cards at the door and on the reception desk which people use to share concerns or news of one kind or another. So by the end of the day, I have a pastoral agenda for the week.

First thing Monday morning I collate all that I and my colleagues have heard. When we meet for our team meeting I have an agenda ready. Never less than one side of A4 in length, often the agenda runs to four sides. Most of the agenda stems directly from Sunday. If I pick up significant news during the week, then I'll e-mail a short pastoral update to the team before the week is out.

We could wait until Tuesday morning before we have our meeting, but on Monday morning everything is so much fresher in our minds. The meeting is not just concerned with the sharing of news and concerns. It is also the time for 'post-mortems' on the service. We rigorously analyse how we have done, and discuss how we might do better next Sunday. Much as every Monday we thank God for his presence and blessing the previous day, there is no place for self-satisfaction. The rest of Monday is often taken up with mundane tasks of one kind or another. It tends not to be the day for great creativity.

For some Tuesday is a good day to take off - but not for me. By Tuesday I am wanting to get down to the important work of writing my sermon. Tuesday is sermon writing day. The sermon may not get finished on Tuesday. Often by the end of the morning I feel I have done enough, and need to put the sermon on the back burner to await further attention the following day. It's amazing how over-night, unconsciously, the sermon just comes together.

So that means I don't like to take Wednesday off either. And anyway, all kinds of meetings, both within and outside the church, seem to take place on Wednesdays. Thursday too seems to be a busy day, with meetings, visits, and preparation of one kind or another. So that leaves Friday.

In my opinion Friday is the best day to be off. The great thing about Friday is that, Saturdays apart, this is the one day of the week when my wife knows she doesn't have to prepare for work the following day. Friday evenings we can do things together. So Friday morning I'm off to the gym - I find it a penance as I go hell for leather on the treadmill, but at least it helps keep me in shape. My penitential rites are completed in my doing the family shop, but then the rest of the day really is for me. Unless I have a funeral or someone is dying on a Friday (and it's sometimes just my luck that they do!) or I have a wedding rehearsal (never more than half-an-hour), I do my best to avoid church. Home is the place to be.

The great advantage about Friday is it is followed by Saturday! Saturday is often a day I can soft-pedal. Sometimes I just work during the morning. The sermon may be ready, but often I want to give more thought to the prayers. Sometimes, if I have no church commitments, I'll take most if not all of the Saturday off. If I have worked 50 or more hours earlier that week, I see no reason why I

can't spend the day with friends or family. But Saturday can never be my day off, because often Saturday is full of church commitments. Last Saturday, for instance, I had four engagements in my diary: a training morning for small group leaders; a lunch in aid of the local hospice; a wedding; and a barbecue in our garden for all our youth and children's leaders. Amazingly, at the last minute, all four events were cancelled - and thank God, for that week I was still recovering from a church mission trip to Ghana. This coming Saturday I have just two engagements in my diary: a naming ceremony for one of our African families; and a barbecue (not in our garden, this time!) for all those who help with our child contact centre. The following Saturday I shall have to show my face at an evening bridge-building event with a Christian comedian, but at lunchtime we are being taken out to one of the finer dining establishments in the South East. On the final Saturday of the month I shall be attending the annual coroners' dinner in a grand hotel in Brussels. So Saturday may not be my free day, but it is a day of great variety.

So far I have talked about myself. However, with four other ministers, a children's worker, and an intern, there are others who need a day off too. I know of one large church where everybody has the same day off, but if you are part of a seven-day-a-week church, it is difficult having no minister available on any particular day. So days off have to be spread. We all work Sunday and Monday, then one has Tuesday off, another Wednesday, another Thursday, and three of us have Friday off. Those who have Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday off have to be flexible. Some weeks, because of church commitments, they may need to take another day off instead, whereas those of us who take Friday off tend to be fairly inflexible!