

To all at St Mary's

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to let you know that I will be taking a period of sabbatical leave from **April 21st to July 21st, 2025**. This is a wonderful opportunity for rest, renewal, and reflection—something that is encouraged every ten years in ministry. I was ordained in 2010 and this will be my first sabbatical.

During this time, I will be spending time on a mix of retreat, rest, and study. A particular focus for me continues to be the relationship between **mental health and spirituality**, and I am especially interested in how churches can support people in this area. I have now identified several organisations and projects doing innovative and compassionate work in this field, and I hope to spend time learning from them during the sabbatical.

As well as these times of study and exploration, I'm also looking forward to periods of **quiet retreat and personal renewal**—spaces to pray, reflect, and simply be.

After various water leaks and mould problems at the vicarage, I'm also planning to tackle some **redecorating** during this time and possibly even some gardening.

I am deeply grateful for the support of the churchwardens, PCC, and colleagues who are helping to make this sabbatical possible and who will be overseeing the life of the parish during my time away. Revd Lisa Opala, Fr John Blakesley, Revd Paul Peverell and our reader Janet Hinton will all be working together to make sure that the worshipping life of the church continues. Revd Paul will also be the main contact for funerals.

I will continue to hold you all in prayer while I am away and I look forward to returning with renewed energy and fresh perspective ready for our celebration of 100 years of St Mary's in 2026!

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tessa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tessa Stephens