

Back in the February edition I wrote to tell you that, after nearly 12 years of ministry - approaching nine years in this benefice - I had been granted a sabbatical by the Diocese.

Well, 22 weeks later, the time has now arrived; by the time you read this, I will have conducted my last services at St George's for a little while, and Helen and I will be taking a holiday together. I will then be on sabbatical and will return to parish ministry on Monday 3 October; trusting God that I will feel renewed and refreshed, ready for the work of parish ministry once more. Helen will also be taking a break; apart from Cakes & Chaos, she will not be at St George's. She will be spending some time with our daughters and our grandchildren and will experience worship with other communities.

A sabbatical - the Diocese has given me three months - is simply a time of renewal; a time of reconnecting with God. It is stepping completely out of my current ministry and being freed to 'embark on a holy trek with God'. My holy trek combines a love of the outdoors, walking, and Celtic spirituality. There will be plenty of walking; there will be times 'on retreat' with others - at the Christian Centre on Iona - and another retreat on Lindisfarne; and there will be times outdoors - in God's cathedral - enjoying His creation and exploring spiritual spaces in the Orkneys and the Outer Hebrides.

I am grateful to our Diocese, to our Parochial Church Council, to our churchwardens, and those who will continue the work in our benefice, for allowing me to do this. Acts of worship and pastoral matters will be covered by our Ministry Leadership Team of: Revd Ylva, Revd Rosemary, Lyn Hayes, David Harmsworth and Vicki Young. Services will be covered on four Sundays by visiting priests; including the Archdeacon of Maidstone and the Chaplain of Benenden Girls' School. There will be a variety of styles of leading and preaching, which I trust will be refreshing for everyone, too. Deanery colleagues will also be covering some of the weddings in the parish.

Administrative matters will be handled by the churchwardens: Sue Fisher and David Collard in Benenden; and by our parish administrator, Cathy Baker. Please contact the churchwardens, in the first instance, if you have issues relating to church matters. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals will continue as normal in this period. The only reduction in services is that from Sunday 3 July to Sunday 2 October, the 8am Communion services will alternate between the two parishes. This is to reduce the workload on our two priests: Revd Rosemary (our 'PTO' - Permission To Officiate - who is 'retired') and Revd Ylva (our curate - whose parish ministry is part-time.)

So, as I set off on this holy trek, I leave you in good hands; and I leave you with my thoughts and prayers. I hope you manage to have a break over the summer and feel refreshed, too. I ask for your prayers, that this will be a time of renewal, of spiritual growth, and of refreshment.

God bless

Revd David Commander, Rector