

## Rector's Corner

### Time Management

Comments I've heard in the last few months have inspired me to explain a bit about how my working time is structured, and why.

Some parishioners are apparently under the impression that I'm "away a lot." In a sense, that's true: when I have several consecutive days off, I try to take the opportunity to visit family and friends. If the time off is for making a retreat or fulfilling my continuing education obligations, those require me to be out of town, too. Diocesan obligations like clergy conferences and conventions also require me to travel. Over the course of a year, I probably have more out-of-town trips than the average lay person.

The way my time off is structured can also give the impression that I have much more time off than the average lay person. My letter of agreement includes standard and diocesan-mandated terms regarding time off. Episcopal clergy vacation time is typically measured in Sundays off; five Sundays off per year is the norm, and that is what my LOA has. I am required to take at least one week (not including a Sunday) per year of continuing education and one of retreat, and encouraged to take two of each. I also get weekdays off after Easter and Christmas, plus most federal holidays.

Compared to the typical lay professional's weekends, holidays, and two weeks' vacation, that sounds like a lot of time off. But having one day off per week (Friday) instead of two ends up making a huge difference. I calculated the number of days off this "typical lay professional" would get in 2023 and got 126 days. Even with all the different kinds of time off I get, even if I take the maximum two weeks of retreat time and two weeks of continuing ed (which I probably won't), it only adds up to 113 days. My annual allotment of time off is more complicated, not more generous. I haven't figured out when I'll take all of my time off this year; the clergy calendar is meant to illustrate the terms of my letter of agreement, taken to their fullest extent, not to show when I'll actually be off.

During a work week, I try to make the best possible use of my time, but that too needs some unpacking. Occasionally a parishioner has been surprised or disappointed that I do not "keep office hours," in the sense of guaranteed times when I will be in the office. And while I do spend many hours in the church office in a typical working week, it's important to remember that the most important things I do happen on the weekend (leading worship, obviously, but also special events like Breakfast with St. Nick and Bowls & Brews, and the occasional wedding or funeral) and in the evenings (Vestry meetings and many other meetings). Many other important obligations take place at other locations (e.g. sermon research and writing, pastoral visits,

diocesan meetings and events). Blocking off time to sit around waiting for the phone to ring, or for someone to drop by, would do little good for anyone, including me.

So, every week, I set priorities and adjust my schedule based on the needs of the parish and any obligations to the wider church. One way in which I adjust my schedule is by compensating for evening meetings by beginning my working day later the day of, or the day after them, and by working from home for parts of other days, if my calendar and the overall activity level at Advent permit. The demands of parish ministry have a “feast or famine” quality. Some weeks, when circumstances require it, I do indeed put in extra hours, but the Biblical command to observe a sabbath reminds us that constant overwork is not what God intends for us.

Avoiding fatigue and burnout benefits the parish. Like anyone else, when I’m fatigued, I make mistakes, forget things, take longer to do things, and am generally less capable. Burnout can manifest itself in many ways, including professional misconduct and health problems that are far worse for the parish (never mind the priest) than the surprise or disappointment of not finding me in the office sometimes. Fortunately, I don’t feel anywhere near the point of burnout. And it’s important to remember that even when I’m working from home or making up for an evening meeting, I remain available to respond to anything urgent that might come up.

The point of all this is not to give the impression that I’m not available for the parish, but rather the exact opposite. Spending time with parishioners, whether it’s an emergency or not, is the most important thing I do besides leading worship. I deliberately preserve time in my schedule so that I have time available for parishioners who need something from me, or just want to talk. All I ask is that non-emergency meetings be scheduled in advance. Please get in touch with me if you want to come in and see me, or have me visit you. I would be delighted to put it on my calendar, and arrange the rest of my time around it. I’m grateful to have the flexibility to honor the most important aspects of ministry, which are the same for clergy and laity alike: love of God and love of neighbor.

**The Rev. Bret B. Hays**