



St. Mark's Episcopal Church

February 25, 2015

*Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind,
and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27)*

Dear St. Mark's Family,

While the church year blesses us with its seasons, so does life, and this summer I will welcome a new season in my life, a time of sabbatical. I was ordained a priest on February 10, 2009, and since my arrival as your rector, our lay leadership at St. Mark's has known there is a point at which I am to rest in my ordained ministry. The time is now. We certainly live in a "high-speed" society, and while it may seem countercultural to rest, our God isn't like any other god. Sabbath has always been God's imperative, integral to the whole and holy life. God commanded the Sabbath. He told the people of Israel to work their land for six years, and in the seventh year, the people were to give the land its rest. God rested on the seventh day of creation. So, in this seventh year of my ordained ministry, I will take rest.

My sabbatical will begin on Monday, May 25, and I will be back with you in church on Sunday, August 23 for the Blessing of the Backpacks. I have four goals for my season of sabbatical. Firstly, I will seek to listen to our God, and I hope to go deeper in my spiritual life. Secondly, I intend to reconnect with my family. I appreciate their support of me and my ministry, and I look forward to nurturing my relationships with Sarah, Eloise, and Oliver. Thirdly, on a practical level, I will enroll in a Spanish immersion course and strengthen my Spanish-speaking skills. Fourthly, after six solid and full years of preaching and teaching, I will compile some of my teachings and sermons with the intention of making my curriculum and writing available to a broader audience.

Our bishops encourage all the clergy to take sabbatical, and many of the clergy in our diocese integrate this discipline into the lifelong vocation we have as priests. In leading by example, this past year our bishop took a sabbatical and in a recent diocesan publication, the bishop reflected on his experience. It was a season of clarity and refreshment for him, and having learned more about himself and his life's work, Bishop Doyle said, "We are to labor, but our God wants us to rest as well and to rest in him. He wants to come and walk with us and to see our labors. God wishes us to reflect about our work and to see and name that it is good. God wants to engage in a conversation about the things done and left undone." I would hope for a similar experience, a chance to listen, rest, and return to you with a renewed understanding of my call as a priest in our church.

I appreciate the vestry's support and their encouraging me to be faithful to this time in my ministry. I am also grateful to those anonymous gifts, the funds from the diocese, and the financial support from a local non-profit entity. These three sources of funds will make my sabbatical possible. Most importantly, with the help of our vestry, our strong lay leadership, and the competent and capable supply clergy of our diocese, my responsibilities will be covered for the twelve weeks I am away from the parish. More communication will be coming to you in the months ahead. At this point, I thank you for your support, and I certainly encourage the whole parish to reflect on the discipline of Sabbath, for as Jesus said, Sabbath was made for *us*, it is a gift to be received.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Bert O. Baetz III