

Dear Friends,

As many of you will know and with the encouragement of Bishop Karen, I will be taking a sabbatical (extended study leave) from June through August 2026. Because the word sabbatical is not always familiar, I want to take a little time to explain what this period is, why it matters, and how the life of the parish will continue during my absence.

### **What Is a Sabbatical?**

A sabbatical is an intentional period of extended rest, reflection, and renewal, usually offered after many years of continuous ministry. It is not a holiday, nor is it time away from vocation. Rather, it is a structured season that allows a priest to step back from the day-to-day demands of parish life in order to pray, study, reflect, and attend to their own spiritual and physical wellbeing.

### **What Will I Be Doing During This Time?**

My sabbatical will have three main elements: rest, retreat, and reflection.

First, there will be time for rest. After a number of demanding years in parish ministry, this will be an important opportunity to step back from the regular responsibilities of parish life and allow space for renewal in body, mind, and spirit.

Second, there will be periods of retreat, including a few extended stays with communities of prayer. During these times I hope to share in their rhythms of worship, work, and rest, learning from both traditional and more experimental forms of Christian community. As part of this I plan to spend time on Iona with the Iona Community, to visit Hilfield Friary and the Nazareth Community in London. I hope this time will help me reflect upon how these rhythms of prayer and shared life might connect to and underpin who we are as 6 churches but one benefice.

Third, there will be time for reflection and study. During the sabbatical I will be exploring the relationship between neurodiversity and expressions of faith—considering how people with different ways of thinking, processing, and experiencing the world encounter God through prayer, worship, and church life. My hope is that this will help us continue to grow as a church that is attentive, welcoming, and spiritually nourishing for all.

### **Why a Sabbatical Matters**

Ministry is deeply meaningful work, but it is also demanding in ways that are not always visible. Over time, even joyful and faithful service can lead to tiredness and a narrowing of perspective. A sabbatical offers space to reconnect with God, regain balance, and return with renewed energy and clarity.

Sabbaticals also benefit parishes. They encourage shared leadership, allow fresh voices and perspectives to be heard, and help support healthy, sustainable ministry for the long term.

### **What This Means for Parish Life**

I want to reassure you that the life of the parish will continue faithfully during these months. Plans are in place to ensure that:

- Sunday worship continues with 6 services a month (1 in each parish) with a mixture of well-known clergy and lay-leaders.
- Pastoral care needs are met
- Clear points of contact are in place for both routine matters and emergencies

### **Looking Ahead Together**

I want to be honest in saying that stepping back from something you love and feel responsible for can feel strange. At the same time, I am trusting the wisdom of the wider Church, the encouragement of the Bishop, and the strength of this Benefice community.

I approach this sabbatical as a gift, not as stepping away from the parish, but as stepping back for the parish—so that I may return rested, renewed, and ready to continue our shared ministry together.

Thank you for your prayers, your support, and your faithfulness. I invite you to hold this time in prayer—not only for me, but for our parish and benefice, that God may continue to guide and sustain us in all things.

Blessings

Rev'd Lewis