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Dear friends,

As I write this article I near the end of my sabbatical. What a great gift of time and opportunities these three months have been. I have had time to reflect on the love of God, and service to Him and His people. There have been opportunities to meet with some inspiring people. Also there has been the opportunity to undertake some extra-ordinary experiences. Having a sabbatical was not originally my own idea, but was suggested to me by senior clergy in the Diocese. I thank them for encouraging me. Thanks also go to everyone in the parishes who have been very positive about the idea. I am only too aware of how my being away impacts on others. To the wardens and all members of the PCCs, thank you. Thanks are also due to Derek, Miranda and others, including the Bishop of Chelmsford, who took services that I would normally have taken. However, special thanks go to Sue. When a sabbatical is being organised, a plan has to be produced to show how activities will be covered. My plan had Sue Cruse written throughout it. I am so blessed to have Sue as a colleague. She has always undertaken far more for our parishes than she should. Thank you Sue.

What to write in this short space about my sabbatical? Here there can only be highlights. Knowing that Jesus loves me and wants the best for me was the underlying reason that I gave up my teaching career to offer for the ministry. It was 6th of May 1988 that I was laying in a hospital bed, with emergency surgery being planned and my feeling that I was going to die when I gave my life to Jesus. Twenty years and many experiences later, including eleven years since being ordained, it has been good to be reminded of that love. I have spent six weeks at Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge, where I undertook my original training, amongst ordinands. Here I have met a wonderful group of men and women who all love Jesus and have given their lives to him. Doctors, teachers, city traders, broadcasters, a London taxi-driver and a young man of just 20 years amongst others, all committed to serving God wherever he calls them. It was a great

privilege to live amongst such a wonderful group of people.

Whilst at Ridley I studied with two tutors, Adrian and Jane. These times were also very helpful, particularly considering the question of developing a Christian community and how that community interacts with the wider community. This involved travelling to meet others and experiencing the church in action.

In 1996 I visited Israel. Going there was one of the formative experiences of my life. My intention was to spend Easter in Jerusalem when I had retired. I never dreamed of having the opportunity before. This year I spent time at St. Georges' College Jerusalem. The course I studied was 'Experiencing the Orthodox Easter'. There is so much I could write. The Holy Fire service on Easter Saturday is the most important service for Orthodox pilgrims and many people from Eastern Europe and Greece save all their lives to go to Jerusalem for this service. Being with 5000 believers in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was amazing. Experiencing the fire spread rapidly around the church from the bundles of candles everyone was holding was literally breath taking. Visiting a Christian hospital that works with Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; visiting a Christian school that works with Muslims with special needs; talking with an American Episcopal Bishop; talking with a senior Palestinian who works for the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, these were all unforgettable times. The list of experiences is almost endless, as you will no-doubt discover if you get me talking about the sabbatical! Perhaps the strongest memory is standing by the security wall that is being built to separate Jews from Palestinians. It is ten metres high, topped with razor-wire. Dwarfed by it I read graffiti, 'Friends cannot be divided...from the Warsaw Ghetto to our Ghetto'.

Some businesses have embraced the idea of sabbaticals for their staff. The Chelmsford Diocesan Guidelines state that a sabbatical is about retreat and renewal and rest. These were exactly the original purposes of Holy days, which our secular world has turned into holidays. I have been blessed with three months of Holy days.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick*

