

FR. ANDREW'S SABBATICAL

Frequently Asked Questions



ST. ANDREW'S
A faith for all ages

? What is a sabbatical?

A sabbatical is a structured time away from regular, cyclical work, modeled on God's command for a sabbath year in Exodus 23 and Leviticus 25. Partly this break is for rest and renewal. There are particular emotional and spiritual demands to the work of a Rector that are difficult to set aside without a substantial and lengthy time away. As Tish Harrison Warren [wrote in *The New York Times*](#), "Pastors bear not only their own pain but also the weight of an entire community's grief, divisions and anxieties." It is good, God-ordained even, for a priest to rest from that before burning out.

However, a sabbatical is not just for the pastor. It also makes space in a faith community for other people and ministries to flourish as they step up to lead and grow.

☂ Is this a three month vacation?

That would be fabulous, but that's not what a sabbatical is. A sabbatical is less about "getting away" and more about having time and space to be, think, pray and do with a different set of spiritual and emotional demands. This time is for the benefit of the clergy and the parish, and must be focused around study and renewal.

💪 How is this going to strengthen the parish?

Fr. Andrew's sabbatical offers two primary benefits to the parish. First, our Rector will come back to us refreshed and renewed. St. Andrew's faces an exciting period of growth and building in the next several years, and to have our Rector spiritually, emotionally, and physically renewed will bless his leadership of our parish in the years to come.

Second, Fr. Andrew's absence will demand that many people step up and into new roles: Fr. Logan, Mtr. Paulette, our staff, our volunteers – maybe even you! This will increase our leadership capacity as a parish, build spiritual muscles, and deepen our care for one another. We are Christ's body, the Church, and this temporary absence of our Rector can strengthen us for the work we'll do together upon his return.

🚶 Does this mean Fr. Andrew is looking to go to a new church? Is he leaving?

Fr. Andrew has no plans to go to a different church, and the sabbatical has absolutely nothing to do with making such plans.

When is Fr. Andrew's sabbatical?

Fr. Andrew will be on sabbatical from May 13 - August 10, 2024. His last Sunday will be May 12 (Mother's Day), and he will return for Blessing of the Backpacks Sunday on August 11th.

Why now in Summer 2024?

Partly, it's just time: August 2024 will mark seven years since Fr. Andrew took over as Priest-in-Charge of St. Andrew's after the departure of Fr. Mike Michie, our founding Rector. He has been at St. Andrew's for ten and a half years (well past the seven year guideline provided by the Customary).

Moreover, this is a good time for the parish. We have a tremendously strong staff, both clergy and lay, a servant-hearted vestry, and a healthy, growing congregation. Fr. Andrew can take this time of rest, renewal and study without leaving the parish with a lack of leadership or direction.

Finally, for the Van Kirks, this is the last summer before Henry goes to high school, making it a perfect (and last) chance for the Van Kirks to share time, experiences, goals and challenges together, before the kids reach that stage of adolescence in which spending that much time with their parents will seem abhorrent.

Who is going to be leading the church? Who do I call if I have a problem?

During the sabbatical, Fr. Logan will assume most of the day-to-day duties of Rector, including the planning and oversight of Sunday worship. Our staff will continue running their ministry areas, and the Vestry will continue their oversight and governance of the parish, including the maintenance of our facilities and campus. For pastoral needs, reach out to Fr. Logan or Mtr. Paulette, either through the church office or directly. In cases of dire emergency, Fr. Logan and Syd will know how to get in touch with Fr. Andrew, regardless of where he is.

Can I take the summer off too?

Please don't. St. Andrew's will not be pushing the pause button for three months. Of course, Fr. Logan, Mother Paulette, and the rest of our clergy and staff (already are and) will be working hard to make sure that our worship, programs, and outreach never miss a beat.

More importantly, as stated above, one of the greatest benefits of a sabbatical is the opportunity it provides the members of the parish to step into new leadership roles, discover new gifts, and care for one another pastorally. We need you to be a part of that.

Will Fr. Andrew be communicating at all with the parish while he is gone?

Fr. Andrew will be writing regular updates about his sabbatical time on his Medium page, and these will be linked in the weekly editions of "The Net," our email newsletter. He will not, however, be checking his work email or communicating directly with individuals about parish matters.

Our following a "no contact" rule during this period of renewal will ensure that Fr. Andrew gets to truly set aside the emotional and spiritual support he provides as our pastor, so that he can come back rested and renewed for the work God has for him here.

What will Fr. Andrew be doing during this time? What is his plan for "study and reflection?"

Fr. Andrew will be going on a personal, spiritual retreat at a monastery at both the beginning and the end of the sabbatical time. In between, the Van Kirks will be traveling some over the sabbatical

period, including spending several weeks at a home in southern France that has been graciously provided by members of the parish and their friends. July will be mostly split between McKinney and Stephanie's family's home in Colorado.

Wherever they are, Fr. Andrew will be writing at least three hours a day, six days a week, as he works to finish a book project that has been rattling around in his head since 2011.

A book? What's the book about?

The book idea currently bears the unwieldy title *The God You Cannot Find Is a God You Do Not Want*, and it is intended to address how common objections to the existence or active presence of God would, if hypothetically answered, result in a god that we would not want at all, rather than the God of love revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ. Theologically this is the realm of apologetics and religious epistemology; practically speaking Fr. Andrew wants to poke holes in the walls of doubt people build for themselves in order that the breath of God may sneak in. For that reason it will not be an academic treatise, but aimed at a broader audience and written in a more popular style.

What are the diocesan guidelines for sabbaticals for clergy?

Fr. Andrew's sabbatical was written into his initial letter of agreement as Priest-in-Charge in August 2017, in accordance with the Bishop's Customary, which states:

A sabbatical leave is intended to provide active, full-time clergy, the opportunity to be renewed through additional study and reflection after they have served seven (7) consecutive years in one Cure. This applies to Rectors/Vicars and also to Assistants by whatever title known. Typically, such study will be focused in an area of study that enhances one's ministry in the parish or the Church at large.

The Bishop's Customary provides minimal direction on what "study and reflection" should entail, beyond that both the clergy and parish should plan for this time intentionally. Fr. Andrew and the Vestry have been working on these sabbatical plans for the better part of a year, which included the submission of a large grant application to the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Foundation last spring. While that application was unfortunately denied, the broad strokes of that plan have still made their way into the plans for the sabbatical time this summer.

Where will Fr. Andrew go to church?

As they travel, the Van Kirks will go to church wherever they are. When they are in town, you're likely to see Stephanie, Henry, Addie, and Drew at St. Andrew's. Fr. Andrew will attend other churches in the area.