

The Vintage Voice

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Take a Day Off from Retirement

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It is almost a cliché with retired priests: “I am so busy in retirement that I wonder how I got any work done when I was employed.”

I worked in ministry for fifty-four years, the last twenty at Trinity Church, San Francisco, a very lively downtown inner city parish. I had interests, such as writing, plus the interests I always have shared with my wife, Ann, such as entertaining, shopping, and cooking. I was plenty busy.

It was only after a couple of years of not working that I realized I was even busier. I was too occupied to enjoy my new life. I was lurching from event to event, to-ing and fro-ing from appointments, examinations, classes, and lunches. I was traveling, reading, exercising, and occasionally preaching.

After a hard look at how I was spending my time, I decided to start taking days off from my retirement. I decided that one day a week I would make no medical appointments, no lunch or dinner dates, no shopping or library trips. I would take a day of rest. Sound familiar?

“Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day.” I used to keep Sunday as a holy day by working at church, preaching, teaching, conducting youth groups and vestry meetings, and celebrating Eucharist. It certainly was not a day of rest. As an active priest, I did take my day off, but that was not a day of rest either. Shopping, cooking, exercising, washing the car, and doing my other chores around the house and yard took up all of my day off.

Orthodox Jews keep the Sabbath as a day of no work. They go to great lengths to avoid work of any kind. No cooking, no traveling in a vehicle, no turning on or off lights, no dropping in at the office. In fact, about the only strenuous activity that seems to be encouraged on the Sabbath is sex between spouses! In this time of 24/7 and type-A personalities, we need to heed the wisdom of the Jews. Our bodies and souls need rest, quiet, and a restoration to holiness and sanity. Some Mormons also hold Sunday as a day of worship and quiet. No cooking, no business, and even the children are excused from homework.

Taking a day off from a busy retirement is difficult for a formerly busy parish priest. In fact most clergy pride themselves on being busy. That notion smacks a bit of justification by works. It often carries over into retirement. Not me. In addition to taking a day off from retirement, I schedule only one or two major activities a day. I attend a weekly vigil for peace. It is near the library where I make a weekly stop for books and DVDs. That's it for that day.

Yet it is important to note that people are different. We have different paces and styles. Traveling is a good example. My wife, Ann, and many of my friends like to get to London or Paris and visit as many museums, grand houses, gardens, castles, ruins, plays, and churches as possible. They go from breakfast to bedtime, stopping only for lunch and dinner. Others are more like me. Up in the morning, I go off to the café for coffee, croissant, and some fruit. I get the English edition of the *Herald Tribune*, read for an hour, do the crossword puzzle, and jaunt off to a museum to join my wife for an hour, and then a bite of lunch.

She goes on to other venues while I wander back to our hotel or apartment for a nap and some reading. I love to shop and cook in foreign climes, so I have dinner ready when Ann returns from her afternoon adventures. We enjoy good restaurants and often go out to eat. Sometimes we go to the theater, but more often we read and go to bed early. I have any number of friends who have similar lazy ways of touring. I used to feel guilty that I did not get more out of my travel dollars, but I now am clear that I travel the way I do . . . not the way I don't. As I said before: we are all different in the way we travel and choose to lead our lives.

We Anglicans don't have rules hovering over our lives, traveling, work, or retirement. We have the enormous freedom of choosing our own paths and programs. The bad thing is that we often are in disarray about our schedules. The good thing is that we have the freedom to order our own lives. We can learn from the Jews and the Mormons, the Benedictines and Franciscans, and the spiritual directors that have sprung up among us. But finally it is up to us to order and regulate our lives for enjoyment and refreshment.

The old story is that God rested on the seventh day. The ancients knew that their bodies needed rest from toil in order to be creative and productive during the rest of the week. Working or retired, we Americans, clergy and lay, need to learn to rest, keep quiet, listen to music, enjoy nature, and feel the pulsing of our bodies. So take a day off from retirement.



The Rev. Robert Warren Cromey graduated from The General Theological Seminary in New York in 1956. After serving parishes in New York, he moved to San Francisco and has lived there since 1962. He was Director of Urban Work for the Diocese and was Vicar of St. Aidan's, San Francisco. He obtained a license from the state of California and had a private practice as Marriage and Family Therapist for eleven years. He served Trinity, San Francisco, from 1982 until 2002, when he retired. From 1985–1990 he participated in seventy-five funerals of men who died of AIDS. He is married, has three daughters and six grandchildren. Write to him at: twocromeys@earthlink.net