



Friday July 16, 2021

## **A Pastoral Letter to Ministry Agents and Congregational Leaders**

And Jesus said to them: “Come away by yourselves to somewhere remote, and rest awhile”.

In the gospel reading from Mark this Sunday (Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56) we hear of the return of the disciples and how they are encouraged to go and rest a while. The rest proves hard to find and in between the healing, preaching and caring they even manage to feed five thousand families.

It can be comforting to know that from the start, even when Jesus was around, there was always more work to be done and rest an often difficult to organise and elusive thing to find for him and his friends. But also that even then, even there, having a rest was part of the discipline the disciples were called to.

For those who want to serve the gospel of Jesus, self-care and rest are part of the call. We’re called to create space to give God a chance to meet with us, to care for us, for the Spirit to make itself heard and for us to become aware of Jesus’ presence alongside us. We’re called to create space for prayer, for regeneration, for healing and spiritual growth.

### **REST IN A COVID-BUSY WORLD**

Over the last 18 months too many of us have been unable to get around to fulfilling that part of our call as disciples, the discipline of rest, prayer, and making space for God, Spirit and Christ to move and be with us. We’ve been busy coping with the pandemic, caring for each other, carrying the Church, negotiating change and challenges that we had not dreamed of facing as both lay and ordained disciples.

And we’ve done well. Most congregations have successfully transitioned into a new reality where online connectivity and QR codes are only small parts of a much larger complex of changed realities. We have coped and are coping with the uncertainties of health, finance, and future prospects for ourselves and our communities.

Perhaps it is now time, encouraged by the words we find in the gospel for this Sunday, to take a break and organise ourselves some rest. To put down our burdens, trusting that finding calm and peace is as much part of our shared journey of faith as is the hard work we do to keep our Churches going and our communities cared for and supported.

## **REST IS A UNITING CHURCH EXPECTATION**

Provisions for leave are part of our UCA regulations, and can be found in our Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, as well as the Synod's Handbook for Ministers. For ministers, deacons and other ministry agents it is mandatory to have four weeks of annual leave, and it's recommended that we take at least two weeks of study leave. For ministry agents in congregations that means ten Sundays off a year! There are also provisions for long service Leave to enable ministry agents to take longer breaks for study, nourishment and self-care.

Lay leaders are also encouraged to attend to self-care and take regular breaks from their duties. Not as a luxury but as an imperative to protect and safeguard our mental, physical and spiritual well being as followers of Christ. All of us are called to attend to the sacred task of rest and to encourage and enable each other to it.

## **RETHINKING BUSINESS**

Especially where we might feel everything depends on us and that we are indispensable, it may be time to re-orient ourselves to the faith and trust that ultimately we live by grace and were liberated to love, not to kill ourselves with hard work.

I would like to encourage you all to talk about rest, prayer and peace, and reflect on how to sustain yourself and others into the future as the pandemic continues to wreak havoc with our lives and we negotiate the fall out of what it has done to our lives together in our Churches and society. God is with us, Jesus walks beside us and the Spirit hovers over us. There is nothing to fear. There is just the invitation to live the gospel, wherever we happen to be in time or space in a way that reflects the grace, love and generosity of Gods providing for us.

Please know that the Presbytery is available to support you if you need to find someone to help fill in, information about COVID-safety, support with organisation, administrative tasks, or help to find temporary or more permanent solutions going forward.

Anneke Oppewal  
Presbytery Minister: Pastoral Care  
0437 298 454  
pm-tl@ucappep.org

