

ROGER'S RECOMBOBULATION AREA: Ministerial Time Off - 11.17.2021

UU ministers get more vacation, time for study leave, and sabbatical time than most professions. Why is that? Is it a good thing? Here are three thoughts on these questions:

1. A lot of professions would be better off if people had more time off and more time for study and rejuvenation. The American tendency to work long hours and have little vacation is not a good thing in my view—for individuals, for families, for society, and for the quality of our work. When I took a couple sabbaticals during my twenty-five year ministry, I found myself regularly wishing that people in other occupations would be able to have the same experiences I was having.
2. The standard workweek for UU ministers is working six days and having one day off. Rev. Sara, Rev. Jack, and I all regularly take Mondays off. We're generally in the office or working at home Tuesday through Friday, with meetings between one and three evenings a week in addition to the daytime work. We typically have tasks to tend to on Saturday—like finishing preparations for the service (after not having enough time to work on that between Tuesday and Friday). We often have Sunday afternoon meetings and tasks. So generally our weekend starts sometime Sunday afternoon and goes through Monday. It's very helpful to our lives to have a real weekend every six weeks or so. That's why you'll see two instead of all three of us on some Sundays.
3. Occasional study leave through the year as well as periodic sabbaticals gives us time for reflection and rejuvenation. This translates into our doing better work. We need to tend to our spirits and theology in order to tend to your spiritual journeys. There are a lot of burned out ministers out there, and it's not a pretty sight. Very few people say to friends, "Hey, you should come to my church sometime. My minister's really burned out but still maybe you'll like it." Without a doubt, the best preaching and other work I did in Appleton was after my second, awesome sabbatical. (I made the mistake of waiting seventeen years between sabbaticals.) I took a week's study leave in October which enabled me to get away from the daily grind and think deeply about the interim work we need to do over the next eighteen months. I'll take another week in the winter to reflect more deeply and read in preparation for upcoming sermons.

I have not always done well at taking my vacation time, including during my interim ministry last year. I am not going to make that mistake again. I will be away on vacation next week and again for a week in December. With gratitude for my WBUUC colleagues who will be covering for me, I won't do email or other work while I'm gone.

As always, I welcome conversation with you if you have questions, concerns, ideas, etc. about this or anything related to the ministerial transition. Remember that you can find lots of resources about the transition at <https://whitebearunitarian.org/ministerial-transition/>.

