

Report of Sabbatical – 22 April to 18 July 2019

Rev Andy Osmond

I had the privilege of taking a three month sabbatical from 22 April to 18 July 2019. I was particularly fortunate that my wife Sue was able to join me for much of it, as our three daughters are all now adult.

During the sabbatical, barring one citywide event we were involved in delivering, we stayed away from Mariners. We had put in place detailed plans of how everything would run for other leaders in the church – and we have good and capable leaders, so we had no fears.

Early on, we attended a healing conference at which we heard numerous testimonies of God healing people from broken bones to cancer to Parkinson's disease. It reminded us of what a powerful and good God we have. We came away feeling truly inspired. I acquired a USB stick of teaching from the conference which we proceeded to listen to and enjoy as we embarked on the next phase of the sabbatical – an eight day driving trip in the West Highlands of Scotland in a motorhome.

We flew to Inverness and picked up the motorhome from there. The trip was fabulous for so many reasons – the weather was good (not guaranteed in the Highlands!), the crowds were small, the scenery was spectacular (rugged and breath taking) and the midges hadn't hatched! In Scotland, you have a right to roam, so we were able to pull up in the motor home wherever we fancied. We only used a campsite twice in eight days. We weren't too ambitious in the ground we tried to cover, so we had time to take it all in. During our time away, we saw dolphins, seals, red deer, highland cattle and wild goats. We would love to repeat this trip one day!

Soon after getting back from Scotland, we went on an 11 day trip to California with two of our daughters and a son in law. Unusually, the weather was generally poorer there than in Gloucester! But we had a great time as a family experiencing a very different culture, albeit the same language. While there, we met up with two sets of friends, visited a couple of churches known to us, experienced the mountains and waterfalls (Mount Shasta) in the north and the city of San Francisco in the centre. Pier 39 is not to be missed for the cafes and bars and especially the sea lions.

A few days after getting back from the US, we flew to Sibiu in Romania to visit friends whose wedding we attended at around the same time last year and whose twins' dedication we attended this year! It was lovely to see and spend time with the wider family, all of whom were so friendly and hospitable. Sibiu itself is a medieval city with beautiful architecture and a café culture where people eat out often.

After almost a month away and living out of a suitcase, we were glad to get back home! In fact, we were UK based for the rest of the time. We made two visits to our daughter and son in law living in Maidenhead and took the chance to visit their church. We also made more extended visits to my widowed mother who lives in Kent. I am an only child. It was good to have more time to do this.

I also went on two retreats – one short (unguided) one with Sue in South Wales and another longer (silent) one at St Bueno's in North Wales. There must be something about being revived in Wales... Being an extrovert, a silent retreat is not something I would naturally be drawn to. But I wanted to have a different and new experience, to see what I could learn. I largely enjoyed it. I read, walked and prayed a lot. I felt my senses were heightened during my time there and I sensed the Lord speaking to me clearly about a few things pertinent to ministry back at Mariners.

We went to a leaders' conference at Ellel Ministries in Pierrepoint, Surrey. This was really refreshing, especially as we caught up with old friends. And we caught up with other friends elsewhere too, during June and July.

We were able to visit several other churches during the sabbatical (UK and overseas), something that is not easily done during my normal working life! We visited specific churches that we know of, either because friends lead them or they are known as flourishing churches. This was really enjoyable, especially the sense of walking in and thinking, 'I am not responsible for anything!' We came away from most of the churches noting a few things we might emulate, but generally thinking that Mariners was doing quite well. One church we visited – Kings Gate, Peterborough – was really inspirational in terms of how (as a large church) they welcomed newcomers so well. Three separate people from the church sought us out and welcomed us and gave us relevant information or directions. We were given a welcome pack during the service and invited to the welcome lounge afterwards to learn more about the church. We learnt a lot from the experience.

We rounded out the sabbatical with a couple of days in the Gower and a week with our family in Cornwall. Again, we had good weather in beautiful locations with family. It was a great way to end what proved to be a rich, diverse and restful sabbatical.

Many thanks again to you for helping make all this possible. Our church also took up an offering, which bolstered our funds and helped make possible all that I have described above. Sue and I are truly thankful.

22 August 2019