

RULES FOR REVERENDS

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Illustrated by Dave Walker

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THE BEGINNING

I spent the 'noughties' not being a parish priest. After being a bishop's chaplain and then working in a cathedral, I returned to general parish work, and things I'd learnt ten years before started to come back to me.

One evening last winter, I was looking for a house to do a baptism visit. It hit me: the rule was that, because it was dark, the one I was looking for would be the only one without an obvious number. When I did find it, I just knew that its doorbell wouldn't work.

When I got home, I wrote those 'rules' down. More came very quickly, and I put them on my blog (<http://jeremyfletcher.wordpress.com>). People seemed to recognise them. I wrote some more—and here's the result.

Clergy inhabit a fantastic, pressurised, privileged, frustrating and humbling role. These 'rules' are dedicated to the ordained and, indeed, anyone who does anything like the job of a parish priest. I have shamelessly stolen some of this material from you. You know who you are. (Good job, because I've forgotten.)

What follows is not serious, really. Except when it is. You'll have to decide.

All Saints Stranton, St Nicholas' Nottingham, St Andrew's Skegby, All Saints' Stanton Hill, St Katherine's Teversal, the

Diocese of Southwell, York Minster, Beverley Minster, St Leonard's Molescroft, St Peter's Woodmansey, the Church in Tickton, All Saints' Routh... none of this book is about you, obviously.

My family have lived this job with me for a quarter of a century, and deserve far more thanks than I can give. At least I've not mentioned them too much in sermons...

GENERAL STUFF

Because life isn't as compartmentalised as you might like

The only people who ring before 9 o'clock in the morning are undertakers. Or bishops.

In a PCC meeting, even those you know well will say stuff that you wouldn't believe.

The one time you answer the phone in an amusing way will be the one time you wish you hadn't.

Just because you're on Twitter, it doesn't make you acceptable to the young.

Everything stops in September. You thought that's when it started, but that's when your congregation (who are all retired) go on cruises.

Falling asleep during a clergy quiet day isn't a sin, but it's embarrassing if you dribble.

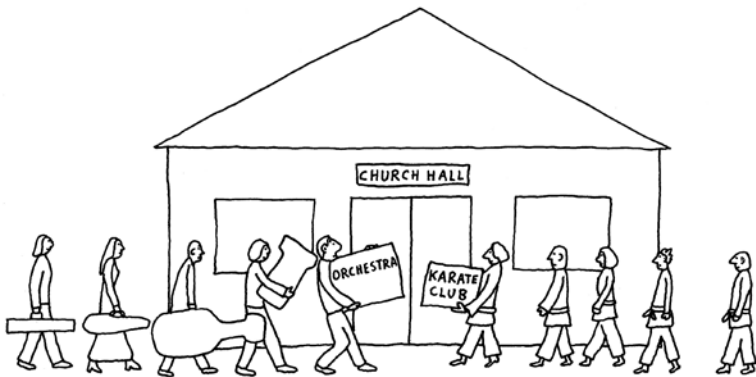
Annual Parochial Church Meetings would be enlivened if people could be voted off rather than on. But you might be first.

The press has the memory of a goldfish, and works on whims and timescales more rapid than a toddler in a toyshop. You will not change this.

Some people will never ever be satisfied. Find out who they are, and spend as little time as possible trying to sort things out for them.

People who light a candle when they say a prayer are not being superstitious. The Holy Spirit is helping them with sighs too deep for words.

No church hall booking system ever works properly.



No, the Diocese does not know what it is doing.

If you want something to thrive, threaten to abolish it.

Always accept a resignation.

If you can't be omniscient, you can give the impression of being omnipresent. And you don't have to stay to the end.

If the whole team is last minute, you'll get on well with each other and your church will learn what faith is all about.

No one is ever happy about car parking arrangements. For any event. Anywhere.

Work out how you respond best to conflict, because there will be some. The Body of Christ is made up of human beings, after all. And the Holy Spirit doesn't make it easier. Look at Corinth.

The preferred communication style of most churches is osmosis and telepathy.

Look carefully at the retired clergypeople around you. Find a happy one, and ask them how they did it. Start planning to do the same. You could be retired a long time.

Loud shoes in stone-floored churches are much to be encouraged.

There might be loads of clergy at the cathedral, but they do work hard. It's just different from what you do.

Being on the committee of another organisation is a good way of realising that perhaps the PCC isn't so bad after all. Or recognising that, actually, it is.

The contents of the flower cupboard are a mystery, one not to be explored without prayer and fasting.

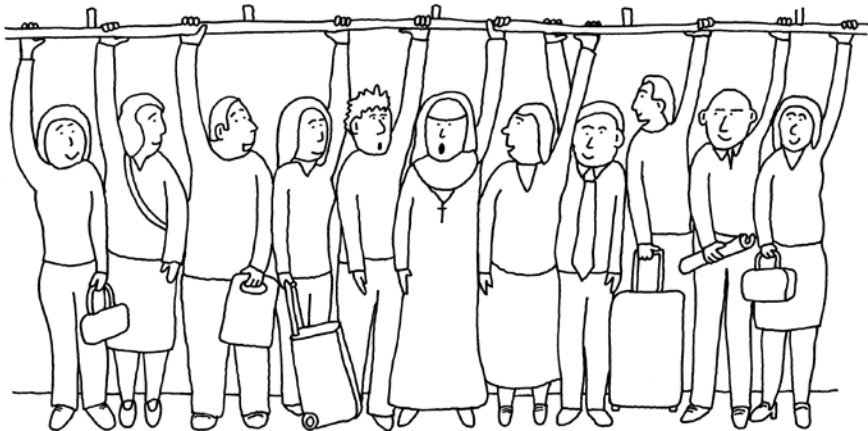
Answering machines are superb, but you do need to listen to them.

Gardening is only therapeutic when your parishioners can't see you doing it. When they do, they think you're taking too much time off.

If you need a decent policy for something, ask your friendly Methodists. They've got loads of good ones.

There is no such thing as a quiet toy.

Never doubt the power of a nun to get conversations going.
Especially on public transport.



Fill in attendance numbers carefully, and review them year by year. Some trends take time to make themselves felt.

Working harder at this job won't get you any more money. Unless you become a bishop, a dean or an archdeacon. And who wants to be one of them?

If you get a lone bagpiper to play a lament, have plenty of hankies handy.

Most church problems are sorted out by the people who know, in the car park afterwards. It's not worth having the original meeting at all, when you think about it.

If you have the NRSV on your smartphone, you can update your Facebook profile during worship and pretend you're reading the Bible.

Visitations are only made by angels, archdeacons and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Not all Visitations are the same.

At least with Alpha you get food.

When you talk with children, do it on their level. Physically, too. And listen.

There is always something you wish they'd taught you in training, and something else you wish they'd left until you were ordained.

It's interesting how the words 'swearing' and 'churchwardens' go together.

No one understands what a stipend is or what it's worth.
Least of all you.

Lots of stuff in your job is the same as other people's jobs. Try to remember what's unique to your calling—and make time to do it. Praying for your people is a good start.

How Christian it is of people to share their coughs and sneezes by bringing them to church.

Deanery Synods... conclusive proof of the truth of the doctrine of Limbo.

There will come a point in your life when you hear yourself saying 'Amen' loudly at the end of someone else's prayer a good two seconds before everyone else. This is what older clergy do. You used to hate it.

Rural Deans... not rural, not deans.

If you do the washing-up, at least you'll start with a mess and end with it sorted out. Nothing else in your day will be like this.

By all means type out emails last thing at night. Just don't send them until the next morning.

Beware the vicar who has just returned from the Holy Land.

If you have a finely developed taste in music and literature, you'll need to put it on hold on more occasions than you might think.

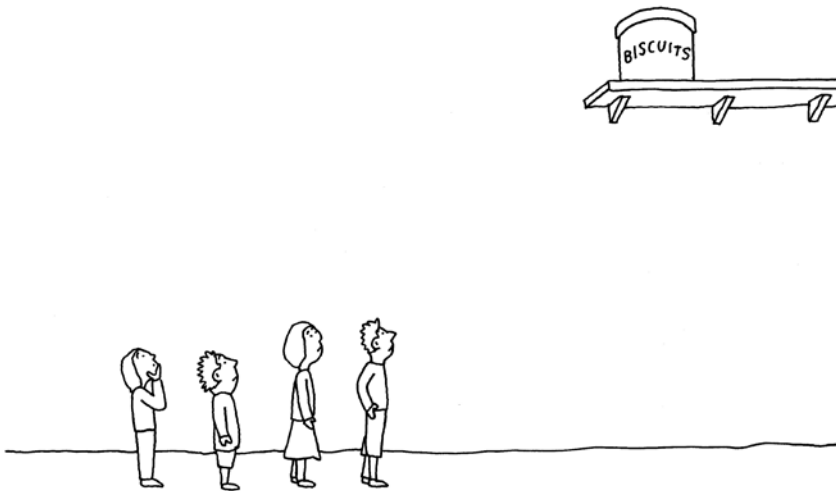
For 95 per cent of the congregation, what you know to be part of a wonderfully crafted and theologically satisfying sermon series is just what you happen to be preaching about on the day when they turn up.

Never take your diary with you to church.

Have fun with the last appointments you make before you leave. Your successor will love you for it.

If you have three or more churches, you will, at least once a year, design a rota that requires you to bi-locate. Not even you can do this.

If you let the children of the choir/Sunday school at the biscuits first, there will be none left for anyone else. Devise a plan to avoid this. Or frighten the children out of church all together. That will not be difficult.



The bulk of your thinking time should be spent working out exciting names for your existing activities, to make them more attractive.

If you don't want people to ring you on routine matters after 9pm, don't do the same to them.

Some people can only survive if they are complaining.
Why not complain back and see what happens?

Beware of doing the same thing three times. The view will then be that you've always done it, and you will be reported to the bishop if you stop. Even if it was your idea in the first place.

Make sure you:

- have a regular day off, and an extra day off every now and again
- take your full complement of holidays
- have a retreat and regular quiet days
- attend a range of courses for your CME
- go to conferences and teaching days in the wider church

- attend the days your bishop calls you to
- go faithfully to every meeting of Chapter and the Deanery Synod
- do some further study to keep your theological faculties sharp
- have a hobby

In the one day left to you after all this in a typical year, you can do your pastoral work as well.