Now that COVID is under control in Western New York, many of us are beginning to go back to what we consider our normal lives. In fact, most of us expect to be fully “back to normal” by fall.

For many of us, normal means a lot of activities and tasks. It means running about to take kids to sports or dance. It means running to work and the store and the gym and the church and the whatever. It means rushing about with a full calendar and task list trying to jam as much as we can into every day.

We have an opportunity to reset our lives as we come back from COVID. We don’t have to go back to running around. We have an opportunity to choose to do those things God has really called us to do. And we can accept the gift God has given us of sabbath, or rest.

Sometimes, the tasks we put on our to-do list may not need to be done. Or they may be better done by someone else. For example, King David has put the task of building a temple to God on his to-do list, but God doesn’t want a temple right then. God’s plan is to call David’s son, Solomon, to build the Temple.

Sometimes we think we must save someone from themselves, so we knock ourselves out trying. We tend to do this sometimes with grown children or siblings. But we can’t force them to make better decisions. We’re just frustrating ourselves trying. We can only suggest and pray and leave the rest to God.

Sometimes we think we’re the only ones who can do a task at work or at church. So, we jump in and do it. Perhaps we’re correct. Perhaps God has called us to that task. Or, perhaps, not. Perhaps God is preparing the heart of another person for that task, and we’ve taken it over, robbing that other person of the joy of doing what they’re called to do and exhausting ourselves.

Now that we have a chance to remake what is normal, I invite us to start with a different perspective. I invite us to start by promising to accept God’s gift of sabbath – or rest. When we accept that concept, we build sabbath into every week and every day. Notice, it’s not just vegging out on the sofa, although, sometimes that’s appropriate.

Rather, Sabbath is a time of intentionally resting our bodies and minds from the mundane, everyday routine of work and tuning back into God. It’s a time of rest, but also of restoration. When we build some Sabbath time into every day, we build in periods of quiet prayer and meditation. Some people find this works best for them in the mornings; others find the evening more workable. Our prayer book has daily offices or small daily prayer services for morning, noon, evening, and bedtime. They may be helpful, or you can use an app or simply sit in silence before God. The key is to make this our priority and then to discern during that time what tasks or activities we are called to that day or the next day and which we are called to eliminate.

We build Sabbath into every week through intentionally gathering to pray as a community -- gathering virtually or gathering in-person – whichever best helps you to stop, rest, and discern. Often, we become so tired from all the world’s activities and tasks that we can’t assemble with our church community. That’s backwards. We assemble with our church community so that we can rest our minds and bodies from the mundane of daily life and focus together on God. From that experience, we then focus the coming week on those things God has called us to do.

I attended the ordination of a friend of mine some years ago, when I was still a lay person. Bp David Jones preached, and he said something to the ordinands that was especially important. Although it was said to ordinands, it’s important for all of us – lay or clergy – who do the work of God in the world.

He said, During the time that’s set aside for you to actively do your ministry, go at your tasks with all your might. But when it’s time to stop, go home and leave your ministry in the hands of the One who created You and loves all humanity. Because God has got this. God can manage while you rest and reconnect with God.

We all have ministries. We all do the work of God in the world – at our jobs, our schools, in the community. Setting aside time for that work is important.

But when it’s time to stop, leave your ministry in the hands of the One who created you and loves all of humanity. Rest your mind and body and reconnect with God through personal prayer and through gathering with God’s people.

We’ve got an opportunity to remake what’s normal in our lives. Let’s make Sabbath rest our priority, then go out into the world.