

July 2026 Holidays

For many years now, one of the features of July for me has been visiting schools as they celebrate all that their leavers have contributed to their school. Even without new adventures to look forward to, many of us probably never lose that sense of excitement as holidays begin. So this month I found myself reflecting on holidays, and on some of the people holidays used to be named after.

The word 'holiday,' comes originally from 'holy day.' Long before 'annual leave' existed, 'holy days' - often celebrating the lives of saints - would be days when people stopped working for half a day or a day (and were encouraged or expected to go to church instead) Some historians have estimated that in medieval times, local churches might have celebrated over 150 saints during the year! Most of us have probably never heard of most of these saints, but there are two saints that I particularly notice at this time of year.

The first is St Barnabas. The Bradwell Infant School and Nursery (right next door to St Barnabas Church) celebrates St Barnabas Day each year on 11th June and I am always invited to join them for their celebration in church. 'Barnabas' was a nickname meaning 'Son of encouragement,' that was given to Barnabas by the other disciples, because he was particularly known for supporting others, and giving them a second chance when they needed it. The motto of Bradwell Infant School and Nursery is, 'Encourage one another and build each other up,' and it is always a delight to see how well the children at the school do exactly that today.

The second saint I notice at this time of year is St Peter, because the yearly ordinations of new priests and deacons always take place on a weekend near to St Peter's Day at the end of June. Pictures and statues of St Peter often show him holding keys, because traditionally St Peter is believed to have the 'keys' to let people into heaven.

The gospels describe the 'Kingdom of heaven' as a place where everything is as God wills it to be, where all are equally precious in God's sight and where all are enabled to flourish. Christianity teaches that part of being Christian is a calling to work together to build, 'the kingdom of heaven on earth,' that is to build communities where all flourish, and all are valued.

As I look at the two saints I have mentioned, it feels to me as if we all hold the keys to heaven. By living like St Barnabas did, by supporting and valuing and caring for others, we can all play our role in building God's kingdom in the communities we are part of. My prayer for us all this month is that, like the children at Bradwell Infant School and Nursery, we will all try to do just that.

Yours in Christ,
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