



Starting back

A few years ago, when I was a school chaplain, one of the things which I came to recognise was the feeling of anxiety sluicing through the staff room at the start of September.

You might expect this from the new teachers, but what I came to learn was that it infected absolutely everyone.

There was a moment, about twenty minutes before the pupils arrived back at school for their first day, when almost every single teacher, from the head down to the NQT, was convulsed with doubts about their ability to teach. How could they do this? How could they engage with the students? They knew they'd done it before but what if they had lost their mojo over the summer? What if the pupils ran rings around them? On the outside, some of them looked confident enough, but the feeling of fear was universal: I only know for certain because I was the chaplain and they came to tell me about it.

For a brief few minutes, the corridors were curiously quiet: empty of children but filled with nerves. Then the children arrived, the interactions started again, and the teachers' nerves drained away as they realised that, actually, they could do this after all.

I write this now because I suppose I have a little of that feeling myself, as I return to my desk after a holi-

day and prepare to launch into a new term's worth of activities. It's not quite the same of course, as it's not like the Church stops for August, and there is *nothing* that quite matches the intensity of change when a school moves from holiday mode to term-time mode, but there's still something about this time of year that marks a return of activity. Even when I worked in consultancy, not a lot happened in August, as so many clients were away.

September, then, can have a feeling of a new start. The holiday we were looking forward to has now passed. We no longer have the excuse that we are tired. We head back into the world, often having had a time to pause and think about other things altogether and now we re-engage with the projects we left on the backburner for the summer.

While on the one hand, there's something uncomfortable about this liminal state, still tentatively putting our toes back into the water, I wonder also if it's not a state of mind to remember. For a brief while, our eyes look upon our usual world somewhat afresh.

And while almost everyone will feel a little discomforted by the returning process, it may be that you go back to work and really, really are uncomfortable about it. In which case, maybe it's time for a change.

September 2016. Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.