

Sabbaticals/Extended Study Leave in the Diocese of Worcester - Guidelines and Process

1 Overview

After seven years of stipendiary ministry post-curacy, and thereafter every seven years, stipendiary clergy in the Diocese of Worcester may apply for sabbatical leave. The purpose of this time is to provide an opportunity for study, retreat and refreshment, and it normally lasts three months.

Many ministers who have taken sabbatical leave testify to having been refreshed and re-energised for ministry through the experience. It is one way in which the Church seeks to affirm and care for its ministers. Sabbatical leave gives an opportunity for reflection and growth in aspects of personal and ministerial development. It is a time for gaining new insights which benefit future ministry. Thus in the medium and long term, parishes (and other contexts of ministry) benefit from ministers taking sabbatical leave. A sabbatical is not a reward for long service, but it does help to sustain and support ministers through a long ministry. Ministers may take sabbatical leave more than once in the course of their ministry.

There will normally be a limit of six grant-funded sabbaticals per year. This note describes the process and guidelines around applying for a sabbatical, preparing for it, and taking it. It does so in order to help those taking sabbaticals make the most of the experience, to help parishes and others understand the rationale for sabbaticals, and to explain how we aim to use finite diocesan funds fairly.

2 Qualification and Process Summary

To be eligible to be considered for a sabbatical:

- You must have completed seven years of (stipendiary) ministry since the end of curacy, or since the end of your last sabbatical. It doesn't matter how many of those years of ministry have been in the Diocese of Worcester.
- You must normally not be within the first three years of a new post
- You must normally not be within three years of planning to retire

The three stages of the process are:

1. **Planning in principle** – Shaping the broad parameters and submitting a Stage 1 application well in advance – see the timetable on page 2.
Up to three sabbatical grants for each half year will then be given approval in principle, following which applicants can go ahead and make bookings
2. **Planning in detail** - More detailed planning of cover and content and submitting a Stage 2 application –by 3 months before the sabbatical.
3. **Taking the sabbatical** – Taking sabbatical, writing up the main learning points, and meeting to reflect on the experience

The contact persons for those exploring and taking sabbaticals are Janet Fox, Clergy Development Officer (jfox@cofe-worcester.org.uk) and Roger Latham, Director of Mission and Ministry (rlatham@cofe-worcester.org.uk), who will be happy to help at any point in the process. They are the point of contact for the submission of forms and handling of queries.

3 Stage 1 - Planning in principle

The first stage, normally around a year before a potential sabbatical, requires you to:

- Make Janet Fox or Roger Latham aware of your interest in exploring a sabbatical, e.g. by email, in plenty of time.
- Explore timing that suits yourself and deanery/ team/group colleagues
- Identify in principle how cover would be provided for your duties
- Begin to think about the main components of your sabbatical – see section 4.1
- Gain the approval in principle of your colleagues (as appropriate), Area Dean and Archdeacon for you to take a sabbatical at your proposed time.
- Submit a Stage 1 sabbatical form in line with the timetable below.
- A decision regarding your application will then be made in the light of the number of applications received and the funding available.

Janet or Roger will be keen to have an initial conversation while you're preparing this stage, by phone or face-to-face, to help shape your thinking.

It's important, where relevant, to talk to your PCC(s) or equivalent at an early stage.

When the broad parameters of a potential sabbatical have been identified, complete a 'Stage 1 sabbatical form', in time for the appropriate decision-making process:

- Sabbaticals beginning Jan to June Submit Stage 1 form by the end of the previous Mar
- Sabbaticals beginning July to Dec Submit Stage 1 form by the end of the previous Sep

For instance, if you hope to take a sabbatical beginning Feb 2025, make sure you submit a form by the end of March 2024. Or for a sabbatical beginning in Nov 2025, the deadline is Sep 30th, 2024.

Note that additional sabbatical bursaries may be available from EIG, for which the deadline is normally in September of the year before the sabbatical. Those interested in such bursaries should contact EIG separately and direct.

Shortly after these deadlines, decisions will be made as to which sabbaticals can be approved. Some may be able to be approved without funding. Some may not be able to be approved, in which case applicants may be invited to resubmit an application for a later date.

4 Planning in Detail

There are three main priorities at this stage:

- planning more detail of the content of sabbatical
- making sure cover is in place.
- submitting a Stage 2 sabbatical form by 3 months before the sabbatical start date

4.1 Sabbatical content

Most sabbaticals should include an appropriate combination of rest, retreat, and some form of focus/study. They should also generally be inhabited at a more spacious pace than that of most people's normal ministry. It's helpful to have some sense of what balance of these three components you are looking for. For some helpful general considerations and wisdom around planning a sabbatical, see <http://johnmark.net.au/kz/?p=229>.

Think about what area should be your main focus, for thinking, study, conversation, reading and/or experience. How might this best be explored?

The normal expectation is that people taking a sabbatical will find some sort of mentor or tutor, both to help them shape the sabbatical in advance, and also as an informed and stimulating conversation partner. As an indication, you might consider meeting with such a person well before the sabbatical (while you are still shaping it), and also a couple of times during the sabbatical itself. Who might such a person be for you? You may want to ask around for ideas, and/or Janet or Roger may be able to help suggest someone.

Give thought and attention to the form of retreat that would be good to include. Many people make the most of the opportunity to take a type/length of retreat not normally feasible? Again, explore possibilities for this.

Sabbatical leave is not simply time off work, but may include some holiday, and opportunity for rest. How can this work best for you?

Some people are inclined to over-schedule their time on sabbatical, and a few might veer in the other direction. Allowing some flexibility, perhaps especially in the later stages, is often helpful.

It's worth paying attention in advance to how you will manage the return to work afterwards, for instance in scheduling meetings with appropriate colleagues.

Several of the possibilities mentioned above involve costs, which can easily total more than the £500 sabbatical grant from the diocese. You may additionally be able to claim your CMD grant entitlement, and apply for funding from other sources, such as an EIG bursary mentioned previously.

4.2 Covering your absence

Your stage 1 application will have included an indication of the main sources of cover. Now you need to sort out the details of how your responsibilities will be covered.

Having first raised the possibility of a sabbatical with your PCC at an early stage, do keep them informed of how your plans are developing. Feel free to use this paper, to help indicate how the diocese views the taking of sabbaticals. If at all possible, try and resolve any tensions before you begin your sabbatical, for your sake and theirs.

Think through the details of answering machine messages, email responses, what should happen in the case of emergencies, and so on.

4.3 Submitting a Stage 2 sabbatical form

This notes the planning you will have done. Please make sure you submit this by 3 months before your start date. Final permission for the sabbatical, and payment of any grant, are dependent on satisfactory completion of this form.

5 Taking the sabbatical, and reflecting on it

Having prepared as described, enjoy your sabbatical! It is often good to have left some flexibility, especially towards its latter stages, to enable the exploration of interesting possibilities that only emerge during the course of the sabbatical.

Make sure you make the most of conversations with a tutor/mentor.

Especially towards the end, think about how the experience of your sabbatical might enrich and inform your ongoing ministry.

We ask you to write up, at least briefly (say 2 or 3 sides of A4 – suggested questions below), your key reflections and learning from the sabbatical experience, within a month of the end of the sabbatical. Take a view on whether that's more realistic to do within the sabbatical time itself.

Janet Fox or Roger Latham will normally have arranged to meet with you around a month after the sabbatical. They'll ask for a draft of your write-up in advance of the meeting. The meeting is primarily for your benefit, to help crystallise what you've learned, and take it forward into your ministry as appropriate. They will also be keen to hear from you any wisdom that might be of benefit to other ministers taking sabbaticals in the future. A final version of your written reflection (which is often the same as the draft) will subsequently be sent to both bishops. (In the unlikely event that the writing up is not done, we will ask you to repay your grant.)

Suggested questions to explore in writing up your sabbatical:

- ✓ What were the main highlights of your sabbatical experience?
- ✓ As you look back, did your balance of rest, retreat and study work well?
- ✓ Were there ways in which your plans were adjusted during the course of the time – and how did that go?
- ✓ How do you feel in yourself – physically, spiritually, emotionally – compared to just before the sabbatical?
- ✓ If you worked with a tutor/mentor, what did that contribute to the experience?
- ✓ In what ways would you say you have learned or changed through the experience?
- ✓ What message or learning from your sabbatical would you like to remind yourself of in, say, six months' time, one year's time, three years' time? How can you make sure that you remind yourself?
- ✓ Are there any ways in which you want to adjust your practice in the light of your sabbatical experience? What would be a good first step to enable that adjustment?
- ✓ What might come out of your sabbatical: for you; for your current ministry; for the wider church?
- ✓ What words of wisdom from your own experience would you share with other people as they plan and take their own sabbaticals?