

Extended Study Leave

(Sometimes known as Sabbatical leave)

The Diocese encourages all stipendiary clergy to take ESL periodically. A grant of £500 is available for this. Because ESL concerns professional and vocational development the grant is free of Income Tax. ESL for 2011 was oversubscribed. We now have a Diocesan policy for allocation of ESL. Although Bishops' permission is still required for ESL, permission does not constitute an entitlement.

These notes explain not only the practicalities of our diocesan procedure but also offer some guidelines on how to approach the idea of study leave and make the most of it.

What qualifies as Extended Study Leave?

Some are put off by the label 'study leave', feeling that they must pursue some higher degree or other academic course. But what counts as appropriate is much wider than that.

The basic notion of 'sabbatical' leave is, of course, Biblically based. The cessation of work principal in Genesis 2 v.3 is a positive gift or rest ('God blessed the day and made it holy'). In Leviticus 25 we have 'Sabbath years' and the sound idea that the ground should be left untilled so that it can replenish itself. David Ellingson draws the parallel with our lives:

'Just like the soil, we humans need a sabbatical, a time to
Lie in fallow. We require a time to receive rather than give
Output, to carefully nurture and cultivate our lives so that the
soil of our spirits may be rid of weeds and have opportunity
to receive nourishment' (1)

There is then a place for extended rest and change rhythm. The hectic pace of today's world makes this hugely important for clergy who readily admit to a lack of sufficient time for personal and spiritual nurture. The weekly day off and the regular holiday are vital, but the longer break for personal renewal has been of great long-term benefit.

ESL is a time for professional and vocational development

- **Spiritual refreshment**
 - A new environment
 - A time to explore a different rhythm of life, less outcome focussed
- **Restoration**
 - A time for God to restore balance, spiritual vitality and vision
- **Stimulus**
 - New input to give new vision
 - Visiting new cultures and places to give new perspectives
- **Reflection**
 - Deeper understanding
 - New ways of doing things
 - Future objectives

The result of such a time will be to re-focus attention from the narrow task-orientation in which parish ministry can trap us, to a fresh personal awareness of our identity and our vocation. Or, as Richard Bullock neatly sums it up, 'A time when perspective and the Holy Spirit can come together'. (2)

Guidelines for the Lichfield Diocese

- A period of extended study leave is normally six to twelve weeks
- All stipendiary clergy and licensed lay ministers who have served ten years in ministry, can be considered for ESL
- Funding from the diocese is available for study leave approved by the area bishop. Currently, a sum of up to £500.00 is made available from the Director of Ministry Development

There will be 2 deadlines each year for allocation of ESL. Applications should be made by July 31 for ESL 18 - 30 months ahead and by January 31 for ESL 12 - 24 months ahead. E.g. Applications can be made on 31 July of 2011 for 2013. The second batch of applications for 2013 can be made on January 31 2012. Application forms, which now include provision for Bishop's permission, are available from The Diocesan Website. Completed applications for ESL should be sent for the attention of Revd Lesley Bentley, Director of Ministry at St Marys House, The Close Lichfield WS13 7LD

We will accept people for ESL in this order (up to a total of 19 per annum)

- People who have been in current post for 7 years or more and have not taken ESL in the last 7 years.
- People who have been in current post for 6 years or more and have not taken ESL in the last 7 years
- People who have been in current post for 5 years or more and have not taken ESL in the last 7 years
- People who have been in ordained or nationally accredited ministry for 10 years or more and have not taken ESL in that time. In the event of oversubscription in this category, then those who have had the longest interval since their last ESL, whilst in stipendiary ministry, will be the first to be awarded funding.
- The Director of Ministry holds details of some of the colleges and institutions that offer sabbatical accommodation and study opportunities.
- The diocese requires a brief written report of the study leave to be shared with the Area Bishop, Archdeacon and the Director of Ministry. This is not meant to be a major piece of work, but rather to offer personal reflections on the learning experience and the opportunity for self-development.

Making the most of Study Leave: some important factors

1. Plan your leave with great care

- Some people begin with a recognition that they are eligible to apply for study leave in two years time, but have no clear idea what to do with it. Others determine early on a particular activity or area of research that they want to follow up and simply need to structure it and work out the practical details.

In either case, careful planning is vital. Occasionally, a priest comes to the end of study leave with a sense of disappointment and failure that it has not lived up to expectation. "If I could do it over again, I would do it differently." Although it is unlikely we shall achieve all our sabbatical targets, care in the planning stage is sure to make the whole enterprise more creative.

- If you have very unformed ideas on how to use a study leave, or you would benefit from knowing more about what is available, contact the Director of Ministry for a chat about possibilities.
- As the plans begin to form, share them with your Area Bishop and Archdeacon. They will have the wider diocese picture in mind as well as your own needs. They may have useful ideas to help shape things at an early stage. You will need their approval and support when final decisions are reached.
- Share your plans with churchwardens and PCC. The parish could easily hold misconceptions about study leave ('The vicar's going on holiday for 3 months!') so it is important that they understand its purpose and where possibly can take an active interest in the kind of sabbatical you envisage.
- They may be encouraged to make a financial contribution to it. You will certainly want their prayers and goodwill for your leave of absence.
- Write out a summary plan (for your own benefit as well as those with whom you are sharing) which should answer questions like:-

What do I most want to happen to me personally?

How would I like the parish to benefit?

What area of study or research am I really interested in?

How will I discover the information I want?

What preliminary reading should I set myself before the study leave?

If you intend to visit a number of places to discover their liturgical practise or their principles of church growth or whatever, clarify the questions you want to ask and the information you want to elicit. You might construct for yourself a questionnaire sheet, even if you don't propose to administer it directly on your visits. If you have no such structure, the danger is you return with a lot of scribbled notes that are difficult to digest and formulate.

The emphasis on planning does not mean that every aspect of the leave should be stitched up in advance. There needs to be room for flexibility as you respond to new situations and insights. But some serious plan that is not over-rigid will be the best guarantee of wise use of time.

A final wise word on this from Loren Mead of the Alban Institute in the USA

'Be sure the sabbatical is tailored for you, who you really are.....
Don't set up ideal plans that would bore you to death or workaholic plans. And don't become infatuated with what someone else did and try to copy it.' (3)

2. Consider using a Consultant for your leave programme

It is generally a mistake to think you alone will be able to see the best way of using your extended study leave. We have already noted the value of sharing the concept with the diocesan staff and interested people in the parish. But beyond this, it is highly beneficial to find a consultant to supervise and monitor your programme in a helpful way.

Some fight shy of such a consultation, fearing that it will lead to over demanding academic rigour, when they would prefer a more relaxed exploration of the topic. But this need not be the case.

Choose a consultant appropriate for the concept you have in mind. It may be you simply need an experienced clergy friend who will help you shape the leave period in the most beneficial way. Maybe some experienced practitioner in an area can guide you on how to go about some piece of reading or research your plan. If your study leave involves an overseas trip, you would be strongly advised to make a link with Selly Oak Colleges so that someone from overseas culture can help you prepare for the experience.

3. Sort out sensibly the timing of your study leave

- a) In planning well ahead you will want to ***choose the period for being away from the parish carefully.***

There are several considerations:

- the parish:** Can cover be found for the period? (It will be important to explore this with the rural dean). Can I avoid being absent at a major festival? Are there other particular points in the parish programme, e.g. stewardship campaign, mission week, that I need to avoid?
- the family:** Are they able to join me, at least for part of the time? Are there particular family considerations to be taken into account?
- the projected leave** Is there a limitation on when I can get accommodation? when the planned activity is possible?

Sometimes integrating all of these factors becomes so difficult that you are tempted to abandon or at least postpone the whole enterprise! But it is well worth the effort of reaching a compromise that gives you the necessary weeks.

- b) ***Plan the use of the time of the leave itself so that your personal goals are possible.***

- It might be sensible to begin the period with a major family holiday or a time away with your spouse. Alternatively, such a holiday break might come right at the end. In any case, beginning a sabbatical period should not be too abrupt – a time of winding down to a new pace is useful.
- Some travel component of the leave is very helpful. Whilst it is financially prohibitive to think of several weeks of overseas travel, or accommodation at a university or college, some change of scene is highly desirable. It removes you from the place of your normal routine and opens you to a fresh rhythm and perspective in meeting new people in different places.
- There may be the possibility of finding some cheap accommodation which takes you away from the parish for study and rest, not least for some of the time. Some examples that have been tried are: a spare room with some member of extended family or a good friend; borrowing the holiday accommodation/second home from a parishioner or clergy colleague. The Priscilla Trust offer a splendid property in the Dordogne for a four-week period, without charge and in some circumstances contribute to travel costs (details of this from Ministry Development Office).

- c) ***Think carefully about the conclusion of your leave***

It would be thoroughly unwise to rush back on Maundy Thursday to take all the Easter services! Ease yourself in sensibly with time to pick up the news and prepare for re-engagement with the task.

4. Prepare a financial budget as carefully as you can

As from April 2010, the diocese provision for approved study leave is £500. This can be claimed from the Ministry Development Office, at whatever point it is needed.

If you are travelling widely or staying in University or college accommodation, the diocesan grant may prove to be only a helpful foundation. You will need to ask:

- Are there any charitable trusts (from your school or university, or from the historical resources of your parish or locality) that maybe approached for additional funding.
- The Lichfield Theological Trust makes some grants through the Bishop Woods Travel Scholarships 'for individuals seeking to develop their understanding of their ministry and of their faith through travel overseas'. Application forms from the Secretary to the Grants sub-committee, c/o Visitor Study Centre, The Close, Lichfield, WS13 7LD.
- Grants are also made from Trust Funds administered by the Board of Mission in London for 'periods of sabbatical leave for the study of mission or mission issues'. Applications to:-

The Administrative Secretary
Board of Mission and Council for Christian Unity
Church House
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3NZ

- How much are you and your family able and willing to put into the pot?
- Is your PCC able and willing to make some contribution? This may require a tactful approach and resources are always stretched, but it would be a positive gesture of backing your plans if some financial support was offered.

Whatever resources you can put together will need to be carefully measured against the expenditure plans you have in mind. If necessary, you may have to adjust your schedule to live within your means.

5. Prepare a pastoral cover scheme for your absence

You will benefit from your Study Leave if you are confident that you have totally adequate parish cover and you do not need to think about what might arise. This works well if you are part of a team where others have agreed to cover for you. But often, you will have to make greater demands upon retired priests, NSM's and local colleagues, working with the rural dean to ensure that cover is in place.

Obvious areas to consider are:

- The regular Sunday services
- Occasional offices
- Special local events that occur in your absence
- Advance planning for later in the year that may need to be done before you go
- The briefing of wardens or PCC secretary about specific responsibilities that you would normally undertake.

The Area Bishop and Archdeacon will need to be assured that you have adequately covered these and other eventualities before you depart.

5. **Keep a journal / diary of your Study Leave**

If your study leave matches your own expectations, there will be many new insights and new experiences to digest. It is therefore well worth recording these as you go along in some daily journal or sabbaticals diary. This is for your own use, so the way in which you do this is entirely up to you. You may well find it helpful to travel with a small notebook so that as encounters and conversations develop, you can quickly note down a pithy comment, a recommended book, a useful address etc.

At the end of your Study Leave, **you will be asked to submit a brief report** on it to your Area Bishop, Archdeacon and the Director of Ministry. This should usually take the form of an outline of the way the time was used together with reflections on personal learning and how it may be used. You are not expected to produce a large academic dissertation although it may have followed some more rigorous course or produced a substantial essay, these conclusions could be shared in your reports.

Keeping a journal will help produce your final report. It will also be valuable as a basis for material to share with the parish on your return. Those with whom you earlier shared your plans and expectations, will be keen to hear about your weeks away. Maybe you could plan a special evening for you to share some of your insights and experiences, perhaps show slides of your travels and then give space for some to tell how the parish has fared during your time away.

The journal will also be a valuable source for some reflection in a de-briefing session. This could well be with the consultant you worked with before the study or in some cases, maybe a different person who you feel would help you consolidate the learning experience and point you to future action.

Someone has said 'It is important not to mistake the edge of the rut for the horizon'. We can all too easily sink into a rut or parish routine and we need the opportunity to lift our eyes to new horizons. At its best, extended study leave can fulfil this purpose and fill us with gratitude to God and new enthusiasm and energy as partners in the work in His Kingdom

Footnotes_:

1. *Dave Ellingson 'Remember the Sabbatical to keep it Holy' cited in Sabbatical Planning for Clergy and Congregations by A Richard Bullock p.5 (Alban Institute, 1987).*
2. *Bullock, p.2.*
3. *Loren Mead '1982 Conference on Sabbatical Leaves' cited in Bullock p.9.*