



DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA

Diocesan policy on SABBATICAL LEAVE FOR PRIESTS

‘Among factors that may cause discouragement in the souls of pastors are the danger of routine, physical exhaustion due to overwork, psychological fatigue... Notwithstanding pastoral urgency, and precisely to face up to these problems adequately, priests must be provided with time, as much as reasonably possible, so as to facilitate longer periods spent with the Lord Jesus, thus recovering strength and courage to continue the road to holiness... In some cases, it may be useful to employ this time for study or updating oneself in the sacred sciences, yet the primary goal of strengthening spiritual and apostolic life must not be forgotten. In any case, the danger of considering the sabbatical period as a vacation or claiming it as a right should be avoided.’

(Congregation for the Clergy, 1984: *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, n. 83 on “Sabbatical Periods”)

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 A well-used period of sabbatical leave can be a fruitful element in the renewal of priests in spirit, mind and body, an effective contribution towards preventing breakdown under the pressure of an increasing workload, and an important aspect of ongoing priestly formation.**
- 1.2 Sabbatical Leave is envisaged primarily as a positive time for spiritual, human, pastoral and intellectual renewal and formation. Although a priest may need an extended break from the demands of pastoral responsibility, over and above his annual holiday, a sabbatical will normally involve periods of spiritual and/or intellectual formation (e.g. approved retreats, courses etc), or a different pastoral experience of some kind.**
- 1.3 Priests who would benefit from a period of sabbatical leave will be encouraged and helped to do so. This must be facilitated in a realistic and workable way which takes full account of the limited personnel and financial resources of our diocese. Part of the Diocesan Ministerial Training Fund will be made available to support the cost of sabbaticals within approved guidelines.
- 1.4 We have very few priests available in our diocese to cover the absence of a parish priest for several months. Some priests may be able to arrange ‘cover’ from outside the diocese (all such agreements need to follow the diocesan procedures for priests coming from elsewhere). Ideally, the diocese would always have one priest available to cover for priests taking sabbatical leave.
- 1.5 It may be appropriate to incorporate up to four weeks of rest and relaxation within the period of sabbatical leave. This would normally be instead of, rather than in addition to, a priest’s annual holiday leave. Alternatively, all or part of a priest’s annual holiday leave could be added to a three-month course, etc, provided that cover can be found in the usual way.
- 1.6 Any financial support offered by parish and diocese will depend on the form of sabbatical proposed.
- 1.7 Priests will usually apply themselves for Sabbatical Leave. There may be circumstances, however, when the Bishop, local Dean or members of the Diocesan Personnel Board may take the initiative in proposing Sabbatical Leave to a priest who may be thought to benefit from such an opportunity.
- 1.8 As a general principle, the option of a period of sabbatical leave will be available after twelve years of active ministry as a priest, and thereafter every twelve years.
- 1.9 As a norm, only one priest will be away on sabbatical at any one time.
- 1.10 Sabbatical Leave will usually be considered for a period up to a maximum of three months. Short sabbaticals of about one month are easier to facilitate; it may be possible to arrange short-term supplies within the local deanery or cluster.

The last three points are open to exception when a clear need can be demonstrated and the exception facilitated. This policy as a whole, and the financial commitments in particular, will be reviewed in December 2008.

2. Normal process for application for Sabbatical Leave

- 2.1 Applications for sabbatical leave should normally be made at least a year before the hoped-for time for that leave. Applicants will need to be flexible about when leave can be arranged. All requests for sabbatical leave will be made by way of an application form to be sent to the Bishop. Forms are available from the Bishop's Secretary. Requests will be considered by the Diocesan Personnel Board, which will make a recommendation to the Bishop. Members will evaluate the application in the light of: years since ordination and since any previous sabbatical; number of priests applying at any time; content of proposed programme, relevance to personal development and parish/diocesan needs, and anticipated outcome; cost of course. The priest's Dean will be consulted as part of the process.
- 2.2 Although a priest is invited to explore possible 'cover', any formal arrangements should be made through Bishop's House in order to ensure that account is taken of other diocesan needs and to enable full compliance with diocesan and COPCA procedures.

3. Financial support for retreats or courses during Sabbatical Leave

- 3.1 The maximum cost of a three-month sabbatical is expected to be £5,000 inclusive of travelling costs. The priest applying for Sabbatical Leave is expected to explore the availability of bursaries and other funding sources for his chosen course or other activity. There may be occasions when a greater overall cost can be justified; in that event, the balance will usually be met by the priest rather than his parish or the diocese. When the Sabbatical Leave includes a retreat and/or course approved by the Diocesan Personnel Board, the cost of that retreat and/or course will normally be divided in the following way:
- The priest himself will contribute 30% of the total cost (or more if the total cost is over £5,000).
 - The priest's parish will contribute 20% of the total cost (up to a maximum of £1,000).
 - The diocese will contribute 50% of the total cost (up to a maximum £2,500).
- 3.2 When a priest takes Sabbatical Leave between appointments, or when the priest is not attached to a parish, the diocese will pay 70% of the total cost, up to a maximum of £3,500.
- 3.3 The funding arrangements outlined above presuppose that the contents of the sabbatical programme agreed by the Diocesan Personnel Board are clearly relevant to the ongoing formation and renewal of the priest concerned for the better service of the Church. Within that context, it seems reasonable for both parish and diocese to support the costs. Full discussion by the priest with the Parish Finance Committee is essential. Consideration needs to be given, on a case-by-case basis, to any implications of loss of income for the priest seeking sabbatical leave and extra costs for the parish.
- 3.4 In most circumstances, when the Bishop grants Sabbatical Leave for anything other than an approved retreat or course, the priest will be expected to fund the costs himself.

4 Further Notes

- 4.1 Most of the process above presumes long-term planning for sabbatical leave, but the Diocese recognises that this will not always be possible. There may be circumstances when a priest urgently needs sabbatical leave because, for example, he finds himself at the point of exhaustion. It is important that such a priest feels free to approach the Bishop immediately. Our diocesan policy towards resourcing sabbaticals must take account of the need to provide emergency cover.
- 4.2 Although a sabbatical will normally involve periods of spiritual and/or intellectual formation (e.g. approved retreats, courses etc), a priest may simply wish to spend a time of ministry in another setting. 'Parish Swaps' have sometimes proved a fruitful way of spending a time of sabbatical leave, as they enable a priest to gain new experiences and ideas which may benefit his ministry and parish. Any such exchanges need to be organised with the formal cooperation of the bishops and/or religious superiors involved, ensuring the full normative process is completed (i.e. Testimonials of Suitability for Ministry; CRB checks; Diocesan Policy on Welcoming Priests), as well as any necessary international requirements (visas, etc).
- 4.3 The Diocesan recognises that some priests may not be able to contribute their full share towards the cost of sabbatical leave as understood in 1.2 above. This is open to discussion with the Diocesan Finance Board and/or the Diocesan Financial Administrator, in liaison with the Bishop. No priest should be prevented from taking sabbatical leave simply because he cannot afford to make his contribution.
- 4.4 The Diocesan Ongoing Formation Team is available for advice on possible courses and retreats for sabbatical leave. Such opportunities are regularly advertised in Catholic publications (e.g. *The Tablet*).