



Planning Your Sabbatical

Extended Ministerial Development Leave

Revised August 2025

Why a Sabbatical?

In Scripture, God sets a rhythm of work and rest, blessing the Sabbath and calling even the land to rest every seventh year (Genesis 2; Leviticus 25). A sabbatical is therefore not a luxury but a biblical practice of renewal. In the Church of England this is formally known as Extended Ministerial Development Leave (EMDL).

We use both terms together: 'sabbatical' highlights the biblical call to rest and refreshment, while 'EMDL' connects the practice to our commitment to lifelong ministerial development. In the Diocese of Truro, EMDL is a normal expectation for licensed clergy, and an essential investment in long-term wellbeing, fruitfulness, and sustainability in ministry.

In 2001 the national CMD Review, *Mind the Gap*, recommended that 'all licensed ministers (lay and ordained, stipendiary and non-stipendiary) should be given the opportunity of a sabbatical, i.e. a time of rest, renewal and recreation, whether or not a financial contribution is made by the diocese'.

The Diocese of Truro sets a high priority on clergy wellbeing, and upon clergy availing themselves of this opportunity. Extended Ministerial Development Leave (EMDL) should be regarded as an essential part of the pastoral care of the self and of the stewardship of one's gifts. It is an integral part of each individual's commitment to ministry. It is a normal expectation for all licensed clergy.

What is a Sabbatical?

Sabbatical (or EMDL) is an opportunity to step back from the normal demands of ministry and take time to reflect, rest, and look ahead.

A well-planned EMDL should normally include:

- **Learning** - some element of study, reflection, or skill development.
- **Retreat** - space for spiritual renewal and deepening your relationship with God.
- **Rest** - time for physical and emotional rest.
- **Location** - ideally some part of the time away from your parish context.

Usually an EMDL will be of three months duration. It is expected that annual leave will not be counted as part of this time.

Am I eligible?

Up to five people may normally be granted EMDL in any year. Initial enquiries should be made, in the first instance, to your **Archdeacon** and/or the **Head of Ministry**.

- Clergy ordained at least 10 years are eligible, and may apply again every 7 years.
- Clergy must have served at least 2 years in their current post before taking EMDL.
- Clergy in the first year of supervising a curate will not normally be granted EMDL.
- Those within 3 years of retirement will not normally be granted EMDL.
- Readers are also eligible once licensed/admitted for 10 years.

1. The First Step

Once you confirm eligibility, begin planning your time. Allow **12 months or more** if you anticipate applying for grants, international travel, or residential placements.

The process has three stages:

1. **Applicant's Proposal** - complete the application form.
2. **Archdeacon's Conversation and Endorsement** - a supportive meeting to help shape plans and confirm pastoral cover (not a gatekeeping step).
3. **Final Approval** - by the Head of Ministry and Bishop of St Germans.

The Head of Ministry is available as a sounding board and can provide advice or signposting.

The Project

It is never too soon to start planning as there is much that needs to be considered alongside the project itself. In reality it may take a year or more before you actually begin your sabbatical.

As you embark on the process of planning, the following may help you to develop the project that you will undertake. Over time you will need to develop a detailed plan so asking yourself some simple questions may be helpful.

Ask yourself:

- What excites or renews me?
- What might help me grow as a person and a minister?
- What skills or experiences would strengthen my current or future ministry?
- Is there something that I could explore that would enable me to be more effective in my current post?
- Are there any insights or skills which I would like to read about and study in more depth and possibly reflect on with others in order to deepen my knowledge and understanding?
- Where is the best place to do this, college, retreat centre, different context, or time away?

It is suggested that we cannot guide others further than we have gone ourselves. You may want to explore new areas of spirituality, consider where you can be vulnerable or open, or where you might take risks.

Not all the following questions may be relevant to your situation, but they may help you to define a worthwhile project.

Travel may be an important part of the project. The opportunity to step away from your current situation enables the possibility of renewal and refreshment, as well as gaining a wider perspective. It may be appropriate to consider the possibility of spending time in a community, or a residential period at a theological college or institution, e.g. Sarum College <https://www.sarum.ac.uk/> or <https://www.gladstoneslibrary.org/>

The opportunity to be creative and imaginative is an important part of the planning process, but an element of realism is also important. As is relevant, consider family needs, school holidays, and finances and whether or not your spouse is able to accompany you for some or all of the time.

Getting the most from your EMDL

Please consider the following when preparing for your EMDL.

1. **Retreat** - The EMDL should include some time which is by nature of retreat, for some people that may mean going on a 'Retreat'. But there are other ways of retreating. The principle is that your sabbatical is time set aside for you and your own relationship with God. This means planned retreat you're your current responsibilities to refresh your own personal spiritual life in a way which is best for you. Careful discussion with your spouse/dependants (if any) is essential. A spouse should not be expected to run the parish(es) in your absence. It is also wise to discuss this retreat element with your spiritual director if you have one.
2. **Rest** - It is appropriate and necessary that the three months include some time of physical rest and refreshment.
3. **Learning** - This is the element of professional and ministerial development which might well take the greatest part of your three months, involving some element of study and theological reflection. It should be designed to widen horizons or deepen thinking in a particular area, rather than simply revisiting familiar territory. Most people have some idea of what they want to do with this time, but it is good to ensure that it is something which benefits a variety of needs including your own ministry now and in the future and the wider work of the church.
4. **Location** - a sabbatical will typically be taken away from the your normal ministry location and away from the vicarage/rectory for at least part of the

period. If part of the period is spent at home you should make arrangements to worship elsewhere rather than at the parish church. It is expected that most ministers should be able to be away for a substantial part of the period.

NB If your application is successful and you live in a Diocesan property which during the period of EMDL is to be left vacant for any time, you should contact the Property Department to ensure that this fact is noted for insurance purposes.

Deferral

Sabbatical applications that are approved but then deferred for a year will not be automatically carried over. You will have to update and re-submit your application form and obtain the relevant approvals again. Priority may be given to other applications that year that have not been deferred.

2. Sharing Your Plans

As you embark on your planning it is important to remember that your plans should be developed with others in the parishes you serve. This may mean conversations with clergy colleagues, churchwardens, PCC(s) and lay ministers. They may have thoughts to offer, and you may consider establishing a local support group to help you with your planning.

Sharing your plans locally is also vital because of the implications of your study leave for the parishes. This is not only an opportunity for your growth, but may also be an opportunity for others to grow as new people take on responsibilities and leadership roles, enabling them to grow in confidence and experience.

At the most basic level plans will need to be put in place to cover services, occasional offices and pastoral emergencies. You will need to seek the agreement of the PCC(s) to cover the costs of retired clergy and Readers from outside the parishes who provide cover while you are away. You are responsible for ensuring that cover is in place, and you may need to liaise with your Rural Dean, but you are not responsible for paying the costs of cover. The fact that you are not claiming expenses from the parishes while you are away should help offset these costs.

Arrange for calls to the vicarage/rectory phone line to be redirected to a parish contact (e.g. churchwarden, administrator, or office phone) during your EMDL, so that ministry enquiries are answered and your family are not expected to handle parish calls.

It is clear that the minister and parish must keep proper accounts in respect of an EMDL period so that all financial proprieties are fully observed.

3. Money Matters

The question of finance should not prevent you from considering the possibility of an EMDL. Your stipend continues to be paid during your study leave, but there may be additional expenses.

As part of the planning process you should prepare a budget taking into account such things as travel, accommodation, insurance, fees, books etc. All licensed clergy and Readers are eligible for an sabbatical allowance of up to £750. In addition there are a number of other sources of EMDL funding, and the following list may be helpful. When planning the timing of your sabbatical you may need to bear in mind that applying for grants can take time and you will need to factor this into your time frame.

- **St Boniface Trust:** <https://www.stbonifacetrust.org.uk/grants.php> The Trust is a small charity (Registration Number 309500) established to advance the Christian Religion in accordance with the principles of the Anglican faith in all parts of the world, especially for the provision of education and training of clergy and lay people by the award of scholarships and maintenance allowance or any purpose concerning their spiritual or temporal welfare.
- **Exeter Cathedral Minor Trusts:** <https://www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk/about-us/minor-trusts/> There are a number of Minor Trusts which are administered by Exeter Cathedral. These are almost all restricted to clergy or their dependents, or choristers at the Cathedral. The Trusts and a brief description of the terms under which they are able to support grant applications are listed below. Applications for each of the trusts are made usually in May each year and are considered by the Chapter who are the Trustees in their July meeting. The successful applications will be contacted shortly afterwards. Once the award has been made it must be drawn down by August the following year or it is lost. For further information please email pastor@exetercathedral.org.uk
- **St George's Trust:** <https://fsje.org.uk> The Trust gives grants to Anglican clergy, seminarians and students. The awards are currently worth up to £350. Each year the Trustees set a budget for the total amount that can be awarded and distribution is made until the limit is reached. We therefore encourage application early in the calendar year.
- **Women's Continuing Ministerial Education Trust:** <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/diocesan-resources/ministry/wcmet> The object of the WCMET is to further the Continuing Ministerial Education of women in the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church by means of grants to ordained women, female Accredited Lay Workers (including Church Army sisters) religious sisters (Lay or Ordained) who, in the opinion of the Trustee, are in need of financial assistance.

- **All Saints Educational Trust:** <https://aset.org.uk/about-the-trust/> not for Ordinands
- **Hockerill Educational Foundation**
<https://www.hockerillfoundation.org.uk/Grants.aspx> not for Ordinands
- **The Saint Gabriel's Trust:** <https://www.cstg.org.uk/grant-giving/grants/>
- **St Luke's College Foundation:** <https://stlukescf.org.uk>

General Clergy support is available here: <https://www.clergysupport.org.uk/>

4. Returning and Reflecting

The expectation is that on return from sabbatical, you write a short reflection or report for the Head of Ministry and the Bishop of St Germans.

It should include reference to what has been gained through the different elements of the sabbatical, your own theological reflections and personal learning arising from the time.

In addition to this brief reflection, some people will wish to prepare a longer more detailed report of their work for the benefit of others. This is welcomed and it is good to give some consideration to ways in which what has been learned may be of use and benefit to the wider church in the Deanery or the Diocese. If your EMDL has arisen out of your Ministerial Development Review (MDR), then the report will also be placed with the MDR papers.

It is important that you do not lose the value of this time through the busyness of parish life when you return. It may be helpful for the parishes to keep a diary of what has happened while you are away. This may make it easier to re-integrate into parish life on your return.

As you plan for your time away, so it is important that you plan for your return. It will be important to pace yourself, and parishes should be discouraged from putting everything on hold to await your return. You may also consider planning a lighter service load for a week or two after your return. Give space both to people you need to see and to yourself, think about how you can reflect on the experiences you have had and how to share them with people locally and integrate them into the life of the parishes

The Next Step

Once you have formulated your initial proposal and discussed it with the Head of Ministry you will be asked to write a more detailed proposal setting out the area of study, what you are hoping to achieve and how you will attain your goals. The Head of Ministry will consult with the Bishop of St Germans on behalf of the Episcopal College. If the Bishop is satisfied with your proposal your application will be approved.

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