

Clergy Sabbaticals.

Updated policy October 2025

Information concerning Sabbaticals

A sabbatical is a structured period of extended leave from regular ministerial duties designed for rest, renewal, retreat and resourcing. Whilst every diocese in the Church of England will award sabbaticals, it is not an entitlement or a right, and different dioceses have different eligibility criteria and processes. **Rather it is a gift offered by the Bishop**, after consultation with Archdeacons, to clergy who have requested a sabbatical or period of study leave.

There is a limit on the number of Sabbaticals we are able to offer in any one year. All applications will be considered by the meeting of Bishops and Archdeacons (B&As) upon recommendation from the Director of Parish Transition and Ministry Development.

1. Purpose

The prime purpose of a sabbatical is to step back aside and have space for prayerful reflection, professional development and personal enrichment. As such, **renewal**, **retreat**, **rest** and **resourcing** are all important elements to take into consideration when planning a sabbatical. It can be a significant time to reflect on your ministry, and on the way it is shaping you. For you to look back and look forward, as well as being an opportunity to give concentrated attention and sustained time to a subject or project which matters to you and your future ministry, and which may also be of benefit to others in the church.

Two options are available

- Long sabbatical: 3 months every 7 years
- Short sabbatical: 1 month each year, for 3 consecutive years

The purpose of a sabbatical may suggest a long or short option is more appropriate. If it is to live for a while in a different rhythm, then the three months should be taken as a block. However, there may be good reasons, given the focus of a particular sabbatical, to take the time in shorter instalments. **Please discuss these options with the Director of Parish Transition & Ministry Development at an early stage.**

2. Eligibility & criteria

- Clergy who have been ordained at least ten years are eligible to apply for a sabbatical.
- Prior service in a similar ministry in another diocese, church or ministry, will normally be recognised, at the discretion of the Bishop.
- Repeat sabbaticals can be applied for 7 years after a long sabbatical, and 3 years after the final month of a short sabbatical.
- Further to the eligibility criteria, Bishops & Archdeacons will consider the following:

- Impact of the overall number of sabbaticals upon the wider ministry of the whole Diocese.
- Overall length of ministry and service.
- Any previous leave granted for either study or sabbaticals, or any other discretionary purposes.
- Other mitigating circumstances.

4. Process and dates for 2027 Sabbaticals.

1 st January- March 31 st	Open for expressions of interest for sabbaticals to be taken in the following year (2027). Complete a short form . <i>Early conversations with the Director of PTMD are encouraged at this point.</i>
April	Bishops & Archdeacons consider expressions of interest, and respond inviting a full application . Conversations with Dir. PTMD around the more detailed planning of a sabbatical are recommended here.
1 st May – June 15 th	Full applications received, to be discussed at the next Bishops and Archdeacons meeting. (June 30 th 2026).
July	Final decisions communicated.

Both application forms (initial enquiry, and full application) are available on the diocesan website.

Please remember when making plans to:

- think them through carefully with any family, dependants and friends;
- discuss them with ministerial colleagues (e.g. Churchwardens, lay leaders, clergy colleagues);
- give thought about letting go of responsibilities and how to take them up again when re-entering the regular working context, perhaps finding creative ways to mark the return.

5. Cover

Once a sabbatical is offered, those taking the sabbatical will need to consult with their Area Dean and/or Minister Community Oversight Minister or line manager, to ensure that the wider church community is aware of the planned leave.

It is the responsibility of the person asking for the sabbatical to ensure that proper cover is in place for pastoral duties and services during the time of sabbatical.

It is expected that PCCs will assist in arranging cover and take responsibility for any costs of cover involved. It is good practice to ensure that any other ministry team members are fully

aware of plans well ahead of time and that where a first-post curate/Associate Minister is involved, that arrangements have been made for appropriate supervision for the period of the sabbatical.

6. Finance

Licensed, stipendiary clergy will be entitled to a grant of up to £500 – long sabbatical, or £200 – short sabbatical, (preferably claimed as a one-off grant). In addition, clergy may use their annual CMD grant towards sabbatical costs. All CMD grants are subject to the agreement of the Director of PTMD. Unused CMD grants cannot be carried over from a previous year.

There are additional sources of sabbatical funding, and the following list may be useful:

- The Ecclesiastical Insurance Group: [Ministry Bursary Awards Scheme](#)
The EIG Bursary Award Scheme is open to those in full time stipendiary ministry in a Christian church and can provide a grant towards a work-related project, contribute to a study course away from a demanding ministry, or support research in the UK or abroad. EIG write that “Due to the nature of their work and the demands of busy ministries, most members of the clergy rarely manage to make sufficient time to carry out imaginative projects to improve their ministries or to simply take time to refresh themselves through a spiritual journey. The Ministry Bursary Awards are here to help them achieve just that.”
Successful applicants have used their awards to help fund projects such as travel, study courses and pilgrimages, as well as periods of reflection and retreat. The closing date for applications for awards for each year is generally the end of September of the previous year.
- The [St. George’s Trust](#): Grants to people involved in the service of the Church of England and churches in communion with her, including clergy grants towards sabbatical expenses.
- Women may also make applications to: the [Women’s Continuing Ministerial Education Trust](#)
- The [American Memorial Chapel Travel grant](#) seeks to foster understanding and the exchange of ideas between members of the clergy in the UK and USA, by allowing a member of the clergy to take a study tour to the USA for up to four weeks.

Please do inform the Dir. PTMD of any other useful sources of funding you come across so that these can be shared more widely via this website.

7. Getting the most from your Sabbatical

As mentioned above, four important dimensions of a sabbatical are renewal, retreat, rest, and resourcing. While the word sabbatical is now used in secular institutions to mean only a time of professional development in the church, we should not lose sight of its roots in rest and renewal. Every sabbatical will be unique, but it is good to consider these four elements when preparing the proposal, and with short sabbaticals, balancing these four aims over multiple short sabbaticals.

7.1 Renewal

This is the element of professional and ministerial development which might well take the greatest part of your three months. It is usually the key element in the sabbatical. It will involve theological reflection, giving space to realigning vocation and ministry with personal identity and calling. A sabbatical provides space to develop, or return to personal discipleship outside of the identity of a ministry role.

7.2 Retreat

The sabbatical 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 some of your sabbatical should be set aside for you and your own relationship with God. This means retreating from church, work, family and responsibility to refresh your own personal spiritual life in a way which is best for you. It is wise to discuss this element with your spiritual director or mentor if you have one.

7.3 Rest

A sabbatical is not a holiday. Nonetheless the biblical pattern of Sabbath does include rest as a vital part of its very nature. It is, therefore, appropriate and necessary that the three month includes some time of physical rest and refreshment. And ideally plenty of fun and laughter! It is particularly wise to include a few days at the beginning of your time to adjust to a change of pace and prepare yourself to get the best from your sabbatical.

7.4 Resourcing

A sabbatical should involve some element of learning and development for the future. 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.

8. Feeding back

You will not be asked to produce a report, but you should review your learning, development, self-discovery, vocational insights with a suitable person soon after your sabbatical. A suitable person might be your line manager, area dean, archdeacon, or bishop. Please let the Director PTMD know who you will use and if a member of the coaching team would be helpful in debriefing. Likewise, incorporating it into ongoing MDR processes and your learning development plan is vital.

Please also remember, you do not have to have to justify your sabbatical with works. At all costs, avoid the temptation to fill up the time with a succession of 'projects'. Having said this, holiday or annual leave is distinct from the sabbatical and should not be counted as part of the sabbatical time. You may choose to plan your holiday at a separate time from the months given to the sabbatical.

Stuart Burns

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