

Extended Ministerial Development Leave

Guidelines for Clergy

Introduction

Extended Ministerial Development Leave (EMDL), sometimes referred to as sabbatical, is part of the church's provision for the ongoing learning and theological reflection of those in ordained ministry. It is a period of up to 3 months away from the parish or sphere of ministry.

The key to successful time out lies in achieving the right balance of rest, travel, study and reflection. It is not normally a time to pursue another degree or to escape from the difficulties in the parish, but rather is an opportunity to get away from the usual demands of ministry and find a renewal of vision and hope. It is a time when perspective and the Holy Spirit can come together and where, through nurturing and feeding the body and soul, we become more fully the people Christ has created us to be.

EMDL is also a kind of pilgrimage, with a change of pace and place. Jesus was always moving towards his Father - in prayer, in teaching and in his travelling. Those who travelled with him were also renewed in the journey, day by day. Walking with him during an extended time of reflection and spiritual encounter can lead to a real sense of renewal. A pilgrimage will bring us home – but now home will be much more than it was before.

It is important to develop a plan, but it is also important to be open minded, allowing for surprises and the possibility of new directions. You need to be flexible and to keep a sense of expectancy, to be intentional but not rigid, and perhaps to let go of an old dream if a new vision emerges.

Anyone considering EMDL should, in the first instance, make contact with the Ministry Training Team Leader.

1. Purpose

EMDL gives the opportunity for rest, renewal and re-creation so as to return refreshed in one's ministry.

It should combine the following elements:

- space for self and God
- refreshment
- personal and professional development
- study
- reflection

It is not an extra holiday, time in which to look for a new post, a chance to do the same job in a different location or an opportunity to recover following a time of prolonged illness or stress.

The overall orientation is that it should be of help in a person's ministry, either directly (if the emphasis is on study and skills), or indirectly (if the emphasis is more on personal development). The intention should be to make it possible for a person to enrich their spiritual life and ministry in a deeper way than is usually possible through a regular retreat, holiday or course of study. Whilst not the time to go looking for a new job, EMDL may also offer the opportunity for vocational discernment perhaps leading to a change of direction in ministry.

2. Eligibility

Clergy holding a licence in the Diocese may apply for Extended Ministerial Development Leave provided that:

- They have completed at least 11 years' ministry i.e. 7 years after serving a title post.
- They have not had a similar period of EMDL in the previous 10 years, in this or another diocese.
- They have been at least 3 years in their present post.
- They have not had a grant for a Major Academic Course within the previous 3 years.
- The Archdeacon and Churchwardens are in agreement.
- They have actively participated in ministerial development in the Diocese.

Priority will be given to those who have not had a previous time of EMDL.

The authority to grant EMDL lies with Bishop's Staff.

Planning your Extended Ministerial Development Leave

1. Factors to be considered

- family and personal circumstances
- the needs of the parish or ministerial context
- the deanery's/colleagues' ability to cope with cover, etc

Please note that it is the responsibility of the person requesting EMDL to arrange cover.

2. Process

EMDL is overseen by the Ministry Training Team Leader, who should be the first point of contact for clergy to discuss their plans. No expenditure should be committed to until the EMDL has been formally confirmed and the components approved by the Diocese in writing.

Applications for EMDL need to be made to the Ministry Training Team Leader at least nine months in advance of the proposed time of EMDL.

Preparation for, and taking of, EMDL will go through the following stages:

1. Have a conversation with the Ministry Training Team Leader.
2. Clarify with your Archdeacon and Churchwardens that they will support an application.
3. Discuss your plans with your PCC.
4. Identify a suitable mentor (see below).
5. Submit an application to the Ministry Training Team Leader
6. The application will be considered by the Bishop of Taunton, the relevant Archdeacon and the Ministry Training Team Leader. If the application is successful they will also decide on any financial grant the Diocese is able to give.
7. Result of EMDL application communicated to applicant.
8. If the application is successful make full arrangements for your EMDL and for cover in the parish.
9. Take EMDL.

Following EMDL, report back to the Ministry Training Team Leader, who may wish this feedback to be shared with other relevant groups. Report back to the parish as appropriate.

3. Making Plans

Planning with the Parish

The concept of EMDL is not equally understood by everyone. This is why you must plan well in advance and keep others informed of the whys and hows.

Planning should take into account your need and also the needs of the parish, or work setting. You should keep your Area Dean and clergy in your LMG fully in the picture and discuss with the Area Dean what help will be necessary from outside the parish to maintain a satisfactory level of worship and pastoral care. In general terms, the parish should pay for the taking of services while you are away, as a contribution to the EMDL.

The parish's experience of EMDL will be very different from a vacancy - after all you are going to come back! Efforts will have to be made to maintain the ministry in the parish without you. This means that and potentially training these people in advance. It is an opportunity to delegate some responsibilities and enable lay ministries.

The Wardens and the parish secretary/administrator, Readers and assistant clergy need to be clear about where their responsibilities lie. Much heartache can be avoided if each has received a complete list of who does what and when. Work out with the Wardens the agenda for any meetings and brief any others involved as to what action can be taken as a result of any decisions being made in a meeting. You cannot cover every problem beforehand, but you can develop adequate methods and assign people to handle such problems.

This can be a growing time both for you and your congregation and present opportunities for others to use their gifts and experience. Careful planning will help you all make the most of it. To help with this you might invite the PCC(s) to look at these questions with you.

1. According to the Biblical understanding of the Sabbath, how might our parish enjoy a Sabbatical?
2. What are the risks and dangers for the parish during the period of EMDL?
3. What are the opportunities for growth?
4. How can we (the parish) best prepare for EMDL?

Contingency plans in case of emergency are very important. These will vary according to the particular plan you have developed for your EMDL. You will need to decide the level of 'emergency' would necessitate contacting you and, in that case how you can be contacted and who can contact you.

It is important to plan for your return to the parish as well as for your departure. Both you and the parish will probably have moved on in some ways during the EMDL. You will need to think about the management of the tasks you have delegated during your absence and how you give the parish a chance to feed back their experiences during your absence, as well as how you will share your experiences and insights on your return. It may help to consider that the parish may fear you returning so energised, enthusiastic and ready for change that they might not be able to cope!

Personal Planning

Whatever your personal circumstances, consider those you are close to and how the time will impact on them. If appropriate, it should be possible for family members to be involved in some way, at least with a holiday during or at the end of the period.

Part of the EMDL is a break in routine, a relief from the chores. However routine domestic things will still need to be done and how this happens will need to be considered. For some part of your EMDL your spouse may end up being a 'lone parent', which may not be easy. Others will resent your absence if you have not made proper provision for things to be taken care of when you are not around.

If you plan to spend some of the time at home, ensure that you are at home for the family and yourself and not available once again to the parish at large.

Planning your time

a) Timing

Timing plays a crucial role in developing a good EMDL plan. You, your family (if applicable) and PCC will probably need a year or more to make a good plan. This is a time to involve others in your thinking and to build a consensus. Decide well beforehand with all involved:

- when you will be gone
- how long you will be gone
- how you plan to use the time

Those who are taking responsibilities in the parish during your absence will need to be clear about timing. Any family and friends will also need to prepare for times away from them.

In addition, you should plan to take some holiday time before and after your EMDL, so that you can shift gear. Give yourself enough time to unwind beforehand and do not arrive back home ready to jump onto the treadmill the next morning. Give yourself a few days to get yourself back into things.

b) Funding

The Diocese should provide some funding, usually up to one third of overall costs up to a maximum amount set annually. In 2026 this is £850.00. Additional funding can be sought from other grant making bodies. Usually funding agencies have strict terms under which they are prepared to support applications. Further details are available from the Ministry Training Team Leader.

c) Travel

An important aspect of EMDL is going away from the immediate context of your ministry. Travel is really a part of making pilgrimages. Learning, however, is not through travel alone – but rather through disciplined reflection on the journey.

d) Mentor/Consultant

You will need to arrange someone to help you reflect theologically on the external and internal pilgrimage you are making and to guide you. This should be someone with some expertise in the area you are intending to look at. It will be quite important to have someone who can help you plan what you will do and how you will spend your time, as well as helping you reflect on the experience.

The frequency of meeting between you and your mentor is a matter of mutual agreement but three times is probably the minimum: at the planning stage, during the time away, if appropriate, and upon its completion.

One issue you will need to address with your mentor, as well as the Ministry Training Team Leader and your spiritual director, is how the EMDL will be integrated into your continuing ministry. Renewal of vision is one thing, but integrating what has happened into your life and ministry is often quite a distinct challenge.

e) Accommodation

There are many options for accommodation, both specifically religious settings and other. Consideration should be given as to whether it will be most productive for you to spend time with a supportive community, alone, or a combination of the two.

f) Asking the Right Questions for You

EMDL is another way of enabling us to respond to the wonder and excitement of God moving in our lives. Some real benefits may be the blessings derived from a new sense of ministry, a stronger marriage, or a greater personal devotion to God. In planning 3 months away from parish duties it is important to consider how that time can most constructively be tailor made for you and your needs. As part of your planning you should consider the following questions:

- What opportunities do I want to embrace?
- How would I like the parish to benefit?
- What can be special for my family?

4. The Application Form

Please complete an application form once you have read these notes.

You will need to include sufficient detail in the application form in order that the Bishop's Staff can make a decision about your EMDL. However, you should not wait until all your plans are complete before filling in the form, if that might mean that you will miss the deadline for grant applications (see page 3). Please also note that submitting an application for EMDL does not guarantee that Bishop's Staff will grant permission or that they will not require amendments to the plan or its timing.

The completed application form should be sent to the Ministry Training Team Leader.

Further Advice

Please contact the Ministry Training Team Leader, Ronnie Crossman, for further advice on planning your EMDL.

Ronnie Crossman
Flourish House
Wells
BA5 1FD
Tel: 01749 685129
Email: ronnie.crossman@bathwells.anglican.org

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