

Diocese of St Albans
Council for Discipleship and Ministry
Extended Study Leave: Guidelines and Policy

This document sets out the St Albans diocesan policy regarding Extended Study Leave (ESL) – colloquially still sometimes referred to as a “sabbatical” – and explains the diocese’s recommended principles for making effective use of such time.

1. Purpose

The prime purpose of ESL is to do as the phrase suggests: to provide a three month period away from the pressures of everyday ministry in order to take time for personal study and development. Such development should be seen in the widest context, including some or all of: acquiring new knowledge and experience, honing existing skills, and refreshment in prayer and spirituality.

2. Eligibility

ESL is offered to all stipendiary clergy, including diocesan officers who are Licensed or Commissioned in order to carry out their role. Clergy are entitled to ESL every ten years providing that:

- They have been ordained for more than ten years;
- They have been in their present post for at least three years; and
- They are not within five years of retirement.

Prior service in a similar ministry in another diocese will normally be recognised.

ESL is of greatest benefit to those in active and healthy ministry; it is not the right course for those who are recuperating or recovering from any kind of crisis. In such circumstances, the Diocese will offer alternative support and provision.

3. Procedure

The procedure normally begins with a letter from the Director of Ministry indicating that the clergy person is eligible for ESL and inviting them to take up the opportunity. A particular timescale is given with regard to taking ESL. Normally this will be 18 months from the date of the letter in order to give sufficient time for planning and preparation. Once the clergy person has informed the Director of Ministry that they would like to take ESL in the timeframe indicated, the following steps need to be taken (approximately in this order):

- A meeting with the Director of Ministry (DOM) in order to begin planning the theme, content and structure of the ESL;
- Approval from the PCC that the clergy person may take ESL. While this should simply be a formality, in difficult circumstances the DOM may be invited to attend a PCC meeting;
- The arrangement of parish cover during the time away, especially regarding the supervision of any curate in training. This will involve consultation with the Rural/Area Dean. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of the person taking ESL to ensure that proper cover is in place;
- Detailed planning of the ESL including the drawing up of a schedule, itinerary and budget;

- Applications towards grant-making bodies to help cover the costs of the ESL (where applicable);
- Final approval. This involves completing the ESL Proposal Form and returning to the DOM. Once the proposal has been approved, this will release a grant from the Diocese towards the cost. Since some costs may need to be paid in advance of the ESL, it is recommended that the ESL Proposal Form is submitted at least three months prior to the beginning of the ESL.

Once the ESL is complete, the clergy person will be expected to report back to the DOM and the Bishop (see below).

4. Finance

ESL can be expensive, especially when extensive travel is involved, and so financial planning is important. Clergy should expect their ESL to cost in the region of £2,000 which is reckoned to be enough to pay for two to three months residence at an English theological college.

There is no objection to clergy spending more than this sum if additional money can be found from, for example, Ecclesiastical Insurance Group bursaries, trust fund grants, and your own resources. However, where the budgeted ESL costs are significantly more than the usual amount the Bishop may ask for assurance that the clergy person is not in danger of getting into financial difficulties.

The Diocese will normally make a grant towards ESL of up to £1,200 or half the budgeted cost, whichever is less. The remaining cost (less any other grants) should normally be covered equally by the individual and the PCC. However, the PCC would not normally be asked to contribute more than £500.

The usual personal training allowance may not be put towards the cost of ESL unless a specific training course forms part of the time away.

5. Getting the Most from Extended Study Leave

Because part of the purpose of ESL is to live for a while in a different rhythm, it is important to take the three months as a block. For exceptional reasons an ESL plan that involves taking two shorter instalments may be approved, provided that they are not more than a few months apart. It is highly unlikely that a plan involving three or more instalments will be approved.

It is much easier to keep clear of parish entanglements if part or all of the time is physically away from the parish, but this is not always possible or desirable. Commitments to family must take a high priority, and there is no objection in principle to ESL being based largely at home, although careful thought must be given as to how the “absence” from the parish is maintained.

Leaving and re-entering regular ministry must be considered carefully. This is especially the case with regard to “clearing the desk” before ESL and potentially returning to a “backlog” of demands. It is good to allow a few clear days at either end of the ESL to make time and space for this. It is also wise to think in advance about how it will feel to let go of all the normal ministerial duties, especially when it is borne in mind how much a clergy person’s identity can be bound up with the role.

6. Elements of Extended Study Leave

ESL varies greatly and each clergy person’s time away will be unique. Although the word “sabbatical” is no longer used, the church should not lose sight of its roots in rest and renewal. Thus, it is crucial not to fill up three months with an endless succession of activities, no matter how worthy and worthwhile they may seem. Nevertheless, ESL is part of Continuing Ministerial Development, and it is expected

that the time away will enable clergy to grow and develop personally and professionally. Thus, it is expected that ESL will incorporate three elements.

Rest and Refreshment

ESL is not an opportunity for an extended vacation! 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. This may involve devoting time to – or maybe taking up for the first time – a relaxing hobby or activity such as painting, gardening, cookery, sailing or playing a musical instrument. It is particularly wise to begin with a few days to “recover” from the demands of ministry and to adjust to a change of pace.

While annual leave should be kept distinct from ESL, in some instances – especially when foreign travel is involved – it would be foolish not to combine ESL with a holiday. In such a case, the holiday component should ideally come at the beginning of the ESL so that the subsequent “project” is not interrupted. When ESL does incorporate a holiday element, this should be discussed with the DOM early in the planning process. The ESL grant does not normally cover any specific holiday costs.

Broadening or Deepening

This is the “project” element of the ESL. It involves personal, professional and ministerial development, and will generally take the greatest part of the three months. While it won’t necessarily involve formal studying, it will involve some element of learning. This may take one of two forms – or occasionally both.

The project may involve some “broadening” of the clergy person’s experiences and horizons. This would be the case particularly when the ESL involves learning about something which is completely new for that individual. An example would be visiting a church in a different context, culture or country.

Alternatively the project may focus more on “deepening”. This would be the case when the clergy person already has an interest in a particular subject area and would like to devote time and energy to exploring it further. One example would be studying a theological topic in more detail than is possible in daily ministry. Another would be improving a particular ministerial skill or expertise.

Whatever project is chosen, it should be designed to widen horizons or deepen thinking, rather than simply revisiting familiar territory. While most clergy have some idea of what they want to do with this time, the MDO can help to clarify the precise nature of the ESL project.

It should be noted that ESL should not be used solely for completing dissertations for higher degrees. While some time may be given to “writing up”, the purpose of ESL is wider than this. No more than half the time should normally be used in this way.

Getting Back In Touch with God

Clergy should set aside some time during the ESL for nurturing their own relationship with God. For some clergy this will involve going on a “Retreat”, but there are other ways of doing this including Christian festivals, pilgrimages or time spent living in community.

This is often a good way to complete the three months away as it gives time to “process” the experiences of the ESL in a Godly and reflective way before re-entering regular life.

While the MDO can help with this element of the time away, clergy are also encouraged to discuss this element with their spiritual director, if they have one.

7. Extended Study Leave Report

There are two views regarding ESL reports. On the one hand, ESL is time away from work and clergy should not be burdened with having to produce lengthy written documents. On the other, since the Diocese and PCC are contributing financially, it is reasonable to expect some kind of “outcome”.

In practice the only requirement is that clergy bring back *something* from their time away. Ideally this should be something that would be of interest and benefit to others in ministry, but this is not always possible. Examples would include: a short written report, a presentation that could be shared at a Deanery Synod, or the fruits of a creative project (such as art or poetry). The key point is that whatever is brought back demonstrates what has been gained as a result of the time away.

1st January 2015