



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Sabbaticals for priests

27 March 2014

Purpose

To promulgate a policy and procedures relating to the granting of sabbaticals to priests.

Application

This policy applies to diocesan priests in the diocese of Melbourne. They are to be read in conjunction with the 'Guidelines relating to taxation and other matters concerning a sabbatical'.

Nature of a sabbatical

1. Sabbaticals, or Sabbatical Leave, are distinguishable from long service leave or a prolonged holiday for health reasons. A Sabbatical is a prolonged time given to one's continuing education or improvement, either spent overseas or in one's own country. Such Sabbaticals are common in the academic world and in various professions. Sabbaticals have been common for some time among religious priests, but not so much among diocesan priests.
2. There has been a development in the understanding of Sabbaticals for priests in the documents of the Church. The Vatican Decree of the Ministry and Life of the Priests talked only of study and some organizations in the priest's own territory. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* gave more emphasis to specific times for study workshops and reflection sessions, but did not go further than that. The Congregation for the Clergy publication, *The Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, was much more explicit, even to using the very word 'Sabbatical'.
3. Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests
 1. Para 19: To facilitate study and the more effective learning of methods of evangelization and the apostolate, every attention is to be given to providing priests with suitable helps. Examples of these are the organization, according to the conditions of each territory, of courses or congresses, the setting up of centres designed for pastoral studies, the founding of libraries and the proper direction of studies by suitable persons.
4. Pastores Dabo Vobis
 - Para 72: The intellectual dimension of formation needs to be continually fostered through the priest's entire life, especially by a commitment to study and a serious and disciplined familiarity with modern culture.
 - Para 80: Study workshops and sessions for reflection in common are also important. They help to prevent cultural impoverishment or getting entrenched in one's ways, even in the pastoral field, as a result of mental laziness. They help to foster a greater synthesis between the various elements of the spiritual, intellectual and apostolic life. They open minds and hearts to the new challenges of history and to the new appeals which the Spirit addresses to the Church.
5. Congregation for the Clergy — Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests
 - Para 83: Notwithstanding pastoral urgency, and precisely to face up to problems, such as routine, physical exhaustion or psychological fatigue, 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.

Hence, a sabbatical is an extended time for continuing personal and ministerial formation, away from the priest's normal assignment. It is not vacation time nor is

it Long Service or Study Leave, but has as its focus a deepening of Theological understanding, of pastoral skills and personal and spiritual growth. It may involve participation in a specific sabbatical program or be developed by a priest to suit his own ministerial needs.

Sabbatical arrangements

The following norms shall apply:

1. Priests are to be encouraged to take sabbatical leave every 7 to 10 years. The length is by negotiation: three months is usual.
2. It is not a right and is made available at the discretion of the Archbishop.
3. Applications for Sabbatical Leave are to be made at least six months in advance, to the Archbishop. As much detail as possible should be given in writing. Prior to application, priests are encouraged to contact the Director of Continuing Education of Clergy to seek assistance in preparing proposals for submission. The application needs to refer to the Code of Canon Law¹ to indicate that the application is made to fulfil the canonical obligation for ongoing formation.
4. Because full-time Supplies are so difficult to gain, as far as possible, each Deanery might cover for the absence of the priest on weekdays so that a weekend Supply only is needed. The person going on Sabbatical is responsible for arranging weekend supplies; the nearby priests could be invited to do funerals or weekday Mass as possible.
5. The priest on Sabbatical Leave will draw his remuneration in the usual way.
 - a. The weekend Supply will be paid from the Diocesan Fund for the Education of Priests.
 - b. The Archbishop has set an upper limit of \$20,000 per priest for Sabbatical expenses (course of studies, board and lodging, and travel costs). Details of all expenses incurred are to be documented and must relate directly to the purpose to the sabbatical.
6. On return from Sabbatical Leave, priests are asked to prepare a written evaluation of their experience with the assistance of the Director of Continuing Education of Priests. On completion, priests will submit this evaluation to the Archbishop.
7. The applicant must acknowledge that he will ensure that the sabbatical payment is expended in accordance with this policy.

¹ Canon 279#1: Clerics are to continue their sacred studies, even after ordination to the priesthood.

#2: Priests are to attend pastoral courses arranged for them after their ordination, in accordance with the provisions of particular law (laws and decrees of the Archdiocese). At times determined by the same law, they are to attend other courses, theological meetings or conferences, which offer them an occasion to acquire further knowledge of the sacred sciences (theology, scripture, moral theology, philosophy, patristics, church history, etc.) and of pastoral methods.

#3: They are also to seek a knowledge of other sciences, especially those linked to the sacred sciences, particularly insofar as they benefit the exercise of the pastoral ministry (counselling, psychology, education).

Canon 384: He (the Diocesan Bishop) is to have a special concern for the priests, to whom he is to listen as helpers and counsellors. He is to defend their rights and ensure that they fulfill the obligations proper to their state. He is to see that they have the means and institutions needed for the development of their spiritual and intellectual life.