



Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

CLERGY SABBATICAL GRANT PROGRAM

PURPOSE: Jesus took himself apart often in his ministry, to pray, to be with God, and to be renewed. The Clergy Sabbatical Program sponsored by the Bishop seeks to ensure that clergy of the Diocese of Massachusetts have an opportunity for a time of Sabbath, a renewal of spirit, and a reaffirmation of life with God, as well as opportunities for creativity and discovery for both the clergyperson and the community of ministry with which they serve.

PRINCIPLES: The following grounding principles of the Clergy Sabbatical Program inform both the selection of participants and the process:

- ~ A sabbatical and the preparation for it are times of intentional, focused reflection and renewal for the clergyperson and, hopefully, also for their placement for ministry: parish, mission, chaplaincy, or diocesan staff position.
- ~ The actual shape of the sabbatical time is determined by the specific vocational and personal needs and desires of the clergyperson and their family. How a congregation, or a faith or diocesan community uses this time is also determined by that congregation's or place of ministry's particular situation and desires.
- ~ Both the clergyperson and the community of faith that the clergyperson serves with should commit to a process of mutual discernment.
- ~ Clergy should be willing to collaborate with the lay leaders, colleagues, and consultants in discerning needs and focus.
- ~ A spirit of openness to the grace and possibilities of change and renewal, the gifts of the Holy Spirit should guide the sabbatical process.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS AND CRITERIA FOR SELECTION:

All priests canonically resident in the Diocese of Massachusetts who are and have been in active, ordained ministry for a minimum of five years, have been in their current ministry for a minimum of five years, and have not had a sabbatical in the past five years are eligible. Deacons who serve full-time on Diocesan staff will also be eligible.

Part-time priests who meet the above requirements may be eligible for a grant on a prorated basis.

Clergy who have served as interims for five years or more also need sabbaticals but may not be able to take one while serving as an active interim. This grant is also available to interim clergy who want to take a sabbatical between calls and have served five years or more with no break from ministry longer than six months. An interim clergyperson's sabbatical might look different, with no parish or faith community's component, but is an important time of personal rest and renewal.

The applications are reviewed and selected by the Bishop's Clergy Sabbatical Committee. The program is not able to fund terminal sabbaticals. Clergy who receive significant outside funding (such as a Lilly Grant) are not eligible.

SCOPE AND DESIGN: The number of clergy and ministries that the program can assist in any one year is limited. Grants will be awarded based on financial need, evidence of collaboration between the clergyperson and lay leadership, and a well-thought-out sabbatical plan that will increase health in the clergyperson's spiritual, emotional, relational, vocational, and/or recreational life. The annual budget for grants is \$25,000 and some years we receive as many as ten applications.

Those who receive significant outside funding (such as a Lilly Grant) will be asked to relinquish diocesan grants. This program does not fund terminal sabbaticals. It is diocesan policy that clergy will work in their current settings for at least a year after they return from sabbatical.

The basic elements of the Bishop's Clergy Sabbatical Program include three distinct phases:

Phase 1: Planning for Sabbatical and Preparing the Application

Phase 1 is the preliminary work done to prepare to submit an application. The clergy applicant determines a preliminary focus for the sabbatical, along with an estimate of funding needed as well as resources available outside of the diocesan grant. This outline for the sabbatical may or may not change as the planning proceeds.

1. The clergy applicant will involve the other leadership of their ministry early in the process.
2. The committee strongly recommends appointing a Sabbatical Committee with lay leaders from among their ministry to help with planning and communication. The appointing of the Sabbatical Committee, whose work includes planning for the clergy and ministry community, is made in consultation with the leadership of the ministry. For clergy in non-parochial positions, this committee may be made up of colleagues or members of a ministry's governing board. For interim clergy, we suggest a committee made up of clergy colleagues and lay leaders with whom they have served. If the clergy is a member of the Diocesan Staff, the Sabbatical Committee is appointed by the Bishop after consulting with the clergyperson.
3. The lay leadership of the ministry should note that the Bishop's Clergy Sabbatical Grant is not able or intended to replace the parish's obligation to set aside money each year to help fund a clergy sabbatical.
4. The Bishop requires that each clergyperson's Letter of Agreement include a provision that the vestry and/or lay leadership will set aside a certain amount of money each year to help fund the cost of the sabbatical and to pay for clergy supply coverage during the sabbatical.

5. Congregations and ministries must honor their clergyperson's Letter of Agreement to the best of their ability.
6. Application forms are available on the diocesan website. Clergy who are interested in applying to the Clergy Sabbatical Program are invited to contact members of the Diocesan Sabbatical Committee to learn more about the application process and what a successful sabbatical might look like.
7. Clergy and lay representatives of the faith community or ministry are expected to attend the Annual Sabbatical Dinner with the Bishop in the year of the planned sabbatical and the year after. Both those returning from sabbatical and those in the planning phase will be asked to gather as a group for mutual support, reflection, and sharing of ideas and resources. The representatives of the faith community/ministry may include wardens and Sabbatical Committee chairpersons.

The Diocesan Sabbatical Committee and the Bishop will issue an invitation to this gathering, held usually in January.

Phase 2: Sabbatical

The suggested time frame for the Sabbatical is three months. There will be some variations to this time frame depending upon clergy vacation schedules and other agreements which might supplement the three months or cause the clergyperson to take it over a one- or two-year period rather than as one uninterrupted period.

Sabbatical time does not replace vacation time. Clergy can and should take the vacation time, continuing education time, and other time away as outlined in their Letter of Agreement in a sabbatical year, in addition to the sabbatical time. These can be added to the three months of sabbatical time in some combination for a lengthier time away, to be determined of course in conversation with lay leadership, or taken at another point in the year.

The clergyperson should clearly outline if and when she/he is to be contacted in the case of any significant or critical event during the sabbatical, and she/he shall define what comprises such events.

Phase 3: Reconnecting

A critical part of the program is an intentional time of reconnecting and debriefing to share learning and insights.

It is expected that the specifics or method of this re-entry for the congregation and clergy will be part of the sabbatical plan. Sample liturgies for leave-taking and re-entry are available upon request. The clergy are encouraged to meet with their Sabbatical Committees to assist with the process of re-entry and integration of the sabbatical.

APPLICATION: Applications are to be submitted by Friday, October 24, 2025, for sabbaticals in 2026.

To apply, please fill out and submit [this form](#). Note: the electronic form must be signed by the clergyperson, warden(s), and clerk. There is an option to “save and resume later” at the end of the form. Use this to share your application with one another while it’s in process. For help with the electronic form, please contact Margaret Lias, Coordinator for Governance and Grants at mlias@diomass.org.

Notice of acceptance will be given by November 21, 2025. Questions may be directed to The Rev. Thea Keith-Lucas, Co-Chair, or The Rev. Sarah Robbins-Cole, Co-Chair, Diocesan Sabbatical Grant Committee, at theakl@mit.edu or sjrobbinscole@gmail.com.

Members of the Clergy Sabbatical Grant Committee:

The Rt. Rev. Julia E. Whitworth
The Rev. Thea Keith-Lucas, Co-Chair
The Rev. Sarah Robbins-Cole, Co-Chair
The Rev. Anoma Abeyaratne
The Rev. Edgar Gutierrez-Duarte

Administrative Assistance:

The Rev. Margaret E. Lias, Coordinator for Governance and Grants

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION BY CLERGY AND LAY LEADERS

Suggested questions for the Clergy

- ~What particular aspect(s) of ministry have you found life-giving in the past few years?
- ~What aspect of your ministry has drained or depleted you?
- ~Is there something other than years of service that is prompting you to request a sabbatical at this particular time?
- ~When you think about the possibility of a significant time away from your position, what do you fear? What excites you?
- ~As you look forward to the next five to seven years of ministry, what do you long for?
- ~How will a sabbatical affect your family or household?
- ~What themes, questions, or areas of study do you intend to pursue during your sabbatical?
- ~How do you see these themes, questions, or areas of study relating to your current ministry at this particular time?
- ~What is your sense of the vestry's and wardens'/ lay leadership's commitment to this program?
- ~In what ways do you think your community of ministry will benefit from your sabbatical?

Suggested questions for the vestry/ lay leaders or sabbatical planning committee

- ~What aspect of life within the congregation or ministry community has been particularly fruitful or rich in the past few years?
- ~What aspect of the congregation/ministry is in need of revitalization?
- ~When you think about your clergy's absence for an extended period of time, what do you fear? What excites you?
- ~What themes, questions, or areas of reflection might the congregation/ministry pursue during the clergyperson's sabbatical?
- ~If you could recommend opportunities for rest, renewal, and revitalization for your clergyperson during sabbatical, what might they be? What prompts your answer?
- ~In what ways do you hope the congregation/ministry will benefit from the sabbatical?
- ~What do you need from your bishop, diocesan staff, dean, or neighboring congregations/allied ministries in order to enter into the sabbatical time without anxiety?