

## The Elizabeth Pathway at St Hild

From September 2025, St Hild are participating in a national pilot of a new ordination training pathway for 'seasoned saints', who are willing to offer self-supporting ministry as a priest or distinctive deacon in their local context.

Through the first of two years, participants on the Elizabeth Pathway will undertake a programme of theological and missional study at St Hild, while also working with the vocations team in their home Diocese, preparing them to attend Stages One and Two of the national discernment process. Should they be recommended for ordination at Stage Two by the summer of the first year, they will go on to a second year of focused studies with St Hild, including our tailored residential programme 'Preparation for Ordination.' This pilot will run for three full cohorts, up to and including admissions in autumn 2027.

St Hild's Elizabeth Pathway has been designed in partnership with the vocations team in Sheffield Diocese; it is open to potential ordinands in any diocese, who meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Candidates must be aged over 53 years of age at the start of training, and normally no more than 65 years of age.[1] Where expressly authorised by the ordaining bishop or his/her delegate and agreed by the Ministry Development Board, candidates up to the age of 70 may be eligible, provided that they may reasonably be expected to serve for at least three years in ordained ministry post licensing.
- Candidates must have significant prior ministry and/or leadership experience, including experience of being in structures of accountability. Typically, this will have involved some form of entrepreneurial and empowering team leadership, strategic/financial management, or position of seniority in organisations such as a trade union, though this may take many forms and these examples are not exclusive.
- Candidates must be sponsored for training by a diocese of the Church of England. By agreement with the national Ministry Development Board, such sponsorship is at the discretion of the diocesan vocations team, on the following conditions on the next page.

[1] In Sheffield Diocese, this pathway is NOT currently authorised for candidates under the age of 55 or over the age of 65 at the start of training.

*That the candidate:*

- has been a Christian for at least five years, with sustaining habits of prayer and Bible reading
- has been active in some form of lay ministry in their local church for a minimum of two years, to be attested by a brief statement from the incumbent (or from a suitable alternative) of the candidate's current ministry and how it is being received
- is, or is willing to become, a baptised and confirmed member of the Church of England
- is willing to offer non-stipendiary ministry as priest or distinctive deacon in a local context, where they expect to be able to serve for at least three years post licensing
- will have been approved by the sponsoring Bishop (or their delegate) and interviewed by them (or their delegate) and before they commence the first year
- will have completed by the commencement of training all safeguarding requirements normally required prior to Stage One discernment, and be committed to ensuring good safeguarding practice, with appropriate understanding of what this means for the roles they already fulfil
- will have received from the Diocese an enhanced DBS with barring before they commence the first year
- has demonstrated 'entry level' evidence of some aspects of the Discernment Qualities, and is able to satisfy the DDO that they may reasonably be expected to inhabit within two years the Qualities at the level required for the point of ordination

Students joining the St Hild pathway will be able to access study through any one of our four centres (Lincoln, Sheffield, Mirfield and Online), and will attend most of our residential training programme for ordinands (5 weekends in Year One; 6 weekends plus Easter School in Year Two).

Our staff will work together with the candidate to identify the most suitable programme of study to meet national formational requirements, taking prior learning and experience into consideration; those who continue to the second year of the course will be offered the opportunity to take a Durham University Award in Theology, Ministry and Mission at an appropriate academic level (usually one of the Foundation Award, Graduate Certificate or Postgraduate Certificate). During the first year of training, Elizabeth candidates will undertake a supervised parish placement (normally but not always in their 'home' parish) agreed with their diocesan vocations team; in the second year there will be an additional short-term missional placement.

Elizabeth Pathway students will be supported throughout their St Hild programme by our dedicated 'Elizabeth Tutor', Revd Gill Briggs; the programme begins with a 24-hour formational retreat. Peer support will also be provided through discrete 'Elizabeth' student prayer-groups. Those with specific learning needs such as dyslexia, will be able to access funding for specialist support on the same basis as ordinands on standard pathways.

As with any part-time course of study or training, candidates will be taking on a demanding workload, and will need to give consideration to how they will manage their time in order to honour their other commitments, particularly to regular spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study, as well as to their and their families' need for rest and recreation, and prior vocations to work, parish and neighbourhood. Though stretching, it is possible to complete part-time ordination training, including the Elizabeth Pathway, while continuing to work full-time. Candidates are encouraged to assess whether any prior commitments should be laid aside for the duration of training. The required prior leadership experience of candidates for this pathway is likely to mean that they will bring mature gifts of time- and boundary-management, and in the dedicated 'Elizabeth pathway' formational retreat, they will be encouraged to reflect on how these gifts may be applied to training and potential ministry.

Should any Elizabeth Pathway participant not be approved for ordination training at either Stage One or Stage Two, the diocesan vocations team will continue to work with and support them, seeking to discern whether God is calling them at this time to some other form of lay ministry. Participants will be welcome to continue, if they wish, with the remainder of the first-year training programme, and our Elizabeth Tutor will continue to offer pastoral support.