

Full-Time Contextual Training

Overview

Full-time contextual training is the fastest-growing mode of ordination training in the Church of England. Over 75 people have now trained with St Hild College by this route.

“Full-time training with St Hild is a great opportunity to listen and learn from context: rigour, prayer and action woven together, with enabling support all the way.”

- Rt Rev Helen-Ann Hartley, Bishop of Newcastle

The Formation Experience

The formation experience involves:

- Normally 16 to 20 hours per week in a local mission context. Ordinands also undertake at least one shorter additional placement to give experience of a contrasting context or area of ministry.
- Weekly study at one of our centres: St Hild Sheffield (Monday daytime); St Hild Mirfield (Wednesday evenings); St Hild Lincoln (Saturdays and Thursdays both online and/or in person); St Hild Online (Thursday evenings, plus additional face-to-face seminars) and dedicated study time in the week. Where ordinands require greater learning support or additional academic development opportunities, more study time can be arranged.
- Residential community: six weekends each year, plus our annual Easter school week.

This form of training is suitable for all ordinands who can be considered for residential training, especially those looking to train full-time while remaining in their current homes.

Why Train Contextually with St Hild?

Key strengths of full-time contextual training include:

- Grow the character and skills that support future mission and ministry.
- Be formed by a rhythm of teaching and practice inspired by New Testament learning patterns on mission, and well-suited to further in-service learning.
- Experience formation as a fully active and empowered learner alongside others.
- Build a relational network that can support future mission and church planting.
- Study the same level and pace as residential training with a high-quality St Hild academic team.
- Learn in a way which is applied to local contexts, so you can make new connections and reach your academic potential.
- Build foundations which can be developed through lifelong learning, or on our theological educator pathway.
- Share in the unique breadth and character of the St Hild community, drawing together Church traditions, ages, types of training (full-time and part-time together) and learning alongside other denominations.
- Join in residential times at the Mirfield home of the Community of the Resurrection.

Specialist Tracks: Church Planting and Mission on the Margins

St Hild tracks are peer learning communities for those currently serving, or wanting to develop experience, in church planting or mission in marginal contexts. Membership of a track is optional, and students may opt to be involved in both tracks. Each track combines a peer learning group for reflection on practical ministry, a bespoke academic pathway and opportunities for individual mentoring with leading practitioners. Our hope, through these tracks, is to raise up expert practitioners for our region and grow a network of learning and support that will enable a sustainable mission in the years to come.

How does the process work?

The process for considering full-time training works as follows:

- Attend a St Hild Open Day, find out [how to book here.](#)
- Receive an offer, including details of your academic pathway with us.
- We are happy to look with you and your diocese at potential contextual placements. This can be done before a final choice has been made about training, so that you have as much information as possible when making your decision.
- Initial conversation with potential placement, facilitated by a St Hild Core Tutor.
- Confirm details of placement and training pathway, subject to recommendation by BAP and acceptance of a place at St Hild.

Practical Questions

How does academic study work alongside ministry in a local context?

All forms of training for ministry include some placement experience, but at St Hild involvement in mission is at the heart of training. Many students have said that this balance of learning and doing helps motivate them in their academic work, keeping it grounded and enabling transformative theological reflection. Students on this pathway tend to achieve very well academically, according to the appropriate level for them, with some going on to further academic research or teaching in their field.

Our study pathways are flexible in order to work alongside contextual experience. While some modules focus on the classic academic disciplines, other modules overlap with placement experience so that ministry is enriched by study and reflection in context is acknowledged and accredited. For students requiring additional learning support, or on our theological educator pathway, additional study time can be provided.

What exactly will I study?

Your academic programme of study will be decided by St Hild in conversation with you. We do not have a 'one size fits all' study programme but will work to identify the best route for you based on your prior study and experience, the nature of your vocation, and in response to any particular training needs identified. You might study towards an undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate award over two or three years, completing anything from the Common Awards suite which includes the Higher Education Diploma, BA, Graduate or Post-Graduate Diploma, or MA. [See Durham Common Awards here.](#)

Whatever your academic programme, a significant portion of it will relate to reflecting on what you are learning through experience, both in your placement/s and in the shared life of worship and prayer. More traditional academic studies will include modules in biblical study, church tradition (including worship and doctrine), and ministry and mission. Studies are organised in modules which carry ten or twenty credits; the typical programme of study is made up of between 80 and 120 credits per academic year. For students requiring additional learning support, additional study time can be provided.

What support is there for me and my family?

Every full-time contextual ordinand has a dedicated St Hild Core Tutor who oversees the arrangement and ongoing review of their context. Full-time ordinands also meet monthly with a peer group for contextual reflection as part of our formation programme. All our ordinands are part of a prayer group and the wider St Hild community of support, prayer and mission. In their context, each full-time contextual ordinand has a placement supervisor who is responsible for effective learning and growth, and regular theological reflection. The local context is a place of community and support for ordinands and, where appropriate, for their families. In our experience, full-time contextual ordinands grow significantly in their capacity to manage complexity, connect with support structures, and flourish in a local context – all of this prepares them well for curacy and future ministry.

“Training in context has been a blessing in every way. The opportunity to experience mentoring within a context has enabled me to reflect upon my academic learning in a truly applicable way. The range of experiences has accelerated and deepened my understanding of ministry. I could not have hoped for a more life-giving mode of training; filled with the privilege of seeing God at work.

The incredible diversity of students at St Hild results in a wealth of peer support through formal prayer groups and informal spiritual guidance. For me, the opportunity to be guided by one of the Community of the Resurrection has been a key part of my time.

If, as I began my time with St Hild College, I could have seen how much I would have been shaped and grown I would not have believed it. I near the end of my time with St Hild College with a broad and deep theological underpinning, an understanding of the importance of missional leadership and with the blessing of being equipped to begin the next part of my journey with Christ.” -Michelle, full-time contextual ordinand alumna

Our Contextual Team



Rev Shona Shaw oversees ordinand formation in Mission and Evangelism at St Hild Mirfield and St Hild Online and in our cross-college ordinand residential programme. She trained for Baptist ministry at Regents Park College, Oxford whilst completing an MTh in Applied Theology. She has served rural and urban multi-cultural churches in Bradford, Oxford and Leeds, developing team ministry and congregational responses to mission.

Prior to ministry, Shona studied Music and English Literature at Durham, before moving to London to complete post grad studies in vocal performance and qualify as an occupational therapist. Shona currently divides her time between St Hild and a charity leading participatory research with neurodiverse young people and their families in West Yorkshire.



Rev Dr Mark Vasey-Saunders initially studied English Literature and History at York St John and worked with students in Ukraine before training for ordained ministry at Cranmer Hall in Durham. He was ordained in 2001 and has ministered in several dioceses in the Northern Province of the Church of England.

He completed his PhD part-time at Durham whilst working successively as a University Chaplain, Vicar, and Pioneer Minister, and joined the staff of St Hild College when it was founded in 2017. Initially working as an Academic Tutor, from 2024 he became the Centre Head for St Hild Sheffield. Mark teaches Postgraduate study skills, Ethics and Anglicanism. Mark is married to Leah, who is the Vicar of Lancaster Priory Church and Chair of On Fire Mission, and they have four children.