

ONESPIRIT INTERFAITH FOUNDATION

The Sylvan Pathway

Curriculum Guide

Ministry Training & Spiritual Development

Retreat-based · Florence House, East Sussex



OneSpirit
Interfaith Foundation

2026 to 2028

What This Guide Contains

This guide sets out what happens across the two years of the Sylvan Pathway: the shape of each gateway, the ceremonies you will write, the strands that run through everything, and what each stage asks of you.

We publish it because a two-year formation is a serious undertaking, and you deserve to be able to picture it before you commit to it. What we cannot put on paper is what will happen in you as you move through it. That part is yours.

Why We Start With Your Own Life

The same question, six times

The Strands That Run Through Everything

Biography, ceremony, wisdom traditions, accompaniment, practice, community, creativity

How a Gateway Works

The retreat, the three Enquiry Circles, and spiritual accompaniment

Writing a Ceremony

What is asked, and the seven stages

1 Conception and Birth *November 2026*

2 Childhood *March 2027*

3 Adolescence *June 2027*

4 Marriage and Relationship *November 2027*

5 Dying, Death and Funeral Work *March 2028*

6 Being in Community *June 2028*

Vow Taking and Ordination

What this training asks of you, assessment, and key dates

Why We Start With Your Own Life

The Sylvan Pathway walks the whole arc of a human life. You begin at conception and birth. You move through childhood, then adolescence. In the second year you travel through adulthood and intimacy, then dying and death, and finally into community and public ministry.

You walk that arc twice. Once through your own story, and once as the minister who will accompany other people through theirs.

It would be possible to train ministers without going near their biography. We could teach the structure of a funeral, the shape of a wedding, a decent model of listening, and send people out. We do not, and the reason becomes obvious the first time somebody sits with a family the week after a death.

If you have never looked honestly at your own grief, you will find yourself managing other people's. If you have never met the child you were, you will struggle to sit with someone else's early wounding without flinching, or without hurrying them towards comfort for your sake rather than theirs.

There is an old instruction carved into the temple at Delphi. *Know thyself*. Almost every wisdom tradition says a version of it. We take it literally, and we take it as vocational training rather than self-improvement.

Look at what each gateway is actually asking:

- ◆ **Conception and Birth.** You can't welcome a child into the world if you've never looked at how you arrived in it.
- ◆ **Childhood.** You can't understand how you move through the world until you look at the years that taught you how.
- ◆ **Adolescence.** You can't walk beside someone becoming themselves if you've never revisited your own becoming.
- ◆ **Marriage and Relationship.** You can't hold people's vows if you've never examined what you bring to love.
- ◆ **Dying, Death and Funerals.** You can't sit with the bereaved if you've never turned towards your own losses.
- ◆ **Being in Community.** You can't stand in public as a minister if you've never looked at what power does in your hands.

Six thresholds, and the same question six times.

So the training is not preparation for ministry that happens before the real thing. It is the receiving that makes ministry possible. And the proof of it is concrete. **By the end of two years you will have written a ceremony for every threshold of a human life.**

The Strands That Run Through Everything

The gateways give the training its sequence. Seven strands give it its substance, and each one runs through all six gateways rather than belonging to any single retreat.

Biography. Your own life, explored as sacred ground. We work with the biography and the mythology of your own journey, looking at the archetypal shape of each stage of life as it actually happened to you.

Ceremony and Ritual. The craft of ceremony, both to illuminate everyday form and for its capacity to express Spirit. The most honest route into creating ceremony runs through your own biography, so this strand and the first are woven together throughout.

Wisdom Traditions. How the world's traditions approach the thresholds of a life. From birth through to death and beyond, you encounter the teachings and practices woven into each stage, and consider what they offer your own exploration. Each gateway carries a Wisdom Tradition Reflection.

Spiritual Accompaniment. Grounded in deep listening. What it means to be in spiritual companionship with another person, the skills needed to hold space, and what it takes to be genuinely present with someone else.

Spiritual Practice. Your own practice, in whatever form it takes, sustained across two years. Meditation, coherence practices, creative expression, or more traditional religious observance. The aim is a steady loosening of identification with the individual form and a deeper connection to yourself, to others, and to the whole.

Community and Conflict Resolution. How to be in community. How to love and respect difference as an aspect of wholeness. How to meet conflict as an opportunity for reconciliation rather than a problem to be avoided. Nonviolent Communication is the core text here.

Creativity. Creativity as the unique expression of the sacred through each person. Not a decorative extra but a pillar in its own right, woven through every other strand, and a language you are encouraged to find your own version of.

How a Gateway Works

Each gateway runs over roughly three months and is built around a five-day residential retreat at Florence House. The retreat is the heart of it, but the rhythm around the retreat is what makes the learning hold.

Threshold Circle, before the retreat. A gentle point of arrival that helps you begin connecting with the theme ahead. These sessions support orientation rather than depth. You pause, notice what is already present in your life, and step consciously towards the work coming.

The Retreat. Five days living and working together at Florence House. Circle work, ritual, embodied practice, creative exploration, and long stretches of ordinary time together. Every meal is shared. Ceremony is created collectively on retreat before you go away and write your own.

Integration Circle, shortly after the retreat. A space to settle and make sense of what emerged. What has stayed with you? What is still working in you? These sessions support a gentle re-entry into daily life and help prevent the disorientation that can follow an intensive residential.

Deepening Circle, midway between retreats. A space to explore how the gateway's themes are living in your present-day experience. What patterns, insights or shifts are you noticing over time? This is where learning moves from reflection into embodiment.

Alongside this rhythm sit one-to-one tutorials of about an hour every four to six weeks, regular supervision with an accredited supervisor, peer-led study groups, and your spiritual accompaniment partnership.

The Enquiry Circles are not decoration around the retreats. They exist so that the depth of a residential is integrated over time rather than left with you, alone, on a Sunday night.

Inside a Retreat

Fifteen people at most. Five days. Three times a year, for two years.

Florence House sits on the cliffs above Seaford Bay, where the South Downs meet the sea. Wild gardens, ancient trees, chalk paths, a great deal of sky. There are warm communal spaces for circle work and ceremony, and quiet corners for reflection, journalling, prayer and rest. The land itself invites slowing down.

Five days does something a series of evenings cannot. You eat together, sit in circle together, and walk the same paths. You are there in the evenings when the day's work has stirred something and it is easier to say it to somebody in a corridor than in a room. By the third morning a group has usually stopped performing for itself, and that tends to be when the real work starts.

It also means experiences can be more intense than you might expect. We would rather say that now than have you find out on a Wednesday afternoon in November.

Spiritual Accompaniment

This is the strand where deep listening stops being a concept.

From your first gateway you are paired with a fellow student as a peer companion. Once every four weeks you give a session of spiritual accompaniment, and once every four weeks you receive one. Sessions run 50 to 60 minutes, with a firm commitment to the time agreement. By the end of Year One you will have completed seven sessions in each mode, fourteen calls in total.

These are formal sessions rather than conversations. You begin with clear contracting between you, covering confidentiality, practicalities and what each of you is agreeing to. Each session opens with prayer, silence, meditation or another devotional practice, and gives particular attention to your own and your companion's relationship with the Divine. You are asked to come with as open a heart as you can, setting aside your ideas about who your peer already is.

In Year Two the work turns outward. During Gateway 4 you undertake a spiritual accompaniment project, offering three sessions to an ordained minister who takes the role of your client, and writing it up as a case study. At the close of Year Two you write a learning review of your peer accompaniment relationship, for your own development rather than for submission.

Writing a Ceremony

Five of the six gateways ask you to write a full ceremony. This is the most concrete work in the training, and it is worth knowing exactly what it involves.

Each ceremony runs to between 2,000 and 3,500 words, roughly four to six pages. You write it as you would write a play. The words to be spoken, the stage directions for how it unfolds, and the materials needed for it to take place. A useful test is whether somebody other than you could pick up your script and deliver the ceremony as you envisioned it. That is not an easy standard, and you are asked to be patient with yourself while you learn it.

Alongside the script you write a half-page reflection on why you chose the material you did, and what working on this particular ceremony and this particular personal material has meant for your own development, in body, spirit, psychology, family and environment.

Then you hold it. Ceremonies are led in your study group, with up to forty minutes including set-up, roles handed out, and preparation of the space. If you have written the ceremony for yourself as an infant, you still hold it as the minister. Afterwards your group offers structured feedback: their experience of the ceremony, how they felt witnessing it, what they observed in you as the minister leading it, and what they take away both personally and for their own ministry.

You are also given a working model of ceremonial structure, the seven stages, which runs from the minister's private attunement before anything begins, through opening and invocation, into deepening connection, to the central expression of the ceremony's purpose, then a cooling and integration, a conscious ending and separation, and finally the minister's own release and grounding afterwards. That last stage matters as much as the rest. What a minister carries away from a ceremony needs somewhere to go.

GATEWAY ONE

Conception and Birth

16 to 20 November 2026

Year One, Remembering and Rooting

You can't welcome a child into the world if you've never looked at how you arrived in it.

Your first retreat is a birthing into community. It is the first time the group comes together, and much of the five days is given to getting to know one another and building the connections that will hold the next two years. You arrive as you are and are welcomed into a held, intentional community.

The gateway explores the earliest roots of self. How you entered life, what you inherited, and what shaped your beginnings. It works with embodied practice to support grounding, belonging and attunement, and with creative and symbolic exploration of origin stories and early influence. Group agreements and shared presence are established here for everything that follows.

WHAT THIS GATEWAY ASKS OF YOU

- ◆ To arrive as you are, and let yourself be welcomed
- ◆ To reflect on your own biography around conception, birth and welcome
- ◆ To meet how different wisdom traditions mark the threshold of birth
- ◆ To create ceremony together on retreat, then write your own
- ◆ To begin your peer accompaniment partnership
- ◆ To meet Nonviolent Communication and begin exploring empathy

WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

A ceremony of birth, welcome and baby naming. You are invited to reflect on what it would be to honour and bless your own being, and where that welcome still awaits attention in your own life. You may write the ceremony for yourself as a newly born child, for a newborn or a child in your present life, or for someone from your family's past, honouring and blessing that being as though it were your own.

Alongside it, a Wisdom Tradition Reflection on conception, birth and welcome, and a self-assessment before your first one-to-one tutorial.

GATEWAY TWO

Childhood

*3 to 7 March 2027**Year One, Remembering and Rooting*

You can't understand how you move through the world until you look at the years that taught you how.

Gateway 2 returns to the years that shaped you before you had any say in the matter.

Childhood is where your first conclusions about the world were reached. What is safe and what is not. What earns attention. Whether reaching out gets you met, or leaves you standing there. Those conclusions were arrived at early, usually without words, and they were reasonable at the time. Most of us are still living inside some of them without noticing.

It explores play, imagination, innocence and wonder alongside early hurt, engaged through trauma-aware approaches. It supports you to reconnect with the joy, gifts, sensitivities and wisdom of your child-self, and invites a compassionate re-reading of the conditioning that formed your identity. Playful and creative ritual is used to reach early experience.

HOW THE EARLY YEARS STILL MOVE YOU

What was learned then does not stay in the past. It becomes the setting you operate from, and it shows in ordinary things.

How you walk into a room where you know nobody. What you do when the conversation goes quiet. Whether you can receive kindness without deflecting it, or a compliment without qualifying it. What happens in your body when somebody is angry near you. Whether you can rest without earning it first. How quickly you move to fix things when another person is upset, and whose discomfort that is actually easing.

None of that is character. It is learning, and it was learned somewhere.

The same is true of your spiritual life. Your earliest experience of being held, or not held, tends to shape what you expect of the sacred. Whether you approach it as something that welcomes you or something you must qualify for. Whether you can be still in it. People are often surprised by how directly their image of the divine traces back to a particular kitchen, a particular voice, a particular year.

This matters for ministry in a specific way. The habits formed in your early years will come with you into every room you ever hold. The minister who cannot bear a silence will fill one that needed to stay open.

The minister who over-functions the moment somebody cries will take a grief away from the person it belongs to.

The work here is not to repair any of that. It is to see it clearly enough that it stops steering from underneath, and to know your own patterns well enough to notice when they are moving you rather than the person in front of you.

WHAT THIS GATEWAY ASKS OF YOU

- ♦ To look honestly at the years that formed you before you had a choice about them
- ♦ To notice the conclusions you drew early, and where you are still living inside them
- ♦ To trace how those early patterns show in how you meet people, handle conflict, and receive care
- ♦ To consider how your earliest experience of being held shapes what you expect of the sacred
- ♦ To meet early hurt with care rather than analysis
- ♦ To continue and deepen your peer accompaniment partnership
- ♦ To explore compassionate communication: observing without judgement or evaluation, and the difference between a demand and a request

WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

A healing ceremony, and a Wisdom Tradition Reflection on childhood.

As with every ceremony on this pathway, you write it as a working script, hold it for your study group, and receive their reflections on what they witnessed in you as the minister leading it.

GATEWAY THREE

Adolescence

21 to 25 June 2027

Year One, Remembering and Rooting

You can't walk beside someone becoming themselves if you've never revisited your own becoming.

Gateway 3 meets the threshold of identity, power and becoming.

It works with the archetypal energy of adolescence: rebellion, longing, belonging and self-formation. It explores rites of passage, the moment when personal identity sharpens and self-awareness comes into focus. Creativity and expressive arts are used to surface inner truth and emerging authenticity. The gateway supports you through internal conflict, shame, courage, and the desire to be seen, and it investigates boundaries, personal power, autonomy, and the compassionate reclamation of shadow. It also tends to the younger parts of you that still seek voice, validation or healing.

WHAT THIS GATEWAY ASKS OF YOU

- ♦ To revisit your own adolescence honestly
- ♦ To create ceremony together on retreat, then write a rite of passage
- ♦ To develop reflective listening and skilful questioning in your accompaniment practice
- ♦ To explore community, relationship, and unity through unconditional love

WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

A rite of passage ceremony. A Wisdom Tradition Reflection on adolescence. A written reflection on your peer accompaniment practice so far. And over the summer, a self-directed learning project.

GATEWAY FOUR

4

Coming Into Adulthood: Marriage and Relationship

11 to 15 November 2027

Year Two, Expression and Ministry

You can't hold people's vows if you've never examined what you bring to love.

Year Two turns outward. Having spent a year in your own story, you begin moving into relationship, service and the outward expression of ministry.

Gateway 4 explores adulthood through intimacy, commitment and care. It develops relational maturity and presence as core ministerial qualities, examines healthy boundaries and the balance between autonomy and connection, and works with the idea of the inner marriage, the integration of your own polarities. It engages with responsibility, compassion and emotional accountability, uses relationship as a mirror for growth, and asks how you hold both individuality and unity within a spiritual community.

WHAT THIS GATEWAY ASKS OF YOU

- ♦ To reflect on your own experience of relationship, intimacy and commitment
- ♦ To create ceremony together on retreat, then write a wedding
- ♦ To deepen your spiritual accompaniment practice, and take it beyond the cohort
- ♦ To explore what it is to come into relationship with yourself and with others

WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

A wedding ceremony. And your spiritual accompaniment project: three sessions offered to an ordained minister acting as your client, written up as a case study on your approach. This is where accompaniment steps outside your cohort, and where you are held by somebody who knows the work from the inside.

GATEWAY FIVE

5

Dying, Death and Funeral Work

16 to 20 March 2028

Year Two, Expression and Ministry

You can't sit with the bereaved if you've never turned towards your own losses.

Gateway 5 engages the terrain of death, dying and loss as spiritual teachers.

It explores personal, ancestral and collective grief through compassionate presence, and examines the spiritual psychology of endings, letting go and transformation. It trains you in funeral craft, memorial ritual and the ethical accompaniment of the bereaved. It supports you to develop a tender, grounded presence with people in crisis or transition, and it explores identity dissolution, renewal, and the wisdom available at the thresholds of a life.

WHAT THIS GATEWAY ASKS OF YOU

- ♦ To turn towards your own experience of loss and grief
- ♦ To create ceremony together on retreat, then write a funeral
- ♦ To write your peer accompaniment review
- ♦ To complete and submit your self-directed learning project and your Minister's Manual

WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

A funeral ceremony. Your Minister's Manual, gathering the ceremonial and practical resources you will carry into your ministry. Your self-directed learning project. And a learning review of your two-year accompaniment relationship, written for your own development and shared with your companion only if you both wish it.

GATEWAY SIX

Being in Community

*15 to 19 June 2028**Year Two, Expression and Ministry*

You can't stand in public as a minister if you've never looked at what power does in your hands.

The final gateway shifts focus outward, to ministry as a relational, community-based practice.

It explores what it means to stand visibly and ethically as a minister in the world. It examines belonging, community dynamics and collective care. It encourages vulnerability alongside responsibility, courage and grounded leadership. It develops ethical awareness, integrity, and a real understanding of power and influence, strengthens your capacity to navigate complex group dynamics, and prepares you to step into public spiritual presence with clarity.

WHAT THIS GATEWAY ASKS OF YOU

- ◆ To consider ministry as something practised in community rather than alone
- ◆ To look honestly at power, influence and accountability in your own hands
- ◆ To prepare for vow taking and ordination
- ◆ To write and deliver your Inspiration Talk

WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

An Inspiration Talk of no more than fifteen minutes, shared with your cohort. You are asked to enquire deeply into yourself and speak on an issue, an experience, a knowing, a longing or a teaching you feel genuinely called to share. This piece of work can bring up real vulnerability, and you will be supported in it. People often find it points the way towards a clearer sense of their own purpose.

The Threshold Ceremony

Between Year One and Year Two you are invited into a Threshold Ceremony, a shared pause and a conscious transition.

Having journeyed through the landscape of your own story, this gathering offers space to honour what has been uncovered, tended and transformed, and to begin turning outward towards relationship, community and ministry.

It marks the point where the direction of travel reverses. Having spent a year receiving, you begin to give.

Vow Taking and Ordination

19 TO 21 JULY 2028

Two ceremonies close the training.

Vow taking is deeply personal. You are witnessed by your peers, your tutors and the wider OneSpirit community as you speak aloud the vow that will guide your path into ministry. It is not a promise to become a particular kind of minister or to serve in a prescribed way. It is a declaration of who you are becoming and how you will carry that into the world, in whatever form is authentically yours.

Ordination follows as a collective threshold, a crossing from student to minister. It does not mark an end. Ordination is not a reward for completion but a recognition of your readiness to serve, your willingness to journey with others, and your commitment to keep learning.

What This Training Asks of You

We want to be honest about the nature of this work.

This training uses your own life story as its primary material. As you travel the stages of a human life you will encounter not only the beauty and meaning in your history but the places where life has been difficult, confusing or painful. That is not incidental to the programme. It is central to it. The capacity to hold space for others begins with a willingness to meet yourself honestly.

This is not therapy. It is a formation programme. The difference matters. Therapy sets out to process and resolve what has happened to you. Formation sets out to make you someone who can be fully present with another person in the hardest hour of their life. Our tutors and facilitators hold the learning space with care, skill and ethical awareness, but they are not therapists, and the programme is not designed to process or resolve trauma. If deep or previously unprocessed material surfaces, as it may, you will be supported to find appropriate professional help alongside the programme.

We strongly recommend having therapeutic support available. Many students find independent counselling or psychotherapy an invaluable companion to this work. Consider what support structures you have in your life before beginning, and make sure you could reach professional help during the training if you needed it. That is not a sign of unreadiness. It is a sign of self-awareness and good preparation.

The residential format intensifies everything. Five days together creates a powerful container. The beauty and intimacy of that environment are among this pathway's greatest gifts, and they also mean experiences can be more intense than you anticipate. The Enquiry Circles exist precisely to hold what emerges.

Every invitation is genuinely an invitation. You will be invited into vulnerability. You will never be required to go further than feels right for you. You have the right to choose your depth of engagement, and that choice will always be respected.

Safety, as we understand it, is not the same as comfort. This pathway will ask you to stay present with discomfort rather than be spared it. What we commit to is that you will not be doing it alone.

Assessment

There are no grades and no rankings. We practise what we call assessment as sacred witnessing, recognising and naming change through dialogue, feedback and mutual reflection. Tutors, peers and you all contribute.

Progress is measured by depth of engagement, growing self-awareness, and your capacity to serve with presence, compassion and ethical responsibility.

This is rigorous in its own way. We take seriously our responsibility both to you and to the people you will go on to serve. You will receive honest, developmental feedback throughout, and where further development is needed it will be named with care and clarity, and you will be supported in addressing it.

Your Time

- ◆ Three five-day residential retreats a year at Florence House, fifteen retreat days annually
- ◆ Three Enquiry Circles for each gateway: Threshold, Integration and Deepening
- ◆ One-to-one tutorials of about an hour, every four to six weeks
- ◆ Regular supervision with an accredited supervisor
- ◆ Peer-led study groups between retreats
- ◆ A spiritual accompaniment session given and received every four weeks
- ◆ Reflective and creative assignments, including a full ceremony in five of the six gateways
- ◆ At least four books a year from the reading list, alongside the core text

Between retreats, expect around **6 to 8 hours per month**. Many students find this rhythm becomes a supportive presence in their lives rather than something to keep up with.

Elective module blocks run in January and May each year, and you choose one module in each block.

Dates and Venue

GATEWAY

DATES

1 · Conception and Birth	Monday 16 to Friday 20 November 2026
2 · Childhood	Wednesday 3 to Sunday 7 March 2027
3 · Adolescence	Monday 21 to Friday 25 June 2027
4 · Marriage and Relationship	Thursday 11 to Monday 15 November 2027
5 · Dying, Death and Funeral Work	Thursday 16 to Monday 20 March 2028
6 · Being in Community	Thursday 15 to Monday 19 June 2028
Vow Taking and Ordination	Wednesday 19 to Friday 21 July 2028

Florence House, Southdown Road, Seaford, East Sussex, BN25 4JS.

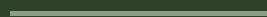
The Sylvan Pathway walks the arc of a human life, from conception to death and beyond. You walk it twice, once through your own story and once as the minister who will accompany others through theirs. By the end you will have written a ceremony for every threshold of a life, and you will have some idea of what it costs to stand at the front of the room and mean it.



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The Sylvan Pathway

Two years · Six thresholds



Applications for the Class of 2028 close at midnight on 30 September 2026.
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