

Notes On Religious Practice

Version: May 2025

Taking up a reserved post in a Catholic school or becoming a Foundation Governor means sharing in the ministry of the Bishop, who is the first teacher in the Diocese. This is a ministry which is lived out in public and witnesses to the teachings of the Church. There is, therefore, an expectation that all who hold such posts are not merely baptised Catholics but practising Catholics in full sacramental communion with the Church.

Applicants are asked to read the following:

[The Bishop' Memorandum on the Appointment of staff in Catholic Schools](#)

[Christ at the Centre](#) by Bishop Marcus Stock (2012) from which the following notes are taken.

Certain key posts require that their holders not only refrain from doing anything *"which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets"* of the school's religious ethos but, in the case of Headteachers or Principals, that they are able and fit to *"preserve and develop"* that ethos and, in the case of certain other designated posts, that they hold *"religious opinions"*, *"attend religious worship"* and *"give, or are willing to give, religious education"* in accordance with the precepts and tenets of the religious faith of the school.

To define objectively what a 'practising Catholic' is when assessing applicants for membership of the governing authority of a Catholic school or to key posts within the school, it is necessary to understand that there are general obligations as well as essential components that constitute 'practice' of the faith in the teaching of the Catholic Church.

A Catholic in full communion with the Church:

- Has received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist validly.
- Participates in the celebration of Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, in accordance with paragraph 2180 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Receives Holy Communion at least once a year, as obliged (CCC 1389).
- Is fully in the communion of the Catholic Church through the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesial governance (Canon 205).

Moreover:

- Teachers must be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life (Canons 803 and 804) in accordance with the objective moral teaching of the Catholic Church.
- Must carry out with great diligence their responsibilities towards both the universal and the particular Church to which they belong; to be registered with one particular parish as a normal place of worship; to be, as circumstances permit, visibly a member of the parish and actively involved in its life;
- Those who are married, in accordance with Canon 1108, are bound by a special duty to work through marriage and the family to build up the people of God (Canon 226).

Concerning marital status:

- The marriage of a Catholic person is governed not only by Divine law but also by Church law. Consequently, a Catholic who is free to marry must observe the Canonical Form of Marriage (a marriage in a Catholic church before a priest or deacon and two witnesses) or have been lawfully dispensed from that obligation by a competent authority. Where this has not been observed, it is often possible to remedy the situation.
- To contract a valid marriage, both parties to the marriage must be free from any impediments and irregularities listed by the Catholic Church.
- Those who attempt marriage with a person still judged by the Church to be bound by a previous bond do so invalidly and bar themselves from sacramental communion. So do those who live in relationships judged to be 'irregular' by the Church.
- The Diocesan Tribunal (based at The St Philip Howard Centre, Crawley) is tasked with examining marriages that have broken down and those considering second marriages.

Priest's Reference

A priest's reference will be sought for all appointments as a Foundation Governor or to reserved posts within the Catholic school. This will require the priest to confirm that the applicant is a 'practising Catholic', defined as someone who:

"Has been sacramentally initiated into the Catholic Church and who adheres to those substantive life choices which do not impair them from receiving the sacraments of the Church and which will not be in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of the school. Inspired by the Gospel and sustained by God's grace, a 'practising Catholic' will give sincere external expression to their interior faith through specific religious, moral and ethical behaviour which is in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church."

(from "Christ at the Centre" Bishop Marcus Stock)

Candidates for these positions are encouraged to speak with their priest prior to giving their name as a referee. Applicants to reserved posts will be expected to answer the following questions at interview, which will be asked by the diocesan representative:

1. Using the definition of a practising Catholic in the document 'Christ at the Centre', can you confirm that you are a practising Catholic?
2. Is there anything in your background or personal life that if it came into the public domain could cause reputational damage to the school, the Trust or the Diocese and make your position untenable?

Potential applicants for reserved posts in Diocesan Schools / Trusts who wish to have advice on whether they satisfy the Bishops' requirement on Catholic practice, including marital status, are encouraged to consult the Chancellor of the Diocese:

E: jonathan.martin@abdiocese.org.uk

P: The St Philip Howard Centre, 4 Southgate Drive, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 6RP.