

Guidance on the Definition of a Practising Catholic

The Diocese of Lancaster Education Service uses the following document as the basis for determining whether a potential applicant for a teaching or senior leadership post would be classified as “a practising Catholic”: --

‘Catholic Schools and the Definition of a ‘Practising Catholic’ by Rev Fr Marcus Stock, published in 2009 by the Diocesan Schools Commission of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

The full document can be downloaded from:

http://www.bdes.org.uk/uploads/4/2/9/6/42966327/catholic_schools_and_the_definition_of_a_practising_catholic_revised_07.04.09.pdf

The key points that relate to school appointments are that a “practising Catholic” is 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.

This definition does not mean that a ‘practising Catholic’ has to be perfect, indeed in terms of the Church’s general obligations, almost all Catholics fail to live their faith fully and do not give an authentic witness to their beliefs in all aspects or at all moments of their lives. A ‘practising Catholic’ will almost certainly not be a ‘perfect Catholic’.

The Church clearly lays out the ‘way of life’ for the faithful in the substantive choices that they make in life: Consequently, it is clear that a ‘practising Catholic’ will be someone who, despite weaknesses and personal sinfulness, decides to make only those substantive life choices which follow the “*Way, the Truth and the Life*”. This way of life is not vague or unknown but is manifest fully and most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ and unfolded in the teachings of His Church.

There are substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Church and objectively impair our communion with the Church for as long as we adhere to them; they are objectively grave in nature and are objectively incompatible with God's law.

There are actions and behaviours which would be considered not only incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church specifically but also incompatible with the professional life and career of any employee within any school. Some examples of these would be:

- serious dishonesty or fraudulent activity;
- being unfit for duty due to alcohol or drug related abuse;
- inappropriate use of school property;
- gross negligence in the performance of professional duties;
- violent or inappropriate behaviour;
- any action which endangers the welfare or safety of pupils;
- any action which would bring the school into disrepute, etc.

There are also substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church and which may be detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of a Catholic school. Some examples of these would be:

- formal apostasy from the Catholic Church;
- maintaining membership of, or giving direct support to, any organization whose fundamental aims and objects are contrary to Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church;
- maintaining the publication or distribution, or by any other means of social communication

or technology, of material content which is contrary to Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church;

- a Catholic contracting a marriage in a non-Catholic church, registry office or any other place without dispensation from canonical form; or contracting a marriage where one or both of the parties have been previously married (and whose former spouse[s] is[are] living) without the former marriage(s) being annulled or declared invalid by the Church;
- maintaining a partnership of intimacy with another person, outside of a form of marriage approved by the Church and which would, at least in the public forum, carry the presumption from their public behaviour of this being a non-chaste relationship; and, where such a presumption in the public forum is not repudiated by the parties within the relationship.

Catholics, whose choices have resulted in them being unable to receive the sacraments but who otherwise may have been a potential applicant for a key post will, on occasion, sincerely present themselves for consideration. In these circumstances, there is sometimes much pressure on clergy and governors to overlook these particular substantive life choices. This may spring from a genuine charitable and pastoral concern not to offend or hurt the individuals involved, or because it is considered that their professional skills and abilities in leadership are needed in the school and override all other considerations.

In these situations clergy and governors should work in partnership with, and follow the advice from, the appropriate officers of the Education Service. For the good of the school and of the wider Church, the requirement stated here must be upheld in terms of appointing only 'practising Catholics', as defined in this document to the key posts within Catholic Schools. This will also ensure that schools follow the guidance contained within the "Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers in Catholic Schools" published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales:

"As a minimum requirement, the Bishops expect that the posts of Head Teacher or Principal, Deputy Head Teacher or Deputy Principal and Head or Co-ordinator of Religious Education are to be filled by practising Catholics."

The full document can be downloaded from the CES website

<http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/employment-documents/recruitment-process/item/1000049-memorandum-on-appointment-of-teachers-to-catholic-schools>