

Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius - Society of St John Chrysostom

Joint Catholic-Orthodox Pastoral Consultation in England

Eastern Christian Children & Catholic Schools

Admissions, Education, Pastoral Care and Catechesis

## RECOMMENDATIONS

September 2016

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## Note

The following recommendations are made by the Joint Catholic-Orthodox Pastoral Consultation in England, which is sponsored by the Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius and the Society of St John Chrysostom, charities which are Bodies in Association with Churches Together in England.

On all questions of official guidance and advice on admissions to Catholic schools and Catholic education, reference needs to be made to the appropriate local Catholic Diocesan Education Service, or the Catholic Education Service of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius  
Society of St John Chrysostom

[www.sobornost.org](http://www.sobornost.org)  
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## A - Introduction

The present network of Catholic schools has developed over more than a century and half, thanks to a mixture of independent and parish schools created by abbeys, religious orders, dioceses, philanthropists and the often sacrificial generosity of the faithful in parishes themselves, so that every Catholic family wherever possible can be assured of a Catholic education for their children at school, to support a Catholic upbringing at home, through Catholic teaching about Christ and His Church, immersion in a life of prayer and celebration of the sacraments, and formation with Catholic values for pursuing a life faithful to Christ on life's pilgrimage on earth as it is in the Kingdom of heaven.

In parallel, the state has increasingly assumed the responsibility to ensure that all children, regardless of their families' resources, background or faith, receive the benefit of primary and secondary education to which they are entitled. The resources and contribution of the various Churches and ecclesial bodies in this country have been essential to building this provision. Hence the right to Christian religious education and the duty to provide it remain integral to our education system. The Catholic Church's schools therefore offer Christian education primarily for the purposes of the Catholic community (including the Eastern Catholic Churches), but not in an exclusive way, since they stand within the context of a national system of education in which many bodies - statutory, independent, charitable and religious - play their part.

Thus, especially in the last few decades, families from other faith communities have sought a Catholic Christian education for their children. Where opportunities exist, Catholic schools have welcomed them. Particularly, this has been the case for children of Christian families belonging to other Churches and ecclesial bodies, with which the Catholic Church shares a degree of unity through the common sacrament of Baptism, which is the source of our communion in Christ and which already unites us together in His one Church as fellow Christians. As St Paul stated, "All you who have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (*Galatians 3.27-28*).

Among these members of other Churches, in an age of global diaspora, are the children of families and communities - nowadays present in Britain to the second, third and fourth generation – belonging to the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, as well as Churches belonging to the patrimony of The Church of the East, which are without their own school system (there are two Eastern Orthodox schools in the state sector).

Concerning the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and the Church of the East, the Decree on Ecumenism at the Second Vatican Council called for special consideration to be shown with respect to the Eastern Churches (*Unitatis Redintegratio 14*). From the point of view of the Catholic Church, these Churches, originating and living in the

Christian East, sharing rites and traditions alike with the Eastern Catholic Churches, are **already more closely united in communion with the Catholic Church in faith than with other Christian Churches and ecclesial bodies.** As the Decree also stated (*UR 15*):

These Churches, although separated from us, possess true sacraments, above all by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are linked with us in closest intimacy.

The Decree went on to observe (*UR 18*):

... for the restoration or the maintenance of unity and communion it is necessary "to impose no burden beyond what is essential". (*Acts 15.28*) It is the Council's urgent desire that, in the various organisations and living activities of the Church, every effort should be made toward the **gradual realisation of this unity** ... Similarly, the Council commends to the shepherds and faithful of the Catholic Church to **develop closer relations** with those who are no longer living in the East but are **far from home** ...

In the five decades of dialogue towards unity that have brought the leaders and theologians of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches together to overcome the divisions of the past, we have developed an even richer understanding of the close bonds that already unite us, **not only as those baptised into Christ**, in whose Person divine and human natures are united, but also in a **shared vision of the Church as participation in the mystery of the Holy Trinity**, Three Persons in One God, whose gift of faith unites the believer in grace, love and communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, our discussions, together with the realities experienced by our Churches' pastors and faithful in everyday life, have revealed that our reflection in common upon life in our one Lord Jesus Christ, and the Church which is to be the living sign in the world of the Triune God, **has direct bearing on the pastoral challenges and practical issues they face.**

The recommendations on the admission and educational formation of Orthodox children in Catholic schools that follow therefore recognise:

- the already close bond in faith between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as well as the Churches of The Church of the East, manifested in a common **baptism** within the one Church of Christ, since each manifests the **apostolic succession** and the celebration of valid **sacraments**;
- **the importance of manifesting** in all aspects of the Church's life and practice, including in relations among Christians and different Churches, as far as possible **the communion of the Holy Trinity** that is God's gift to her, and the unity that is Christ's own life, according to his prayer, "that they all may be one, so that the world may believe it was you that sent me";
- the special consideration to be shown to the Orthodox Churches called for by the Second Vatican Council;

- the high value of mutual enrichment between Eastern and Western Christians, particularly the **enrichment of the faith** of the Latin Catholic community in this country because of increased contact with the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches;
- the call for the Catholic Church's organisations and activities to give effect to closer relations with the Orthodox Churches and their faithful whose home is no longer in the East, **towards the restoration of communion of faith and life** between Catholics and Orthodox in full.

*+ Kallistos, Metropolitan of Diokleia*  
Orthodox Co-Chairman

*+ Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham*  
Catholic Co-Chairman

*Fr Mark Woodruff*  
Chairman of the Society  
of St John Chrysostom  
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*Archpriest Stephen Platt*  
General Secretary of the Fellowship  
of St Alban & St Sergius  
Orthodox Co-Secretary

## B - Admissions

### Recommendations for Governing Bodies and Head Teachers of Catholic Schools

1. For school admission purposes, membership of the Catholic Church is defined by Baptism or reception into the Catholic Church and, besides members of the Latin Catholic Church, it includes members of Eastern Catholic Churches (e.g. the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and the Syro-Malabar Church) which are in union with the Bishop of Rome (see **Appendix 1** to Section B).
2. Eastern Catholic Churches are in full communion with the Pope and thus with the Latin Catholic Church, and families belonging to them have the same standing as other Catholics when applying for a place at a Catholic school according to the admission criteria set out by the bishops.
3. Membership of the Eastern Orthodox Church is defined by Baptism and Chrismation (the Sacrament of Confirmation), or reception into those Churches which are in communion with each other and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (e.g. the Greek, Russian, and Romanian Orthodox Churches).
4. Another family of Orthodox Churches is that of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (e.g. the Coptic, Armenian and Syriac Orthodox Churches).
5. A further category of ancient Churches includes Churches belonging to the patrimony of The Church of the East, from Iraq, Syria, India, and now North America and Sweden.
6. See **Appendix 1** to Section B for a list of the Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox Churches and Churches of the patrimony of The Church of the East.
7. Where schools are not oversubscribed with applications on behalf of Catholic children, we recommend that governing bodies should offer places to other Christian children, if they have places available after Catholic children (including those from Eastern Catholic Churches) have been admitted. **The order of priority for admitting children** who are not Catholics, after looked-after children and former looked-after children as required by law, and any other categories determined by the diocese, **should place children who are members of other Eastern Churches next.**
8. Evidence of baptism should be requested, in the form of a certified copy of the baptismal certificate, or a letter of affirmation from the child's Orthodox priest, confirming that Baptism has taken place. Evidence of reception (again, in the form of a certified document from the Church concerned) should equally be accepted as demonstrating membership of that Church.
9. In common with the Latin and Eastern Catholic Churches, there is no official record or certification of First Communion for the other Eastern Churches, and schools should never ask for such certificates in admission criteria or procedures for Catholic schools. Schools should accept that, in all Eastern Churches, proof of baptism indicates that the sacraments of Chrismation (Confirmation) and Holy Communion have been received.

*Recommendations for the Competent Authorities of Eastern Churches*

10. If the competent authorities of an Eastern Church are approached to certify the religious practice of one of its members, they may wish to do so using a Certificate of Practice (see **Appendix 2** to Section B for a suggested template). However, the format and criteria surrounding the use of such a Certificate is entirely a matter for the competent authorities of the Church concerned.

## Appendix 1 to Section B – the Eastern Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches

### *Eastern Churches in communion with Rome, grouped in their five liturgical traditions*

#### *Alexandrian*

Coptic Catholic Church

Ethiopian Catholic Church (*Ghe'ez rite; there are also Latin-rite Ethiopian Catholics*)

Eritrean Catholic Church

#### *Antiochian (West Syrian)*

Syrian (or Syriac) Catholic Church

Maronite (or Syro-Maronite) Catholic Church

Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

#### *Armenian*

Armenian Catholic Church

#### *Church of the East (East Syrian)*

Chaldean Catholic Church

Syro-Malabar Catholic Church

#### *Byzantine or Constantinopolitan*

Albanian (Byzantine) Catholic Church

Belarusian Greek Catholic Church

Bulgarian Greek Catholic Church

Byzantine Catholic Church of Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro

Georgian Catholic Church

Greek (*or* Hellenic) Byzantine Catholic Church

Hungarian Greek Catholic Church

Italo-Albanian Byzantine Catholic Church

Macedonian Catholic Church

Melkite Greek Catholic Church

Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek Catholic

Russian Catholic Church

Ruthenian (*or* Byzantine) Catholic Church

Slovak Byzantine Catholic Church

Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

#### ***Orthodox Churches***

*There is a number of Orthodox Churches with names similar to those of Eastern Catholic Churches. Although the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are seeking to achieve the restoration of communion with each other, this has not happened yet. The Orthodox*

*Churches and the See of Rome are thus not in union with each other. A useful guide is that Eastern Churches in union with the See of Rome will have the word Catholic in their titles; while Churches with the word Orthodox in their titles are Churches that are not in union with the See of Rome. Children from Orthodox Churches should be considered for admission after Catholic children, along with those of other Eastern Churches. The following list includes the Orthodox Churches belonging to the family sometimes known as "Greek Orthodox" (they are known as Greek because they are from the Byzantine liturgical tradition of the Greek Church, just as Latin Catholics are from the Latin liturgical tradition associated with the Roman Church):*

*Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (including Greek Orthodox, some Orthodox of Russian Tradition, Orthodox Church of Finland, Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church and Orthodox Church of Crete and the Dodecanese)*

*Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria*

*Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch*

*Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem*

*Orthodox Church of Russia (including some Estonian and Ukrainian Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia, and the Orthodox Churches of Japan, Moldova, Latvia, and Belarus)*

*Orthodox Church of Serbia*

*Orthodox Church of Romania*

*Orthodox Church of Bulgaria*

*Orthodox Church of Georgia*

*Orthodox Church of Cyprus*

*Orthodox Church of Greece*

*Orthodox Church of Poland*

*Orthodox Church of Albania*

*Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia*

*Orthodox Church in America*

*A number of Orthodox Churches are not recognised by some or all the others. Advice can be sought from the Society of St John Chrysostom ([www.orientalelumen.org.uk](http://www.orientalelumen.org.uk)), or the Fellowship of St Alban & St Sergius ([www.sobornost.org](http://www.sobornost.org)).*

### ***Oriental Orthodox Churches***

*There is a number of Oriental Orthodox Churches with names similar to some of the Eastern Catholic Churches. These are Orthodox Churches which are in communion neither with the Catholic Church, nor the Churches of the Eastern Orthodox Church listed above, although each family of Churches is seeking to achieve the restoration of communion with the other. Thus the Oriental Orthodox Churches are not in union with the See of Rome. A useful guide is that Eastern Churches in union with the See of Rome will have the word Catholic in their*

*titles; while Churches with the word Orthodox in their titles are Churches that are not in union with the See of Rome. Children from Oriental Orthodox Churches should be considered for admission after Catholic children, along with those of other Eastern Churches. The following are the Oriental Orthodox Churches, grouped in their liturgical traditions:*

*Alexandrian*

Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria

Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church (*Tawahedo = 'unified', referring to Christ's person in his humanity and divinity*)

Eritrean Orthodox Tawahedo Church

*Antiochian (West Syrian)*

Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch

Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church (*which forms part of the above Patriarchal Church of Antioch*)

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (*the Indian Orthodox Church, including the Brahmavar Goan Orthodox Church*)

Malabar Independent Syrian Church (*also known as Nazarani or Suryani, it is not in full communion with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches but maintains good ecumenical relations*)

*Armenian*

Armenian Apostolic Church

Church and Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia

***Churches of the patrimony of The Church of the East (East Syrian)***

*There is a number of Eastern Churches with counterpart Eastern Catholic Churches in Iraq, Syria, India and the diaspora in North America and Europe. Their tradition is sometimes termed East Syrian, Chaldean or Assyrian. They are in communion neither with the Catholic Church, nor the Orthodox Church, nor the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Thus these Churches are not in union with the See of Rome. Children from non-Catholic Churches of the East should be considered for admission after Catholic children. The following are the non-Catholic Churches belonging to the patrimony of The Church of the East:*

Assyrian Church of the East

Ancient Church of the East

Chaldean Syrian Church (*which forms part of the Assyrian Church of the East in India*)

Appendix 2 to Section B – Specimen Template for a Certificate of Orthodox Practice to support an Application to a Catholic School

[NAME OF CHURCH OR DIOCESE]

CERTIFICATE OF ORTHODOX PRACTICE\*

Details of child (for identification only)

Full name of child: \_\_\_\_\_ Address of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

I am [the child's parish priest] [the priest in charge of the Church where the family practises] [delete as applicable] I hereby certify that this child and his/her family are known to me and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the child is from a practising family of the Orthodox Church\*.

Priest's name \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_ Parish \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Priest's signature \_\_\_\_\_ [Parish stamp or seal]

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\* Or the appropriate name for an Oriental Orthodox or Catholic Church, or Church of the East

## C – Education

1. Governing bodies should recognise and ensure that staff are fully aware that baptised children of the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Orthodox Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches have a different sacramental tradition from those of the Latin (Western) Catholic Church that is equally legitimate. Children also received at the same time as their Baptism the Sacraments of Confirmation by Chrismation and of Holy Communion, and are already communicant Christians.
2. Understanding of - and respect for - these Churches' different Catholic sacramental tradition of Christian Initiation is essential, and should be a basic expectation of the Catholic Church for all Catholic schools. The Eastern tradition has the same seven sacraments (often called 'Mysteries') as the Latin Tradition, but differs in admitting children to the Sacraments of Confirmation (called 'Chrismation') and Holy Communion at the same moment as their Baptism, rather than at later stages as with Latin Catholic children.
3. Thus children of Eastern Catholic Churches should never be expected or encouraged to undergo a ceremony of "Big Communion", "Solemn Communion", or "First Holy Communion" with their Latin Catholic peers, nor should they be prevented from receiving the Eucharist in accordance with their own Church's liturgical traditions. This would be alien to their liturgical tradition and sacramental theology, which the Catholic Church, the papal Magisterium and Canon Law teach must be respected and safeguarded. The same applies to the Latin rite of Confirmation, which under no circumstances should an Eastern Catholic young person be expected to undergo with their Latin Catholic peers, even if they request it, since they have already received this sacrament by Chrismation following upon their Baptism.
4. Families of children belonging to Orthodox Churches should equally have the integrity of their liturgical tradition and sacramental teaching concerning Christian Initiation in the Eastern Churches understood and respected by the Catholic school.
5. School curriculum policy should take care that educational and catechetical programmes linked to preparation of children, whether at their churches or in the school, for the first celebrations of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and of Holy Communion, as well as for Confirmation in the Latin Catholic Church, take account of the different conditions that apply to Eastern Christian children and young people, Catholic and Orthodox alike, who may be participating in the same sessions.
6. In the sacramental preparation and education of Latin Catholic children, there is much to be gained from drawing on the experience of their Eastern Christian peers, whether Orthodox or Catholic, to promote greater understanding of the differing Christian practices and traditions, and a deeper appreciation of the sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist from children who have already received them.

7. In schools where there are Eastern Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox or other Eastern Church children, the Head and the RE coordinator should help the class teacher with access to resources to understand Eastern Christian practice and devotion – for instance:
- The different patterns of Christian initiation, in which the East links Baptism, Confirmation (Chrismation) and the first Communion at the same time, while in the Latin Catholic tradition each takes place at a different stage in the child's growth in the life of the Church
  - The different manner of making the sign of the Cross - neither way is "wrong", but belongs to a different liturgical tradition in the one Church of Christ
  - The essential importance of icons to Eastern Orthodox Christians, as a focal point of liturgical, personal and family devotion and Orthodox faith.
  - Aspects of Eastern Christian devotion and custom, e.g. in the home, the Church's Year (involving different Calendars and different dates for Easter/Pascha), fasting.
8. Training resources for Heads, teachers and priests, lay chaplains, and RE coordinators could be developed in consultation with the various Catholic education services, in order to improve awareness of Eastern Christian life, worship and faith, especially so that the educational and religious needs of Orthodox and other Eastern Church children in Catholic schools are understood and met.
9. In the Catholic Bishops' Conference for England & Wales handbook, *The Search for Christian Unity*, issued in 2002 as a popular and localised version of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity's *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* from 1993 (Chapter IV, *Communion in Life*, on Schools) the following provision is made by the Catholic bishops:
- In Catholic schools there must be respect for the faith and conscience of pupils and teachers from **other traditions**. Their clergy should be free to give spiritual and sacramental care to their own faithful. With the bishop's permission this can include the **use of the school chapel**.
10. This offers a good opportunity for Orthodox clergy to work fraternally with local Catholic priests and schools. By the same token, beyond the provision of pastoral care for Orthodox children, there could be benefit if Orthodox clergy were also invited to **contribute to a Catholic schools' RE**, in order to improve awareness and to overcome problematic ignorance of the Orthodox Churches and Eastern Christians more widely.
11. The law requires religious worship in Catholic schools to be in accordance with the rites, practices, discipline and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church. This does not oblige it to be exclusively Latin Catholic in content in a Catholic school. Schools should consider the benefit of inviting Eastern Catholic clergy to lead worship or liturgies, and thus to introduce children to **other forms of spirituality and prayer, devotional customs and traditions, not least in primary schools**. This is regardless of whether there are **Orthodox**, Eastern Catholic or other Eastern Church children in the school. In consultation with their Bishop, they should also consider whether there are appropriate

opportunities to invite Orthodox clergy to lead or contribute to assemblies or liturgies for the same reasons. Advantage can also be gained from school visits to Orthodox churches and exposure to Eastern worship, just as Eastern Catholic and Orthodox children can readily experience Latin Catholic liturgical, sacramental and devotional life in Catholic schools.

## D - Other Recommendations

12. Catholic clergy should be aware of Orthodox and other Eastern Christian children in their schools and contribute to their **better awareness of Latin Catholic traditions** and spirituality, at the same time as ensuring pastorally, with respect for their Church's integrity, that their needs are met.
13. The number of Orthodox and other Eastern Christian children in Catholic schools in England & Wales is not known. It is recommended that any school census criteria be adapted in a nationally consistent way, in order to ascertain the numbers of those pupils in Catholic schools. This will help with the deployment of educational resources and where training and awareness for teachers may be helpful. It would also enable Catholic school Heads and the Catholic, Orthodox and other Eastern Church pastors alike to direct necessary pastoral attention.
14. The Orthodox Church and other Eastern Churches, with the jurisdictions serving the various constituencies increasingly present in Britain, both in the successive generations of those who are long settled here and the new diaspora, **have a right and duty to attend to the education of their children.** This can include religious education in schools and the shaping of its curriculum that is supposed to take account of local communities' faith, practice and experience, through the local Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education. Not only will this improve the quality of RE available to Eastern Christian children in schools, it will also contribute to wider education about the Orthodox and other Eastern Churches, as well as the overcoming of ignorance, lack of awareness and even prejudice.
15. Given the opportunities for setting up new schools within the state system, there may be the possibility of new Orthodox schools, and of **new schools with joint Catholic-Orthodox sponsorship.** The Orthodox Churches in Britain could draw on a great deal of **Catholic experience and history** in respect of the workings of the system and the law, as well as the wisdom available in the Education Services of each Catholic diocese. In the event of co-sponsorships, the willingness of the Catholic authorities and school Heads to improve awareness of Orthodox Church life and faith, in terms of educational and religious needs to be met, would be welcome and important.