

National Catholic societies criteria for entry into the Catholic Directory of England and Wales

Introduction

When in 1790 the first edition of The Laity's Directory appeared, it was published in order to produce the national Ordo, or liturgical calendar, for all the Apostolic Vicariates in England and Wales, and to give brief details about the whereabouts of chapels, clergy and private schools. Subsequent editions, following the restoration of the Hierarchy in 1850, reflected the development of diocesan structures with lists of parishes including their societies and sodalities. Some dioceses shared resources and some found one or other society or organisation to be of more benefit in their localities than others. Some followed the lead of others and so the development and growth of the Church was recorded for its time and for history.

Since that time, the number of organisations, societies, agencies and groups (for ease, hereafter referred to as 'organisations') in the Catholic Church in England and Wales has grown considerably. Times, too, have changed. While Dioceses have become structurally stronger, the needs vary from place to place as do the organisational responses to those needs. The proliferation of organisations is a sign of vitality and of a greater participation by so many in the work of proclaiming the Gospel and spreading the Catholic faith.

However, the uneven pattern of growth has meant that no clear definition of the terms used for entry into the formal listing of the Directory appears ever to have been agreed.

The Bishops' Conference has the responsibility of providing authoritative guidance in all matters pertaining to the proclamation of the Gospel at national level. Ecclesiastical recognition is given to organisations so that they may be publicly known both as Catholic and of national significance. This recognition is an exercise of pastoral care in discerning the national, rather than diocesan or provincial significance of an organisation.

In order to facilitate this task, the Bishops' Conference offers the following criteria and commentary for the guidance to all organisations that wish to be considered for entry in the Societies' section of the Catholic Directory of England and Wales.

Criteria for Entry into the National Directory

While Catholics have the right to establish and direct associations for charitable or pious purposes, which foster the Christian vocation (Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 19; Code of Canon Law 215), no organisation can legitimately claim to be 'Catholic' without the consent of ecclesiastical authority (cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 37; AA 24,25; CCL 216).

All who are baptised into full communion with the Catholic Church are joined with Christ in his visible body, through the bonds of profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesiastical governance (cf. LG 14; CCL 205).

It is therefore the prerogative of the competent ecclesiastical authority to establish that any organisation seeking entry in the Catholic Directory of England and Wales, and therefore formal recognition as a Catholic body with national significance, will be required to meet certain criteria, which will be printed as follows at the head of the Societies' section in the Directory:

DEFINITION OF A NATIONAL CATHOLIC ORGANISATION

Organisations to be listed in this section must have the following characteristics:

- 1.** A fundamental commitment to the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church, particularly as expressed by the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- 2.** A membership widely distributed in the area covered by the Catholic Directory of England and Wales, or an involvement in work properly described as being of national importance in these countries.

The following notes will not be printed in the Directory, but will be sent, by way of guidance, to applicants for entry:

NOTES FOR THOSE SEEKING ENTRY IN THE DIRECTORY AS A NATIONAL CATHOLIC ORGANISATION

- 1.** The word 'fundamental' relates to the key objectives of the organisation as formally written and as corporately pursued. It is tolerant of some variety of emphasis in expression and in operation, but not of deviation from ultimate loyalty to the Church, nationally or internationally.
- 2.** Organisations wishing to apply for inclusion must provide the General Secretariat:
 - a) by the end of April of the year preceding publication of the Directory, the information prescribed in the Schedule below;
 - b) an annual update concerning office holders and the names of the executive committee, publications, and any proposed changes to constitutions.
- 3.** The assessment of each application is remitted by the Bishops' Conference to a panel appointed by it for the purpose, under the chairmanship of a Bishop. If in the first instance the assessment panel raises an objection to an application, the organisation will be given the opportunity to offer further explanation. If in the judgement of the assessment panel an objection still remains further representation by the organisation will be considered by the Bishop responsible who may decide to take further advice before giving a final decision.

SCHEDULE

An organisation wishing to apply for inclusion in the Catholic Directory of England and Wales must make formal application by way of a written request, which will include the following information:

- i.** Details of its foundation: by whom and when?
- ii.** Origin of its present ecclesiastical approval.
- iii.** Key objectives and current programme. (Please supply a copy of the constitution and copies of current publications, including newsletters.)

- iv.** Numerical and geographical distribution of members in England and Wales.
- v.** Names of Officers and Executive Committee and how and when appointed.
- vi.** Is the organisation a Registered Charity? (Please supply a brief history of its establishment, the name of the Trust and charity number, a copy of the Trust Deed and current annual financial report.)
- vii.** Reasons for seeking entry in the Catholic Directory of England and Wales.
- viii.** A brief description (no more than 40 words) of the organisation that reflects its purpose and work and which would be printed under its entry in the Catholic Directory of England and Wales.

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