

***Obtaining Proof of Membership of the Catholic Church  
– Guidance for Schools***

1. The onus of proving membership of the Catholic Church rests primarily with the person seeking to establish the fact. This does not, however, prevent schools from assisting applicants to find out this information. The Church asks for “moral certainty” about membership. This guidance sets out the ways in which this is normally established. It is important when applying this guidance to ensure that the Church does not put at a disadvantage either those who are from other races or cultures or those who may be less able to follow the guidance to parents.
2. Normally membership of the Catholic Church is proved simply by production of a certificate of Baptism into a Catholic Church.
3. A Catholic Church means any church in full communion with the Church of Rome. This includes the 21 Eastern Catholic Churches.
4. Where a person has been baptised into a non-Catholic Church and subsequently received into full communion with the Catholic Church, proof of membership is by a Certificate of Reception.
5. If for some reason a certificate of baptism or reception is not available, other evidence should be considered as equivalent to such a certificate: they are listed below.
6. A certificate of confirmation in a Catholic church is acceptable, since confirmation is not administered without proof of baptism.
7. If a couple have married in the Catholic Church, confirmation from the parish of marriage that proof of baptism or reception was seen at the time of the marriage is sufficient.
8. The above includes marriages celebrated with the permission of the bishop in non-Catholic churches. In these cases such confirmation will be held at the Catholic parish which prepared the marriage papers. If not remembered, the identity of this parish will be recorded by the diocese when it issued the dispensation to allow the marriage to take place in a non-Catholic church.
9. If the school only requires *one* of the parents to be Catholic, a certificate of marriage in a Catholic church is in itself sufficient.
10. If for some reason none of the above information exists, it should be possible to obtain from the local diocese or from the relevant Episcopal conference for the country concerned, a statement that records at a particular church no longer exist. In these cases a letter from the parish priest that the person is a practising Catholic may have to be relied upon.
11. In other cases when there is a good reason why none of the above can be supplied, a sworn statement from a person who witnessed a baptism can be accepted as proof, provided there is no conflict of interest.
12. In this guidance “Certificate” simply means a written document certifying that certain facts are recorded in a register of baptism, reception etc. It may, for instance, be in the form of a letter.

*For further guidance on this topic, contact Paul Barber, Archdiocese of Westminster Education Service, e-mail: [paulbarber@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:paulbarber@rcdow.org.uk), tel: 020 7798 9005.*

## *Obtaining Proof of Baptism – Guidance for Parents*

### **I haven't got a Certificate of Baptism**

1. Whether a baptism took place in this country or anywhere else in the world, obtaining a certificate of baptism is usually quicker and easier than most people assume.
2. A copy of a certificate can usually be obtained quickly and easily from the parish of baptism, whichever country this is in.

### **Other documents which are acceptable**

3. If, for some reason there is difficulty obtaining a certificate of baptism, a certificate of Confirmation in the Catholic Church is an acceptable alternative, because confirmation does not take place without proof of baptism. A copy of the certificate can be obtained from the parish of confirmation.
4. Likewise, if a person has married in a Catholic church, proof of baptism will have been recorded by the parish where the marriage took place. That parish will be able to confirm in writing that the baptism has taken place.
5. If a person has married in a non-Catholic church with the permission of the Church, proof of baptism will have been recorded by the parish where the marriage was prepared. That parish will be able to confirm in writing that the baptism has taken place.
6. If a school requires that only one of the parents is Catholic, then a marriage certificate showing a marriage in a Catholic church is an acceptable alternative, because this would not have taken place unless at least one party is Catholic.

### **I don't know / can't remember which parish it was**

7. If the location of the parish is not known, or the parish no longer exists, enquiries may be made of the diocese in which the parish is located. Telephone numbers for most of these are available from International Directory Enquiries and are listed in the Vatican directory the *Annuario Pontificio* for the current year.
8. If the name of the diocese is not known, then enquiries can be made of the national Episcopal Conference or of the local Papal Nuncio's office. Alternatively, the website [www.catholic-hierarchy.org](http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org) has full details (address, telephone, fax) of all Catholic dioceses in the world, listed by name or country. Used in connection with a good atlas (try [www.multimap.com](http://www.multimap.com)) this will usually identify the nearest diocese. Also [www.katolsk.no/utenriks/liste\\_en.htm](http://www.katolsk.no/utenriks/liste_en.htm) has links to diocesan websites – most dioceses now have one.

### **The records at my parish have been destroyed**

9. In some parishes, records may have been destroyed, e.g. by fire, flood or war. If this is the case, the diocese or equivalent will be able to confirm this in writing.

### **Further Guidance**

10. For further guidance on this topic, contact the Apostolic Nunciature in the relevant country, which can be very helpful (refer to [www.catholic-hierarchy.org](http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org).) If this fails, contact the school for further assistance.