

# I Call You Friends

*Interreligious Dialogue in Catholic Schools*



**Westminster Interfaith**

**DIOCESE OF WESTMINSTER**





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## Acknowledgements

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The Diocese of Westminster Education Service supports schools in the Diocese, to ensure that they are successful and act in accordance within the Trust Deed of the Diocese. They exist so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to future generations. In the words of Cardinal Nichols, ‘Being Catholic means finding ways of expressing and deepening that “universality”, that Catholic character, and being ready always to embrace the other’.

In seeking to live out the Church’s vision for interreligious dialogue, Westminster Interfaith works to create a culture of interreligious awareness and activity across the Diocese, helping Catholics to deepen their own faith through the practice of dialogue.

**The image on the front cover is of a mosaic in the Lady Chapel of Westminster Cathedral.**

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## **Episcopal Foreword**

Dear Catholic Educators,

Catholic education is as you know a profound and sacred responsibility, rooted in the belief that every human being is created in the image of God. This truth calls us to recognise and celebrate the dignity of every person. You are entrusted with the mission of making Christ known, nurturing communities where everyone can flourish and encounter the transformative power of love, respect, and understanding.

The Church has long affirmed the importance of respectful engagement with those of other religions. In *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, the Second Vatican Council states: '*The Church reprobates, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against anyone or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion*' (1965, §5). This teaching reminds us of the mission of Catholic educators, to create communities that uphold the principles of mutual respect, humbly recognising that '*dialogue can enrich each side*' (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, §56).

Catholic schools are uniquely positioned to model this commitment, as they are communities where staff and pupils from different religions come together to work and serve one another. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis challenges us to '*foster a culture of encounter*' (2013, §220), where differences become opportunities for mutual enrichment rather than division.

This document seeks to serve as a comprehensive, practical, and relevant resource for Catholic schools striving to nurture an environment that reflects the dignity of all people. By fostering a spirit of unity and dialogue, it aims to guide educators in their mission to provide a holistic education that not only forms minds but also transforms hearts.

My prayer is that this resource will inspire and equip our schools to live out their sacred vocation as places of learning, love, and encounter. May it remind us all of our calling to witness to Christ and his teaching by reflecting God's infinite love to our neighbours.

Yours in Christ,

**Bishop James Curry**

*Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster*

## Introductory Content

### Introduction

In the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope St John Paul II writes that those engaged in dialogue ‘must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side’ (1990, §56).

The title of this document, “I Call You Friends”, is taken from Jesus’ discourse with His disciples, on the night before His Passion. In this section of St John’s Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that ‘I am the vine, and you are the branches’ (John 15:5). This invitation allows Christians to be rooted in Christ, whilst being open to genuinely and thoughtfully reaching out and embracing others. In dialogue with non-Christians, therefore, Christians must ensure that they remain ‘steadfast in their deepest convictions, clear and joyful in their own identity’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, §251).

The identity of a Christian is found, first and foremost, in the person and teaching of Christ, “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6), in whom people may find the fulness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself’ (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965, §2). This rootedness in Christ, who calls us friends, helps Christians to come to know and understand their neighbours, cultivating friendships across differences in religious belief.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of non-Catholic pupils attending Catholic schools ([CES Census, 2024](#)). This changing landscape presents Catholic educators with an opportunity: to find an expression of a school's Catholicity that is both faithful to the teaching and mission of the Church and meaningful to all the pupils they teach. The Church’s teaching on interreligious dialogue can be utilised to respond to this opportunity.

Practicing interreligious dialogue can help Catholic schools to express themselves in a refreshing and renewing way, knowing that Catholic education is a gift to the world. When this education is expressed in relationship with pupils and staff from Christianity and other religions alike, it can become a transformative force for good in the world.

With this in mind, this resource has been written to support Catholic schools in the Diocese of Westminster who teach pupils who belong to religions other than Christianity.

Following an introduction to the Catholic Church’s teaching on interreligious dialogue and suggestions for how this can be put into practice, there is a section which answers some commonly asked questions. These questions have been grouped into the categories of: Practical Considerations; Religious Literacy and Approaches to Prayer and Liturgy.

The examples contained in the Questions & Answers sections illustrate opportunities where interreligious dialogue can be lived out in schools. They are not, however, intended to be exhaustive and individual scenarios will need to be considered in light of their own facts.

For further guidance, please contact your Diocesan Education Advisor, who can advise whether some cases require taking independent legal advice.

At the back of this document, you will find recommendations for further reading. If there are questions which this resource does not address, please also contact your Diocesan Education Advisor.

This document has been written using the terminology for dialogue preferred by the Church, which is, “interreligious” dialogue rather than “interfaith” dialogue. Both terms, however, point to the same method of dialogue, that is, building relationships between religions.

### **Key Documents for Interreligious Dialogue in Schools**

In 2010, the Bishop’s Conference of England & Wales produced a teaching document entitled [Meeting God in Friend and Stranger: Fostering Respect and Mutual Understanding Between the Religions](#) (hereafter, *MGFS*). The document offers us a pastoral and practical expression of the Catholic Church’s teaching on interreligious dialogue. It is an excellent resource for schools and parishes and we recommend that schools refer to *MGFS* alongside this resource.

Another useful document, produced by the Catholic Education Service in 2008, is [Catholic Schools, Children of Other Faiths and Community Cohesion: Cherishing Education for Human Growth](#) (abbreviated in this resource to *Cherishing Education for Human Growth*). The document provides practical advice and examples of good practice in schools. Whilst sections of this document are referenced in this resource, it is recommended that schools refer to the document itself for further details.

### **What is Interreligious Dialogue?**

In its simplest form, Pope St John Paul II described dialogue as ‘a way of living in positive relationship with others’ (*Meeting God in Friend and Stranger (MGFS)*, 2010, §2). We might say that practicing interreligious dialogue helps Christians to see people of other religions not in opposition to them, but in relation to them. It is a teaching that encourages Catholics to view everyone ‘created, as they are, in the image of God’ (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965, §5).

Towards the end of the last session of the Second Vatican Council, a document was promulgated that speaks about the Catholic Church’s relationship to people who belong to non-Christian religions: *Nostra Aetate*. Although the document is brief, *Nostra Aetate* provides Catholics with a theological foundation for interreligious dialogue, upon which many decades of dialogue, conversations and collaborations, and the strengthening of relationships has been built.

In the discussion of the tenets of other religions, *Nostra Aetate* says that ‘The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions’ (1965, §2). This does not mean to say, of course, that all aspects of other religions are true and holy.

Indeed, in *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*, we hear that ‘truth is one and universal, that there are glimpses of that one truth and supreme good in other religions, and that it is the one God who, in his loving Providence, is the Creator of those elements of truth and goodness’ (MGFS, 2010, §27).

MGFS also reminds Catholics that when engaging in interreligious dialogue, ‘we must not be surprised, but actually expect to find, that God is already there... It is in dialogue that we meet and are moved to collaborate with the same Holy Spirit we have received ourselves’ (2010, §99). By building communities which welcome pupils from all religions, schools are also creating opportunities for Christian pupils to meet and collaborate with the Holy Spirit, present in the lives of others. Interreligious dialogue is therefore an expression of Catholic teaching that can help to nurture an environment where pupils of all religions see the good in each other and where both pupils and staff work together for the common good.

Finally, there is the question of what this theology of dialogue looks like in practice. MGFS reminds Catholics that, ‘Both discussion and collaboration are expressions of the Church’s mission... In recent years the Church has been accustomed to refer to this discussion and collaboration by distinguishing four interdependent forms of dialogue’ (2010, §108-109):

- **Dialogue of Life:** Striving to live in an open and neighbourly spirit with each other;
- **Dialogue of Action:** Working together for the common good;
- **Dialogue of Theological Exchange:** Where specialists deepen their understanding of their respective religions;
- **Dialogue of Religious Experience:** Where people rooted in their own religions, share their “spiritual riches”. (MGFS, 2010, §110-113)

These ways to dialogue are a gift to all Christians who desire to build authentic Christian communities, whilst trusting that their own faith can be enriched through conversations and collaborations with people from other religions.

## Dialogue in Practice

Interreligious Dialogue is one of the many expressions of the Catholic faith. The four forms of dialogue: **Life**; **Action**; **Theological Exchange** and **Religious Experience**, provide schools with a useful framework, which can be used to embed dialogue in the Catholic Ethos of the school.

Taking these ways to dialogue as a guide, this page details examples of how dialogue can be put into practice in Catholic schools. The examples are by no means exhaustive, but instead aim to illustrate a number of ways that dialogue can be expressed.

Sharing a **Dialogue of Life** means living in an open and neighbourly spirit with one another. This form of dialogue can be shared on the occasion of a School Feast Day, where pupils from all religions are united in a day of celebration at the school. It can also be expressed pastorally, in the accompaniment of pupils throughout the joys and struggles of everyday life. This is something that schools will be doing naturally and although these conversations may seem second nature, they provide a strong foundation for dialogue.

A **Dialogue of Action** can be practiced whenever pupils work together for the common good, for instance, during a fundraising or volunteering week. Social action provides a natural opportunity for this to happen. This type of dialogue does not focus on differences in theology, but on collaboration, working towards a goal which benefits everyone in the school and local community. Practicing this form of dialogue can also be an opportunity to explore the primacy of social action in different religious beliefs.

By inviting speakers from different religions to come and speak to the pupils, a school can cultivate a **Dialogue of Theological Exchange**. This could take place in the context of an interreligious panel for [Interfaith Week](#), which takes place each November, or be convened around a particular theme, for instance, climate change or justice & peace concerns. These occasions give pupils the opportunity to hear from individuals rooted in a religious tradition different to their own, helping them to reflect on their own religious beliefs. Practicing this type of dialogue can lead to powerful and transformative encounters for both pupils and staff.

Schools can reach out to their local Borough's Interfaith Forum to enquire about local speakers (see Westminster Interfaith's "[Resource Pack for Schools](#)" for details on how to contact your local Interfaith Forum), or see the contact lists on [RE Hubs](#).

Lastly, a **Dialogue of Religious Experience** can happen in an RE lesson, with opportunities for pupils to share their religious perspective on a particular theme, season or occasion. *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* terms this as an opportunity to 'share your spiritual riches, e.g. regarding prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute'" (2010, §113). Encouraging pupils to respectfully listen to the perspectives of their peers can help to enliven the academic study of religion, whilst also fostering a culture of welcome for pupils from all religions.

## Examples from the Catholic Schools Inspection (CSI)

The Grade Descriptors in the [Catholic Schools Inspectorate Handbook](#) (September 2025) demonstrate ways in which a Catholic school can use the practice of interreligious dialogue to enrich their commitment to the Catholic Life and Mission of a school:

- Page 35 (Grade Descriptors, Grade 1): *Pupils show a deep respect for their own personal dignity and that of others, who are made in the image and likeness of God. They demonstrate a deep sense of respect for those of other faiths, religions, and none.*
- Page 39 (Grade Descriptors, Grade 1): *Everyone is welcomed in a spirit of generous hospitality, especially those who are most vulnerable. This embedded culture of welcome means that the school celebrates the presence of those from various cultures and belief traditions, going the extra mile to understand their needs and enable them to live and pray in fidelity to their own commitments.*

## Interreligious Dialogue, Ecumenism and Dialogue with Non-Religious Pupils

Before moving to the Questions & Answers section, it is important to draw a distinction between the practice of interreligious dialogue and ecumenism. Though related, they are separate practices in the Catholic Church. The practice of ecumenism refers to Christians from different Christian denominations working together for the unity of the Christian Church. Each Christian denomination, though distinct in many ways, are united by a common baptism and a shared belief in the Trinity, each recognising Christ as God.

In contrast, the practice of interreligious dialogue refers to building bridges between different religions. Different religions do not share a common baptism or a belief in Jesus' divinity, however they often have shared values. The practice of dialogue is a witness to the belief that, through conversations and collaborations between people of different religions, the world can become a more united, peaceful place for all.

Many Christians from different denominations attend Catholic schools. However, this resource specifically provides guidance, informed by the Catholic Church's teaching on interreligious dialogue, to help schools support pupils who belong to a religion other than Christianity. For guidance on supporting Christian pupils from different denominations, it is recommended that schools refer to the [Prayer and Liturgy Directory](#).

Moreover, Catholic schools welcome many pupils who have no religion. However, this document aims to respond to practical questions raised by schools in the Diocese of Westminster, with a specific focus on pupils of different religions, rather than those with no religion. For guidance on including non-religious perspectives in Religious Education, schools should refer to the [Religious Education Directory](#), and for Prayer and Liturgy to the [Prayer and Liturgy Directory](#).



## Questions & Answers

### Questions & Answers: Practical Considerations

An increase in pupils from different religions in Catholic schools presents an opportunity to practice the Church's teaching on interreligious dialogue. It can also, however, present schools with practical questions which require careful consideration. This section offers guidance on some of these practical considerations, using examples to illustrate potential scenarios.

It is important to note that the examples contained in this document are not intended to be exhaustive and individual scenarios will need to be considered in light of their own facts. For further guidance, please contact your Diocesan Education Advisor, who can advise whether some cases require taking independent legal advice.

#### **1. How can Catholic schools faithfully engage in dialogue, without compromising their own values?**

As referenced in the **Introduction** to this document, in *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope St John Paul II writes that 'those engaged in this dialogue (interreligious dialogue) must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side (1990, §56).

For Catholic schools, this shows the path of dialogue. Whilst staying true to their own religious traditions, Catholic schools can build a culture of dialogue with pupils from different religions, knowing that dialogue can enrich the whole school community.

For instance, a Catholic school should always celebrate a whole school Mass or Feast Day with solemnity and joy. At the same time, staff can pay special attention to how pupils who are not Christian will experience these times of prayer and celebration. Whole school events can provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion around religious festivals, celebrations, food and prayer, as well as opportunities to celebrate together.

## **2. How can a Catholic school cater to religious dietary requirements?**

Many religions, including Christianity, have rules that surround food and it can be a careful balance to consider all religious dietary requirements. Whilst it may not always be possible to cater for every religious dietary requirement, in spirit of generous hospitality and out of a genuine respect for the religious beliefs and practices within the school, included below are some considerations for schools who serve food in their canteen:

- Many Muslim pupils eat only halal meat, that is, meat from animals that are permissible to eat and slaughtered in alignment with Islamic law. It is permissible for a Catholic school to serve halal meat, and Catholics themselves are allowed to eat it. However, a Catholic school will need to consider whether halal meat will be provided just to Muslim pupils, or whether it will be more generally provided. What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances.
- Many Hindu pupils will refrain from eating beef, and some may be vegetarian. In a Catholic school with a number of Hindu pupils, it would be thoughtful to consider how often beef is served and whether there are suitable alternatives for those pupils who do not eat beef.
- Many Sikh pupils are vegetarian and those that eat meat will not eat meat that has been ritually slaughtered (for instance, halal or kosher meat).
- If a Catholic school chooses to serve a type of meat that many of their pupils cannot eat, out of respect for those pupils, the school should also ensure that the standards and selection of vegetarian food is of equal standard to the meals containing meat.
- Many Jewish pupils will keep kosher laws, which apply to the ways in which food is prepared, mixed and eaten. For pupils who keep a strict kosher observance, canteens should consider purchasing meals from a kosher supplier, as it is unlikely that a school canteen will be able to provide food that meets kosher requirements.
- In all of the examples above, it will be important for Catholic schools to have an appropriate and sensitive dialogue with parents, so as to consider what is possible in the circumstances.
- Regardless of the type of meals a Catholic school chooses to serve, it would be recommended they refrain from serving meat on a Friday, so as to observe the [abstinence as mandated by the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales](#). In this way, a Catholic school can respectfully make room for pupils of different religions, whilst rediscovering its own tradition in the practice of the “Friday Penance”.

### **3. Can pupils cover their hair at school?**

Catholic schools are encouraged to be attentive to the religious practices of pupils from different religions, including where hair coverings form part of their religious expression or belief. For example, some Muslim girls, or Sikh boys and girls, choose to cover their hair. For those in Muslim families, the hijab (a covering of the head and neck, but not the face) is only worn after puberty, whilst in others it is worn from a younger age. Similarly, some Jewish boys may wear a kippah as an expression of their religion. Schools can support a respectful environment by accommodating these practices where possible, consulting with parents in a respectful dialogue as required.

Like any other item of uniform, it is reasonable to require that the hair covering is in school colours and in-keeping with other items of school uniform. This helps to foster a pupil's pride both in the practice of their religion and in their identity as a member of their school.

It is recommended that the rules around students covering their hair should be written into a school's uniform policy (*Cherishing Education for Human Growth*, 2008, p.12).

Schools might also consider reasonable adjustments to clothing requirements for PE. Here, consultation with parents would be appropriate, to ascertain the specific needs of the pupil.

### **4. Can pupils be given time off to celebrate religious festivals or go on pilgrimage?**

With regard to the celebration of religious feasts and festivals, giving pupils a limited amount of time off is permissible, so long as it is in keeping with the school's attendance policy, government guidance and is applied equally to all pupils.

Given that Christmas and Easter are already Bank Holidays in the UK, offering Muslim pupils, for instance, a day off to celebrate Eid(s), or Hindu, Sikh or Jain pupils a day off to celebrate Diwali (Deepawali), is an appropriate consideration for a Catholic school.

The act of pilgrimage is a part of many religions. Many secondary schools and sixth forms offer pupils the opportunity to go on pilgrimage to Lourdes and many Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.

As a general rule, these pilgrimages should take place outside of term time. However, in exceptional circumstances, requests for absence to undertake a pilgrimage can be judged by the school on an individual basis. Here, we also recommend contacting your Diocesan Education Advisor, if a school is unclear as to whether a particular request for time off relates to a religious festival.

## **5. How can Catholic schools accommodate pupils who are fasting?**

Fasting is a practice that is undertaken in many religions. This can often provide an opportunity for discussion about the meaning and benefits of fasting. However, when fasting days fall in term-time, they can present practical considerations.

It is important to note that fasting has different significance and meaning in different religions. In Christianity, many Catholics fast by significantly limit what they eat on days such as Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. This often does not include fasting from all food and water. Fasting is often paired with abstinence (giving something up) during the penitential season of Lent.

During the month of Ramadan, many Muslims fast from all food and water from sunrise each day, breaking their fast at sunset with a meal, known as an “iftar”. In Judaism, there are periods of fasting from all food and water, such as on the occasion of Yom Kippur, which constitutes a 25 hour fast. Many Hindus fast on regular occasions throughout the year.

Schools are required to be respectful of pupils who are fasting. This could include providing them with an alternative space to use during break and lunch time (so that they do not have to sit next to their peers who are eating lunch).

Moreover, it would be thoughtful to consider how fasting pupils, who are in receipt of Free School Meals, could continue to receive their food. For instance, packed lunches could be provided to these pupils and given to them at the end of the day. Often, these small gestures go a long way in building a culture of dialogue and respect with pupils.

There should be special consideration to thoughtfully accommodate Muslim pupils and staff who are fasting throughout the month of Ramadan, particularly when Ramadan falls during the exam season. Newham’s SACRE have produced guidance for schools in their Borough, who have students observing Ramadan. Their guidance might be a helpful guide to schools in the Diocese and can be accessed [here](#) (see “Summary advice for schools on Ramadan”).



## **6. Can pupils leave lessons to pray?**

This question is in particular reference to religions such as Islam, which has set prayer times throughout the day.

A pupil's regular commitment to daily prayer should be commended, but it should not disrupt their time in lessons. For instance, it is good practice to give pupils a place to pray at lunchtime, but not to allow them to leave lessons to pray.

During Ramadan, many Muslim pupils might choose to pray more often. An increase in pupils seeking a space to pray requires particular consideration by the school, as it is appropriate to accommodate these pupils wherever possible, without prayer time clashing with lesson time.

Special consideration should also be given to opportunities for pupils to pray during the exam season, when pupils from all religions might choose to pray more often.

## Questions & Answers: Religious Literacy

Schools with a religious character play an important part in teaching about religions, as well as providing space 'where students are encouraged to discuss issues of religion, ethics and morality' ([The Bloom Review](#), 2023, §3.4).

One way a Catholic school can live out its Catholic ethos is to ensure a school-wide commitment to improving religious literacy. There will be opportunities for this, amongst both pupils and staff, in lessons, assemblies, CPD and in extra-curricular visits to places of worship.

This section addresses some of the questions around improving religious literacy in schools and explains how these can be opportunities to express the Catholic faith through interreligious dialogue.

### 7. Why should Catholics learn about religions other than Christianity?

Learning about a variety of religions not only breaks down the fear of the unknown when approaching each other, but can also help Catholic pupils to reaffirm their own religious beliefs.

In the words of Pope St John Paul II, 'other religions constitute a positive challenge for the Church: they stimulate her both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and of the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply her own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of Revelation which she has received for the good of all' (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, §56).

In this way, learning about religions other than Christianity can help Catholic pupils to acknowledge the signs of Christ in the world, to more deeply examine their own beliefs and witness to Christ's call, to love God and to love our neighbour. It is a service of truth and charity to the wider community that Catholics know their own faith and seek to give witness to it by living it out to the full. As expressed in *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger*, 'When by his grace Christians live according to the Gospel and its values, they are evangelising, and so bringing Christ's saving presence into their world' (2010, §86).

Furthermore, as outlined in the [Religious Education Directory](#), learning about religions other than Christianity 'prepares Catholic pupils for the world they will encounter outside of the Catholic atmospheres of the home, parish, and school' (2.1.4. A Pluralistic Curriculum – see this section for further reading).

## **8. How can Catholic schools acknowledge religious festivals in other religions?**

Religious Education lessons provide an opportunity for Catholic schools to acknowledge religious festivals in different religions, paying reference to the Dialogue and Encounter branch in the [Religious Education Directory](#).

Pupils from different religions can also offer to share aspects of their own beliefs and practices, sharing what the Church terms their “spiritual riches” (MGFS, 2010, §113) (See also **Dialogue in Practice**, p.7 of this document).

Assemblies provide an opportunity to acknowledge a variety of religious festivals. The Education Service in the Diocese of Westminster have produced [assemblies on major religious festivals](#) and key dates for religious festivals are included in the fortnightly “Witness to the Word” bulletin.

On the occasion of major religious festivals, particularly those marked by members of your school community, schools can choose to read out ‘messages of goodwill’ (*Cherishing Education for Human Growth*, 2008, p.11), for instance, wishing Hindu, Sikh or Jain pupils a happy Diwali or Muslim pupils a happy Eid. Alternatively, these messages could be sent directly to parents (*Cherishing Education for Human Growth*, 2008, p.11). This enables a Catholic school to respect the religious beliefs of those in the community, without collectively or liturgically celebrating festivals belonging to non-Christian religions.

Westminster Interfaith produce a “[Festivals and Greetings](#)” postcard, which includes the dates of some of the main religious festivals, alongside their accompanying greeting. Schools are welcome to use this resource as needed.

Appropriate time given to staff CPD is also important here. This time can be given over to informing staff about the key beliefs and practices of the religions that are, in particular, represented in the school. More importantly, however, this time can be used to share the Church’s teaching on interreligious dialogue and to explore, in practical terms, how this teaching can be part of the expression of the Catholic ethos of the school. For further guidance on this, please get in touch with your Diocesan Education Advisor.

## **9. Can a Catholic school facilitate extra-curricular visits to non-Christian places of worship?**

Visits to different places of worship can provide pupils with the opportunity to learn about each other’s beliefs and practices, as well as to reflect on their own. It is absolutely appropriate for Catholics to respectfully enter another religion’s place of worship, as and when they are invited.

If schools are looking for suitable places of worship to visit, it is recommended they contact their local Interfaith Forum, who may be able to help. Westminster Interfaith have produced a [resource with the details of many of the Interfaith Forums](#) across the Diocese (Interreligious Dialogue: Resource Pack for Schools).

## Questions & Answers: Approaches to Prayer and Liturgy

Prayer and Liturgy is central to the unique expression and character of a Catholic school.

Particular consideration ought to be given to how pupils from different religions experience prayer and liturgy, as well as the ways in which their own prayer life can be expressed in a Catholic school.

### 10. Can a Catholic school have a space in which pupils of different religions can pray?

Pope St John Paul II writes about the Church's relationship to people of different religions as being directed by a twofold respect. A respect, firstly, for those who search for answers to the questions of life, and secondly, a respect for the action of the Spirit in humanity (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, §29). Guided by this respect, and indeed by a commitment to 'going the extra mile to understand their needs and enable them to live and pray in fidelity to their own commitments' (Catholic Schools Inspectorate Handbook, September 2025, p.39), it is good practice for Catholic schools to give pupils of different religions a place to pray.

This is affirmed in *Cherishing Education for Human Growth*: 'if reasonably practicable, a room (or rooms) might be made available for the use of pupils and staff from other faiths for prayer. Existing toilet facilities might be adapted to accommodate individual ritual cleansing which is sometimes part of religious lifestyle and worship. If such space is not available on a permanent or regular basis, extra efforts might be made to address such need for major religious festivals' (2008, p.12).

Catholic schools have a responsibility to ensure that this multi-faith prayer room is separate from the Chapel, appropriately resourced and supervised by staff.

This room could also display an interfaith calendar, such as the [SHAP Calendar](#), to emphasise that the room is for the use of pupils and staff from any religion.

It is also important to note that any collective worship in a Catholic school, as per the Diocesan Protocols, must be 'in accordance with the tenets of the Catholic faith'. In this context, it is absolutely appropriate to let pupils from other religions engage in private prayer (in the ways outlined above). However, any collective worship must align to the Catholic faith.

Schools are recommended to contact their Diocesan Education Advisor if they have more specific questions, which are not addressed in this answer.



**11. How should pupils who are not Catholic respond to entering a Chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved?**

When entering a Chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, it is good practice to ask pupils who are not Catholic to be respectful. This might mean that, for instance, instead of genuflecting, they quietly pause for a moment before entering a pew. In this way, all pupils in a Catholic school are taught to be respectful in sacred spaces, even if these respectful actions are not identical.

Moments like this can be an opportunity for formation on how different religions show respect, using their words, gestures and postures. This can also provide the opportunity to teach the Catholic Church's belief in the Eucharist, explaining why Catholics show respect by genuflecting or kneeling before the tabernacle.

**12. Why are Catholic schools advised not to offer yoga?**

Catholic schools have a responsibility to ensure that any religious practice offered to students is consistent with the Church's understanding of prayer, spirituality, and human flourishing. For this reason, some forms of yoga, particularly those rooted in non-Christian spirituality or religions, are not appropriate in a Catholic school context. This is because they include the practice of beliefs or rituals that do not align with Catholic teaching.

However, this does not mean that all forms of physical movement or stillness are unsuitable. Activities such as Pilates, stretching, breathing exercises, or Christian meditation can be offered, because they focus on physical wellbeing or on explicitly Christian forms of prayer. These approaches support relaxation, attentiveness, and calm without drawing on spiritual frameworks outside the Catholic Church.

## Further Reading & Resources

### Interreligious Dialogue Resources

- **Westminster Interfaith:** <https://rcdow.org.uk/interfaith/resources/>

Westminster Diocese has a dedicated department to the practice and promotion of interreligious dialogue called **Westminster Interfaith**. Westminster Interfaith have resources on their website, including an interreligious resource pack for schools, and signposts to further reading. They can be contacted via the email below.

**Email:** [westminsterinterfaith@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:westminsterinterfaith@rcdow.org.uk)

- **Meeting God in Friend and Stranger:** <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/meeting-god-in-friend-and-stranger/>

The document can be downloaded on this page, under the heading “Bishop’s Document”.

- **Children of Other Faiths and Community Cohesion: Cherishing Education for Human Growth:** <https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/resources/catholic-schools---children-of-other-faiths>

This document from 2008 provides practical advice for implementing interreligious dialogue in Catholic schools. See particularly pages 9-12 for examples of good practice. Please note that any reference in this document to Section 48 is out of date, given the publication of the new Catholic Schools Inspection Framework in 2024.

### Vatican Documents

- ***Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI (1964):**  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_06081964\\_ecclesiam.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html)
- ***Nostra Aetate*, Second Vatican Council (1965):**  
[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html)
- ***Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II (1990):**  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html)  
*§27-28 & §55-57, in particular*

## Catholic Education Service Guidance

- **CES Guidance Note: Pupils of other faiths in Catholic Schools, Academies and Sixth Form Colleges in England and Wales**

<https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/resources/ces-guidance---pupils-of-other-faiths>

The purpose of this guidance is to provide an overview of the current legal position relating to an individual's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion in the education context. This guidance includes case studies and explores how the right to freedom of religion may be construed within the context of a Catholic school.

- **CES: Guidance on the right of withdrawal from religious education and/or collective worship in schools in England**

<https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/resources/right-of-withdrawal>

## Government Guidance on Attendance

- **Working together to improve school attendance: Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academic, independent schools and local authorities (August 2024)**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working\\_together\\_to\\_improve\\_school\\_attendance\\_-\\_August\\_2024.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf)

For guidance on "Code R: Religious Observance" please see page 86.

Here, you will find the Government's definition of a day that qualifies for religious observance: *"As a general rule, 'a day exclusively set apart for religious observance' is a day when the pupil's parents would be expected by the religious body to which they belong to stay away from their employment in order to record the occasion"* (p.86).

If you are unsure of any of this statutory guidance, please contact your Diocesan Education Advisor.



**Westminster Interfaith**

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