

# CATHOLIC UNION BRIEFING NOTE

## THE WORK OF THE CATHOLIC UNION

### General Brief

[Catholicunion.org.uk](http://Catholicunion.org.uk)  
[@CatholicUnionGB](https://twitter.com/CatholicUnionGB)



*Public  
Engagement  
by Catholics  
for the  
Common Good*

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### Introduction:

- The Catholic community is one of the largest communities in the country. There are approximately 4.5 million Catholics in Britain today.
- The Catholic Union was founded in 1870. It is a membership organisation dedicated to the defence of Catholic values in Parliament and public life, and the promotion of the common good.
- The Catholic Union is an exclusively lay organisation, however it works with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales ([CBCEW](#)) and the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Scotland ([CBCS](#)). It is a consultative body to the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales.
- The membership of the Catholic Union includes people from all parts of the country and all walks of life. It includes doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, and civil servants. It represents a wealth of lay Catholic experience and expertise.
- The [Catholic Union Charitable Trust](#) is the Union's charitable arm. It organises speeches, seminars and discussions with prominent Catholics and others. It has a particular interest in Catholic Social Teaching which has much to offer those who want to create a more just and equal society.
- The Catholic Union has a number of specialist committees. These include the Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee and the Medical Ethics Committee, which is a joint group with the Catholic Medical Association.
- Our aim is to contribute in a balanced and respectful way to the dialogue between religion and politics. The Catholic Union seeks to follow the spirit of "[The Participation of Catholics in Political Life](#)", a document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome in 2002, which articulates the duties of the laity and their participation in public life.

### Background:

- The Catholic Union was founded in 1870 and the earliest meeting was held at Norfolk House, St. James's Square in London on 10th February 1871 when it was unanimously agreed that a Society of Catholics be founded, under the title of the Catholic Union of Great Britain, to promote Catholic interests. The society was sanctioned by the Hierarchy of England and the Vicars Apostolic in Scotland and approved by the then Pope Pius IX.

- One of the main motivations behind the formation of the Catholic Union was to give a voice to lay Catholics in Britain and provide a source of experience from which Catholic Bishops could draw on. Over time, the actions of the Catholic Union have become more specialised, focusing on legislation which affected Catholic interests through approaches to parliamentarians and those in government.
- The Catholic Union celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. It has become a trusted source of briefing and advice to many Catholic parliamentarians and policy makers and established itself as a key organisation in a number of policy areas, including religious education, religious freedom and persecution, international development, and care for the vulnerable in society. More information about our work can be found on our [website](#).

### **Catholic Statistics:**

- The Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian church. Around 1.3 billion people identify as Catholic.<sup>1</sup>
- An estimated 3.8 million English and Welsh adults identify as Catholic.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, there are an estimated 695,000 Catholics in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> The total number of Catholics in Britain is therefore around 4,495,000.
- CAFOD, the official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, spent £43.4 million in 2017/18 on international development and responding to emergencies in some of the poorest parts of the World.<sup>4</sup>
- Catholic schools make up 10% of the national total of maintained schools. There are more than 2,200 Catholic schools, academies and colleges in England and Wales educating over 850,000 pupils.<sup>5</sup> Ofsted judged 73% of Catholic secondary schools to be outstanding or good, compared to 60% of schools nationally. For primary schools, 74% of Catholic schools were judged outstanding or good compared to 66% nationally.<sup>6</sup>
- The Caritas Social Action Network, set up by the Catholic Church in England and Wales, is a network of 41 separate charities and organisations that supports thousands of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/the-church/>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-feb-contemporary-catholicism-report-may16.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/11297461>  
<sup>4</sup> <https://cafod.org.uk/About-us/What-we-do>  
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/about-us>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/catholic-education/>  
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.csan.org.uk/>