

**To accompany the Motion to amend Rule 1
on Catenian Association membership eligibility criteria
to be decided by the members of the Catenian Association**

Answers to some Frequently Asked Questions



The questions raised for this document come from GB members to whom the answers will be most relevant. Where there is reference to Rules this impacts all members.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is GBNC changing the term from “laymen” to “laity” and what does laity mean in this context for the Association?

GBNC is only the facilitators of the motion which was raised by a member and gained enough votes to pass at the May National Conference and so now has to be put to a vote of the wider Association, in accordance with Association Rules.

The change of wording opens up membership to all lay Catholics over the age of 18 of either sex, including permanent deacons and those members who, after enrolment, discern a vocation and are later ordained as priests. This offers the opportunity to enrol, for example, Catholic women who could not currently benefit from membership because their husband is not a Catholic.

This motion also reflects current societal trends with many of the younger generation, in particular, seeking to join a mixed sex social organisation rather than a single sex one.

Core values of Faith, Family and Friendship are unchanged.

2. If the vote passes does this mean women can join the Association or does it simply open the possibility of a subsequent rule change that would allow women to be admitted?

The motion being voted on is to amend the Association’s eligibility requirements from Catholic laymen to Catholic laity. For the change to be implemented nothing further would be required.

3. If women are to be admitted, would they be able to join any Circle, or would each Circle have to decide whether to change from ‘men only’ to ‘men and women’?

Women would be eligible to join any Circle in the Association under the amended rule.

4. Will it be possible for an individual Circle to decline to accept women members?

If the rule is changed and the Catenian Association ceases to be a single-sex organisation, then individual Circles will not be able to discriminate membership on the basis of sex. If a membership application was declined by virtue of another reason which would equally apply to a male, as is the case at present, then that would be allowed.

5. *Will this change affect the structure or roles within the Association?*

It is envisaged that the only changes will be concerned with nomenclature and making terms gender neutral.

6. *Is this change part of a wider inclusivity initiative?*

There are no plans with regard to a wider inclusivity initiative.

7. *Will it be possible for women to form their own Circles?*

No, just as men cannot form male only Circles under the proposed rule change.

8. *What will be the impact on visits between Circles with and without women members?*

There would be no impact. Under the existing Rule 2(b) a member is entitled to attend the meetings of any Circle.

9. *Will clear rules be set in place to address when a woman member attains an office such as Circle President/Provincial President?*

A woman joining the Association automatically becomes a member and will, therefore be subject to and benefit from the Rules and Regulations concerning the rights of members in the same way as a male member. In GB, all members benefit from the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 which prohibits discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sex or any other protected characteristic.

10. *If the vote does pass and there is a delay (of perhaps years) before women are admitted, would this conflict with discrimination law?*

So long as the delay is not due to any discrimination against prospective members on the grounds of sex but simply because no women wish to be admitted, then there is no conflict.

11. *In the case of married couples, the present status is that a man pays a membership fee and can attend meetings and social events (with their ladies). If women are admitted and both husband and wife wish to attend meetings will both be required to pay full membership fees?*

A capitation fee would have to be paid by each in order for both husband and wife to become members. It would be a decision by the individual Circle as to whether full Circle fees were charged to both or if a family-type membership fee applies.

12. My wife doesn't want to become a Catenian. Does she have to join?

Absolutely not! Wives are already part of our Catenian family enjoying benefits such as benevolence and being able to attend social functions. Their presence and support have been essential to the life of the Association and that is not intended to be changed by the introduction of this motion.

13. In any marketing of the Circle, or in seeking new members, will all Circles be obliged to say that membership is open to both men and women?

Circles would be obliged to say that membership is open to Catholic laity as that would be the rule. Anything other than this could be seen to be in breach of the rule and in GB contrary to discrimination law.

14. Has GBNC not considered forming a new dual-gender organisation rather than creating friction on an existing successful albeit diminishing one?

The motion does not envisage this alternative structure for the Association. Any limited consideration given to this as an alternative suggests any connections between the two groups would be minimal, especially for GB given existing legislation.

15. Do we need to advise any external GB bodies? e.g. Companies House, Charity Commission

The proposed change from “layman” to “laity” is not a relevant matter that any external bodies require to be advised about especially as the Association in GB is not registered with either body, not being incorporated or a charity.

16. Will support be available for adopting the new terminology across Circles, Provinces, and meetings?

Yes. All new terminology, changes to procedures, etc will be highlighted and explanations provided to all Circles and Provinces during a transition and implementation period.

17. What if I value the male bonding and camaraderie in our Circle, and feel uncertain about staying if changes are made - how does the Association respond?

The proposed change in membership criteria is to open eligibility to all Catholics. Change, if any, will be determined by the membership. The Aims and Values of the Association remain the same which all members are expected to honour. We

would encourage members to wait and see what impact any changes would have in practice.

18. Do women want to join the association? Is the change primarily about increasing the membership by recruiting women, and/or increasing the recruitment of men uncomfortable belonging to a single-sex association?

There is evidence that women do want to join. Examples include women becoming “social” members at Adur Valley and in a mixed-sex group in Failsworth, North Manchester. Statements have also been made by female CathSoc students that they also wish to be able to become members. In conjunction with this, the younger male generation are, generally, seeking to join a social organisation for both sexes rather than a single sex one. In contrast, we are aware that some existing young members will consider leaving the Association if women are invited to join. There can be no guarantees that women or younger men will immediately join but it removes the structural barrier to membership.

19. How many Catenians do GBNC expect to resign if this motion is carried?

We are unable to answer that due to the fact that we do not know how many members are adamant about resigning if the vote is “Yes” or indeed “No”. Others are waiting for the For and Against information to be provided and for discussions to take place within Circles before deciding. As with any vote some may change their initial thoughts during the 3 month voting period. Regardless of the result we hope that members will at the very least allow a period of time to elapse to gauge how the membership situation is progressing.

20. When do we actually know the result?

The voting period is the 3 months following the motion being sent out to members by the Association Secretary. Assuming distribution takes place towards the end of August, the result will be known by the end of November.

21. In terms of the impact in GB under the Equality Act 2010, is there any transitional allowance where an existing characteristic is removed for groups (sex) that have operated for many years with the protection of that characteristic?

Direct discrimination cannot be justified in GB law so excluding women from joining would be unlawful as soon as the change is formally made.

Matters of indirect discrimination (where an association does not actively discriminate on the basis of sex but has policies or practices which place women at a particular disadvantage) can be justified in law provided it is a proportionate means of meeting a legitimate aim:

Example: A Circle decides to host a regular social event to encourage applications from diverse ethnic backgrounds and network with other local groups. The Circle liaises with another local association, exclusively for Catholics from Hong Kong, who meet every Tuesday finishing at 5.45pm. They decide to host the event at 6pm to align with this group but a female member objects as it conflicts with her childcaring responsibilities, feeling she may miss out as a result. The Circle attempts to find an alternative time to accommodate those with childcare responsibilities but these are unsuitable.

Women have been shown to hold greater responsibility for childcare placing them at significant disadvantage when required to attend weekday evening meetings. However, the Circle may argue the policy was in pursuit of the legitimate aim of encouraging greater inclusion and the alternative times would disproportionately impact the pursuit of that aim.

22. What is the penalty regime in cases of breach of the GB Equality Act?

The Association is liable for the conduct of its members in the civil courts in GB and may be required to pay damages for any successful claim.

While litigation is rare, Members may also be personally liable if they instruct, cause, induce or aid another to contravene the Equality Act (s111 EA 2010). The situation will vary in other jurisdictions.

Example under GB law: Member A informs member B that their Circle has agreed to prevent implementation of the new rule allowing female members. Should member B refuse then a claim could be brought against the Catenian Association and member A by:

- Women who had their application rejected
- Member B who is victimised following their refusal
- The Commission

A member who knowingly makes false statements to another when asking to aid them in their contravention of the Act, commits a criminal offence and would be

personally liable on summary conviction to a potentially unlimited fine. (s112 EA 2010)

Example: Member A instructs member B to contact a female applicant and inform them that their application was declined as membership was full. Should it later transpire that the reason was because she was a woman, member A would have committed a criminal offence.

Should the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) find evidence to think or suspect the Catenians have committed an unlawful act; they may offer a voluntary agreement to prevent further unlawful acts or launch a formal investigation. Should the EHRC carry out an investigation, it would be required to publish a statutory report detailing any unlawful acts it has identified. The risk of reputational damage to the Association from this would be very high.

Prepared from questions raised across the membership in GB. Answers reviewed by two Catenian retired lawyers, a former partner in a City law firm and input from a Catenian relation with professional knowledge of the workings of the Equality Act 2010