

# Tony Blair 'will covert to Catholic faith within weeks'

By JAMES CHAPMAN - 8th November 2007

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in\\_article\\_id=492483&in\\_page\\_id=1770](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=492483&in_page_id=1770) Tony Blair is preparing to convert to Roman Catholicism within weeks, it emerged last night.

The news prompted demands from followers of the faith for the former prime minister to renounce his previous support for abortion.

Mr Blair's long-expected switch to the faith of his wife and four children is expected to come at a Mass in the private chapel of Cardinal Cormac Murphy- O'Connor, the leader of Roman Catholics in England and Wales.

The Catholic newspaper The Tablet says the service of conversion will take place this month.

Mr Blair has regularly attended Catholic services in recent years, both with his family and alone. He has also visited Pope Benedict XVI and his predecessor John Paul II.

The Tablet said Mr Blair has received instruction from two priests, RAF chaplain John Walsh and Father Mark O'Toole, the cardinal's secretary.

A candidate for reception into the Catholic Church is usually received by their parish priest.

The cardinal's involvement, as Archbishop of Westminster, would suggest Mr Blair's process of conversion began while he was in Downing Street.

Mr Blair's spokesman did not deny the report, saying: "This is the same old speculation", but a friend said it was "not without substance".

News of the imminent move drew calls from leading Catholics for Mr Blair to renounce his backing in Parliament for abortion up to 24 weeks.

Tory MP Ann Widdecombe, who converted to Catholicism over her opposition to women priests in the Church of England, said: "I hope we will get a public statement repudiating his votes on abortion. Indeed, the Church will require it.

"The Church requires that we say at the point of reception that everything the Church teaches is revealed truth. There's no hedging.

"Mr Blair has taken a very public stand on the matter of abortion, and the Church stand being very publicly different, we are entitled to know what he now thinks.

"Without that, it cannot possibly be a serious move."

As premier, Mr Blair clashed frequently with Catholic leaders over his liberal attitudes to gay rights and other issues.

- Roman Polanski is to make the film version of The Ghost, a novel about a disgraced former premier which author Robert Harris admits was inspired by Mr Blair. Mr Harris was once a trusted friend of Mr Blair, but they fell out over the invasion of Iraq.