



Free Presbyterian minister blasts moderator's decision to attend reception for Pope

A Free Presbyterian minister has criticised a decision by the moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to attend a reception for the Pope when he visits Ireland this weekend, the News Letter reports..

The moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, will join other religious and civic leaders in Dublin Castle on August 25 for an event due to be attended by Pope Francis and Irish premier Leo Varadkar.



However, his decision to meet the pontiff has attracted some criticism, with one Free Presbyterian minister claiming it is “a betrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Love for Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and concern for the eternal souls of men will prevent any Bible believer from union

August 21, 2018

or communion with a Roman Catholic Church that remains as contrary to Holy Scripture today as it ever has been,” said Rev Ian Brown, Clerk of the General Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. (Photo above).

“As long as it proclaims its leader as the supreme head of the church on earth, denigrates the work that Christ completed on Calvary by the pretentious teachings central to its mass, refuses the scriptural way of salvation that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, fleeces its adherents by means of an imaginary purgatory, and offers indulgences with as much aplomb as Tetzl managed in Martin Luther’s day, no true Christian should engage in fellowship with this system, never mind travel to welcome its Pope.”

Rev Brown, minister at Martyrs Memorial Church in Belfast, went on to quote Martin Luther’s comments criticising the pope and “papal government”, adding: “In this deception and destruction of the souls of men a true Christian must never play a part. Any Reformed Protestant preacher worthy of the name cannot stand on any other ground. All of which begs the obvious question: how can the Presbyterian Church of Ireland present its recent vote in favour of its moderator participating in the upcoming Papal visit as anything other than a betrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ?”

Dr McMullen will also be present, at the personal invitation of Archbishop Eamon Martin, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, at the ‘Festival of Families’ in Croke Park, which Pope Francis will also attend.

Pope Francis ‘needs to speak honestly about church abuse’ during Ireland visit

The Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin has said the pope should speak frankly about church abuse scandals.

August 21, 2018

Diarmuid Martin said the institution had come through moments of real darkness and needed to avoid covering up or justifying what happened.



The first papal visit to Ireland for almost 40 years takes place this weekend.

Archbishop Martin said: “My hope is that he will speak kindly but also speak frankly.

“The recent history of the church in Ireland had its moments of real darkness.

“We need a church of light, a light that exposes darkness for what it is, and a light that is such that the mechanisms of cover-up and self justification cannot extinguish or tone down.

“My hope is that Pope Francis will challenge the church in Ireland to be different, to be more authentically the church of Jesus Christ in a culture that is different.”

The church has faced a sex abuse crisis which is global of nature but which has caused great harm to a once all-powerful institution in Ireland.

Archbishop Martin added: “The pope has to speak frankly about our past but also about our future.”

He said the scandals had produced deep-seated resentment amongst believers.

August 21, 2018

It is not just anger over the horror of abuse, but an anger at the role of church leadership in compounding the suffering of so many in institutions for children, for unmarried mothers and for vulnerable women.

“These were people who found themselves placed in the care (of) the church to be loved and respected but who so often encountered extraordinary harshness.

“What is worse, they were in the main poor and vulnerable people, those who should above all have been the privileged recipients of what the love and care of Jesus Christ mean.

“I keep asking myself what it was in Irish Catholicism that led to such a level of harshness?”

He said the number of victims was “immense” and not all their identities were known.

“It is not something that belongs to the past but a hurt that survivors and those close to them carry in their hearts every day of their lives.”

30 years on, Ballygawley bus bombing remembered

A memorial service for the victims of the Ballygawley bus bombing has been told that there must be no more "appeasement of terrorists".

A memorial service for the victims of the Ballygawley bus bombing has been told that there must be no more "appeasement of terrorists". Hundreds of relatives of the dead and survivors of the attack gathered on Sunday morning to mark the 30th anniversary of the atrocity.



They laid wreaths and poppy crosses near the scene in memory of the eight soldiers who were killed.

As well as the eight dead, 28 were injured when the Provisional IRA detonated a massive bomb along the Ballygawley to Omagh road at about 12.30am on August 20, 1988.

All the dead were aged between 18 and 21, and those gathered at the scene heard Church of Ireland minister Rev Alan Irwin call for an end to "the betrayal of the innocent victims of terrorism".

"The landscape has changed, lives have changed, but the memory is still as vivid today as on that fateful day," said Rev Irwin, whose father and uncle were murdered by the IRA. "I hope that each of you, as families, colleagues, neighbours have drawn comfort through the intervening years that your loved ones are remembered.

August 21, 2018

"This community has, through their unstinting desire, ensured their lives, their service, their sacrifice has and never will be forgotten.

"What has not changed is the mercy and compassion of God, nor His judgement in the last days.

"He will judge the just and the unjust. Those who are his children will receive their heavenly reward, while the wicked, the murderers, will have their place in the fires that burn for all eternity.

"But here's what has to change... no more betrayal of the innocent victims of terrorism, no more empty promises, no more flawed agreements, no more appeasement of terrorists."

He added: "Those who carried out this atrocity had a choice.

"They chose, because of some twisted ideology, to commit murder.

"What happened afterwards in their twisted minds was to them a cause for glorification."

A new memorial to those who lost their lives was also unveiled at the roadside during the service. It includes descriptive panels explaining what happened on the night.

As well as survivors and relatives of the victims, some of the first responders and medical staff who treated the wounded attended.

Among the first people on the scene were members of the Omagh Protestant Boys' Flute Band and the Londonderry

August 21, 2018

Star of the Valley band, who were returning from a parade in Portadown.

They had been travelling in buses just behind the soldiers.

A church service to honour the dead also took place at Newtownsaville afterwards.

The dead were Jason Burfitt (19); Richard Greener (21); Mark Morsworthy (18); Stephen Wilkinson (18); Jason Winter (19); Blair Bishop (19); Alexander Lewis (18), and Peter Bullock (21).

Since the bombing, five survivors have taken their own lives.

Among those in the crowd was James Leatherbarrow, who suffered a broken back after being thrown from the bus in the blast.

"They were my mates, they still are," he said.

Mr Leatherbarrow, from Liverpool, was looked after on the roadside that night by two women from Derry - Donna Patton and Grace Curry - who sat with him while waiting for the emergency services.

It took him until 2015 to get back on to a bus as years suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) tore his life apart.

"I was an evil so and so. It turned me into a person I didn't want to be," he admitted.

"I had nightmares, flashbacks, depression, years of heavy drinking and was very, very angry.

August 21, 2018

"I was physically and mentally abusive to people and mentally and verbally abusive to my first wife."

Mr Leatherbarrow, now 51, twice tried to take his own life, but battled through and has come out the other side.

Now married again with three children, he has had a positive effect on another IRA victim, Manchester man Neil Tattersall, who joined him and his family in making the trip to Ballygawley for the service.

Mr Tattersall was the worst injured victim of an IRA attack in Manchester when two bombs exploded on December 3, 1992 - one close to Kendals department store, the other near the city's cathedral.

Some 65 people were injured and Mr Tattersall was hit with shrapnel through the base of his spine.

"They couldn't move me so I was in the zone where nobody could go and there were police officers looking after me there," he said.

"Long-term it's not just the injuries to my spine, it's what it's done to my mind, the post-traumatic stress disorder.

"It was a chance meeting with James three years ago that changed my life.

"At that time I was homeless with a history of ruined relationships.

"It was only going to end one way and it wasn't good. But I was invited to a victims' meeting in Manchester.

"I didn't want to go, but forced myself.

August 21, 2018

"The room was full of people with Irish accents and I wasn't comfortable.

"I nipped out for a cigarette and James was there.

"He took one look at me and said: 'You've got PTSD'. Since that day we've been the best of friends.

"He's helped me get my life back together."

Mr Leatherbarrow said: "It was obvious to me he was suffering.

"We got together, helped each other and we're standing together today. That's got to be positive."

One might support Liverpool and the other Man United, but on one thing they agree. "The people who did this are murdering cowards," said Mr Leatherbarrow.

"I joined the Army and you have to expect there's a chance you might be killed, but to see my mates murdered the way they were... it's something that's with me every second of every day.

"But it's days like today when you hear other people telling similar stories that you can say to yourself: 'I am not the only one. Thank God for that. It's not me'."

Northern Ireland has welcomed its 16th group of Syrian refugees

The group of 22 families totalling 86 people, flew into Belfast International Airport on Thursday.



Children riding a bicycle next to destroyed buildings in Raqqa, Syria

They are staying at a welcome centre in Belfast for several days before being resettled.

The latest arrival brings the total number of refugees brought to Northern Ireland under the UK-wide Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation scheme to 1,096.

The scheme is co-ordinated locally by the Department for Communities with spokesman Ian Snowden saying some of the new arrivals are among the most vulnerable refugees to flee from Syria.

“Northern Ireland is very proud of its role in providing a safe haven for some of the most vulnerable people in society,” he said.

“It has been a great pleasure working on this scheme and I was pleased to see a further 22 families arrive this week.

August 21, 2018

“The nature of the programme, given the sheer size and complexity of it, and given that we are receiving some of the most vulnerable refugees to flee Syria, means that it has been challenging.

“We are adapting each day and I have learned a lot about a different culture.”

The first group of Syrian refugees arrived in Northern Ireland in December 2015.

Mr Snowden said the scheme is working very well, with colleagues from across the UK visiting to “learn from our approach”.

“When the refugees arrive they stay in a welcome centre in Belfast for a number of days where they receive information, advice and guidance on issues ranging from housing, benefits, the law, banking systems and a little about life in Northern Ireland including the joys of our weather,” he said.

“This has worked well and provides the refugees with a few days to catch their breath after the ordeal they have experienced, to rest after their flight to Northern Ireland and to prepare for their new life.”

Mr Snowden said the families from previous arrivals are integrating into the local community.

“Obviously each family and individual is different and integrating and adjusting to life in Northern Ireland at different paces,” he said.

“All have embraced the opportunity they have been afforded.

August 21, 2018

“Most arrive with very limited English. They have thrown themselves in to learning the language.

“All children of school age are in school, many of the adults have found employment and other are studying. Importantly too, many are also getting involved in local community groups and activities.

“The whole scheme has been such a success because of the combined efforts from the public, community and voluntary sectors as well as from families and individuals across Northern Ireland in the streets, villages, towns and cities where the refugees have settled. I am thankful to everyone who has played their part.”

The Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme was announced by former Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015 in response to the war in Syria.

It aims to resettle 20 000 Syrian refugees from refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey in the UK by May 2020.

Belfast Methodist College principal walking 150 miles from Malin to city to mark school's anniversary

The principal of a top Belfast school is taking on an epic 150 mile walking challenge ahead of the start of the new academic year. Scott Naismith, principal of Methodist College, will walk from Malin in Co Donegal to the establishment's gates on the Malone Road to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the school.

August 21, 2018



He will be joined by 240 new first form pupils for the final leg of his journey, from Pirrie Park to the College.

Mr Naismith began his walk on Saturday, August 18, from Malin as that is where Sir William McArthur, who laid the Foundation Stone of Methodist College, was born.

The 150 mile journey will take him six days and will end with a celebratory fair in the grounds of the College from 2pm to 4pm on Friday, August 24.

Speaking to Belfast Live, Mr Naismith said: "I feel a mixture of excitement and trepidation, I am looking forward to it and just want to get started.

"The reason for doing it is because it is the 150th year of the college and McArthur Hall has just been renovated and reopened. I was doing research and found out he had laid the first stone of the college and he was from Malin.

August 21, 2018

"I thought it would be a good way to start our 150th year of the school by linking with Malin."

He will start walking no later than 7am each day, with the exception of the first day, when he will start at 7.30 am and the last day, when he will start at 4.30am.

The daily time is based on an average walking speed of 3 miles per hour with rest breaks included.

On Friday he will be accompanied by the new first form, the 150th intake into the school, from the College's playing fields at Pirrie Park to Methody. They will walk along Ardenlee Avenue, Ravenhill Road, Park Road, Ormeau Road, Ormeau Bridge, Stranmillis Embankment, through Botanic Gardens to Methodist College and will be piped up the driveway to the quad.

On August 24, 1865, the foundation stone of Methodist College was laid by Sir William McArthur. Three years later, on August 18, William McArthur was present at the opening ceremony held in front of the College. Not only did McArthur help raise the money to build School House, but he also provided all of the funding to build a boarding house for female boarders.

The McArthur Hall building, named in his honour, has just been refurbished and will be reopened at the start of their 150th year.

All funds raised by the Walk and the Fair will go towards the development of facilities for the pupils. To find out more and to donate, [click here](#) .

August 21, 2018

Moderator's postcard from Jordan: A visit to Petra

In his third 'postcard' from Jordan, where he is on his oversea tour, the Moderator, Dr Charles McMullen, takes a break and visits the ancient and once lost city of Petra. Looking at the elaborate tombs it crossed his mind that there has always been a search deep in the heart of mankind for eternity.

We have just spent two wonderfully relaxing days being taken to places well off the beaten track, including the spectacular Jordanian Rift Valley, where from a small hotel in Dana we talked to a warm, friendly and interesting guide.

As I looked into the far distance, breathing in the peace and tranquillity, I thought to myself that I'd love to return here with a small group, and head off on a three to four day trek. Even in Petra, a World Heritage Site and one of the new seven wonders, our wonderful host knew where to take us to maximise the views.

Nothing can prepare you for Petra. Take it from me that I'm not prone to exaggeration, but words, and even photos, cannot even remotely begin to do justice to how stunning and breathtaking it actually is. John William Burgon famously describes it as "a rose-red city half as old as time". Dating back to Nabataean and Roman times, this hidden treasure was rediscovered after hundreds of years by a Swiss adventurer at the beginning of the 19th century.

Its landmark is the imposing Treasury, first glimpsed as you emerge from weaving your way through a long, spectacular

August 21, 2018

ravine. Soaring to over 40 metres, its Corinthian pillars are beautifully preserved and surrounded by intricate detail. On the upper storey there is a solid-stone urn, according to legend filled with gold.

As we walked further, suddenly all around us were the facades of numerous other massive monuments hewn in the rock face. It was simply unbelievable that we were basically looking at elaborate tombs and now it crossed my mind that there has always been a search deep in the heart of mankind for eternity.

Our host knew again where exactly to take me. In the heat, I tried to conceal my breathlessness as we climbed a man-made staircase in the rocks and emerged at what in the Old Testament would have been described as a 'high place', a large sunken courtyard and neighbouring altar.

From tombs to high places! And now, as I took in yet another amazing view, the best moment of all. The sacrifice has been paid. Christ is risen! And I am His forever!

WCC honours the legacy of Kofi Annan

Calling Kofi Annan a leader with hard-won wisdom and maturity unparalleled in our time, the World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary gave thanks to God for Annan's life, which he described as a gift to the United Nations and the whole world.

“He will be recalled as the leader who acted to unify and transform the United Nations,” said Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC general secretary. Tveit added that Annan

August 21, 2018

was a “liberator who by force of his personality inspired the political leaders and grassroots movement to work for just peace in the world.”

Tveit described Annan's relationship to the WCC as a special one, recalling Annan's invitation to his 75th birthday party at the WCC Bossey Ecumenical Institute. Kofi Annan and his wife lived close to Chateau de Bossey in Switzerland. This is when he expressed his gratitude for the churches' support for unity, justice and peace in the world.

In her reaction to Annan's death, Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC Central Committee, said, “We thank God for giving us Kofi Annan for 80 years. Through his life and works he has become an icon of just peace and freedom for all human beings.”

Abuom said: “We will remember Annan for his strong commitment to just peace and mutual accountability.”

“Our prayer is all that Annan stood for may become part and parcel of our global values for justice, peace and dignity for the whole humanity,” added Abuom.

WCC President in Europe, Archbishop emeritus Dr Anders Weyryd comments “Kofi Annan was a credible and much needed revitaliser of the UN. His integrity and commitment arose respect and renewed the will of many to support the UN and its mission.”

Annan's life was also described by the WCC's general secretary as “consistent with the best teaching of nonviolent leadership”. Calling him one of the most

August 21, 2018

deserving Nobel peace laureates, Tveit added that Annan's leadership ideals inspired a new generation and transformed the United Nations during his leadership.

Jewish Labour MP says internal probe made her think 'what it felt like to be a Jew' in Nazi Germany



A Jewish Labour MP has said that she believes that Jeremy Corbyn has gone the “wrong side” of the “fine line” between being pro-Palestinian and anti-semitic.

Margaret Hodge [spoke to Sky News](#) as the ongoing anti-semitism row within the UK Labour Party persists, with leader Corbyn’s pro-Palestinian stance under fire from many within the party.

August 21, 2018

Allegations of anti-semitism within Labour have grown since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader in 2015.

Scores of party members have been suspended, expelled or forced to resign for making anti-semitic statements since Corbyn became party leader, but he and his far-left supporters have been accused of a “complacent” approach to the problem.

That controversy resurfaced in recent weeks after the party refused to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism.

Corbyn was also under fire on the issue after pictures emerged of the veteran MP at a [wreath-laying ceremony in Tunisia in 2014](#).

Hodge, who faced internal disciplinary action for calling Corbyn an anti-semite, said it made her think about “what it felt like to be a Jew in Germany in the 1930s”.

The member of parliament for Barking said Corbyn’s words and actions on the issue had led to him “digging himself deeper and deeper into a pit where the Jews just feel uncomfortable”.

Hodge added that the onus is on Corbyn to “start healing that rift” that had been created within the party.

Maghera firm makes chair for Pope Francis

A Maghera company has built a chair to be used by the Pope during his visit to the Republic of Ireland.

August 21, 2018

The Specialist Joinery Group was commissioned to make the altar furniture to be used at the papal mass in Dublin's Phoenix Park next Sunday.



Company chairman John Bosco O'Hagan said it had been "a privilege and an honour" to do the work.

The County Londonderry firm was offered the task after making an icon for the World Meeting of Families.

Pope Francis will make a speech at the World Meeting in Croke Park on the first day of his visit to Dublin.

Mr O'Hagan said the icon has travelled 45,000 miles between parishes the length and breadth of Ireland for the past year.

The company was approached by the Church six months ago with a view to supplying the sanctuary furniture for the papal mass.

August 21, 2018

"We looked at the drawings and I said immediately it would be a great honour and a privilege to be asked to do this," Mr O'Hagan said.

The furniture includes the altar the Pope will say mass on, the chair he will sit in and the lectern he will speak from.

"Everything is to be quite simple. It is all straight lines and a simple manufacture," said Mr O'Hagan, speaking on BBC News NI's programme Good Morning Ulster.

"There is nothing elaborate about the whole thing. The Pope is a simple man and he seems to live a very simple life, so the furniture is simple as well."

'I'll be in the background'

More than 300 family and friends attended an event at the company's premises in Maghera on Friday to view the pieces before they are transported to Dublin.

The company said the furniture is expected to go on permanent display somewhere in Ireland or Rome after the mass.

"The Specialist family are incredibly proud of the sanctuary furniture and this is without doubt the most important project that we will do in our lifetime," Mr O'Hagan said.

Mr O'Hagan said that he will be attending the Pope's visit at the weekend to see his product in action.

"I will be there, but I will be very humble in the background, keeping quiet," he said.

August 21, 2018