



Catholic church was 'too dominant' in society, says Irish Prime Minister

The Prime Minister of Ireland has said he is glad that Catholic church is less dominant in public life ahead of a Papal visit this weekend. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar also said he hoped Pope Francis would address the victims of abuse suffered in church institutions.

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"I think in the past the Catholic Church had too much of a dominant place in our society.

"I think it still has a place in our society but not one that determines public policy or determines our laws," he told the BBC.

The Pope is due to arrive in Dublin this morning and will also visit a Marian shrine at Knock, in the west of Ireland, during his two-day visit, before conducting a Papal mass in Phoenix Park on Sunday.

Mr Varadkar, who is Ireland's first openly gay Taoiseach, said that his predecessors would have consulted the Pope about secular matters such as health policy, but this was no longer appropriate.

He added: "We do have a church/state dialogue that involves other churches as well and faiths other than Christian faiths too."

The weeks before the visit have been dominated by criticism of the church's handling of abuse cases, with a report published earlier this month about abuse in Pennsylvania concluding that 300 predatory priests had abused more than 1,000 children.

The church has been criticised for a lack of transparency, with campaigners arguing that leaders are aware of senior figures, who have failed to disclose abuse but do not take action against them.

On Friday an abuse survivors' group gathered in Dublin to call for a zero tolerance policy on priests and bishops who covered up evidence of sex crimes.

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Peter Isely, founder of the Ending Clerical Abuse group, said: "[The priesthood] is the only occupation in civil society where you can rape and sexually assault a child and remain working as a member of that occupation.

"That's the problem."

Mr Varadkar said: "It is an opportunity for him to say something to the women and children in particular who were victims of the Church's institutions — to reiterate the apologies that he's given in the past but also to demonstrate that things are going to change into the future.

"I also think it's an opportunity for us as a republic for us as the Irish state to start a new chapter in our relationship with the Church, one that again is very much about having a place for the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland but not one at the centre in the way it was in the past."

Irish Council of Churches President welcomes Pope's visit to WMOF

The President of the Irish Council of Churches, the Revd Brian Anderson, together with other Church Leaders, will attend the State reception for Pope Francis in Dublin Castle and the 'Festival of Families' in Croke Park today Saturday 25th August.

Speaking ahead of the engagements the Revd Brian Anderson said:

'I am delighted to be representing the Irish Council of Churches at these events. Pope Francis has shown great

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leadership in promoting relationships of respect and understanding among Christians, and between people of all faiths and none. His visit will provide a valuable opportunity for reflection about the role of churches in responding to the needs of an increasingly pluralist society. It has been an encouragement to see how the news of Pope Francis' visit has been received by the Irish Churches. This is a clear indication of the strength of ecumenical relationships in Ireland today.

'It is significant that his visit takes place in the context of the World Meeting of Families. For churches, our care for the family is a central part of our contribution to society and our concern for the common good. As part of the preparations for the World Meeting of Families we organised an inter-church meeting on the theme "Proclaiming Christ to Families Today" which focused our attention on our response, as Christians, to the many challenges facing families and family life in contemporary Irish society. It is to be hoped that the World Meeting of Families and the visit of Pope Francis will not only serve as a great encouragement to our Catholic neighbours, but will bring a powerful message of solidarity and hope to all families who are struggling.'

Junior BB project: 'A place to play'

The Presbyterian Boys' Brigade World Mission Committee has launched this year's Junior BB project, 'A Place to Play' which aims to raise £7,500 to build a playground at a church-run school for refugee children living in Jordan.

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Presenting the cheque for Revamp the Camp, the 2017 Junior BB project are (back row): Csaba Veres, Ilona Veres, PCI's global mission workers in Romania, Rev Dr Jim Campbell chairman of PCI BB World Mission Committee, Noah Gordon, Patricia Scullin, Carnmoney Junior BB leader (front row) Algyogy campsite volunteers Rebeka Solomon, Timi Balais, with Joshua Ashe, Peter Hanna and Daniel Grills from 4th Newtownabbey BB company, which raised over £1,500 for the 2017 BB project - the largest amount raised by any one company.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has a long association with the Boys' Brigade (BB), one of the biggest Christian youth organisations in UK and Republic of Ireland. Each year, the [Junior BB Project](#) - for 8 to 11 year olds - gives Boys' Brigade companies in congregations the opportunity to help raise funds in support of an overseas

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project. While companies are free to choose how and when they raise funds for the project, the aim is to have all contributions gathered in by the end of June in the following year.

Rev Dr Jim Campbell, chair of the Presbyterian Boys' Brigade World Mission Committee said, "We were delighted by the response to last year's project - 'Revamp the Camp – Romania' which raised over £7,500 to revamp a campsite owned by PCI's partner church in Romania. Our funds paid for the refurbishment of the bedrooms at the camp.

"Boys from 4th Newtownabbey BB company, which meets in Carnmoney Presbyterian Church, raised over £1,500 for the project - the largest amount raised by any one company. In July four Junior Section boys from Carnmoney BB handed over a cheque for £7,500 to two volunteers from Romania who work at the Algyogy campsite when they visited Belfast. The efforts of the boys, officers and parents was greatly appreciated."

The former minister at Cooke Centenary Presbyterian Church in Belfast continued, "This year's project, 'A Place to Play' will support the construction and equipping of a playground at a church-run school for refugee children in the town of Fuhais in Jordan. Here the church provides free education to 32 children, aged 4 to 13 years old."

"The Middle East country has welcomed around 2 million refugees, who are mostly from neighbouring Syria and Iraq. Sadly, most families cannot afford the school fees needed to allow their children to attend local schools, with many

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going without an education. The church-run school is, therefore, an incredible blessing,” Mr Campbell said.

Presbyterian Moderator, Right Reverend Dr Charles McMullen, who has just returned from Jordan on a 10 day visit and visited the school encouraged people to support this year’s project. “Many refugee children need to develop physically and socially after years of living in fear and isolation. I visited the school and met some of the children and their teachers and saw the wonderful work that is being done there. I hope and pray that the playground will literally play a small part in giving the children back something of the lives that they lost.

“Meeting so many Junior BB boys and officers on my visits to congregations, I know that they will work hard in the coming year to raise enough funds to pay for this much needed playground.”

A small percentage of funds raised by the project each year is given to the BB Global Fellowship to support the worldwide work of the Boys’ Brigade.

Community Fun Day marks anniversary of flooding in Derry parish

Separate events were held in the North West, on Wednesday evening last (22nd August) to mark the first anniversary of last summer’s flooding, which brought devastation to a number of areas in counties Londonderry and Donegal. Homes were wrecked and roads and bridges

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swept away by one of the worst downpours in living memory

The Rectory Grounds in Eglinton were packed by people of all ages, on Wednesday evening, as the three main local churches marked the anniversary with a Community Fun Day. Eglinton was one of the communities worst affected.

The Fun Day took place at the exact time the rain began falling a year earlier although this year the weather conditions could hardly have been more different: people milled about in shirt sleeves or summer dresses, eating ice cream and enjoying music from a live band, as smoke from a barbecue wafted across the Rectory grounds. A children's roundabout was installed in the courtyard, there were bouncy castles on the lawn, and there was face-painting and balloon games for younger children.

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The Rector of Faughanvale, the Rev Canon Paul Hoey, and the Minister of Faughanvale Presbyterian Church, the Rev Lindsay Blair, mingled with their guests, although the third of the joint-organisers, Fr Noel McDermott, was unable to be present. Among those who attended were the Deputy Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, Alderman Derek Hussey, and Independent Councillor Maurice Devenney.

In a short address, the Deputy Mayor congratulated the local community for their resilience in coming through the past year, in the face of the many difficulties they had been confronted with.

That community resilience and the sense of togetherness with which the villagers had responded to last year's crisis were the qualities the three local church leaders had sought to celebrate on Wednesday evening.

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Leaders key to successful Holiday Bible Club in Antrim



All Saints' Parish, Antrim, ran a very successful Bible Club each evening from August 13-17.

The Vicar of Antrim, the Ven Dr Stephen McBride, said that no matter how many Holiday Bible Clubs are held over the summer, children will still flock to them all.

Good leaders, he said, were key. "You could have the best kitted out Bible Club, with bells and whistles, but if the kids don't connect with the leaders they won't come back after the first session," Archdeacon McBride said.

"At All Saints' Parish we succeeded in providing a balance between a well-structured programme and leaders that the kids could relate to.

"We had action songs, short interactive puppet show talks with Sid and Bert, games and craftwork with the underlying theme of King David and over arching theme of a sports academy where we encouraged the necessity of having a fit body as well as a fit soul."

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Archdeacon McBride said there had been a steady turnout during the week. “Hopefully we have showcased not only what role church plays in the upbringing of these kids, but have also given parents encouragement that church is genuinely interested in all aspects of family life,” he said.

“It was encouraging that our Club was supported by children who attend Antrim’s church plant of the Christian Fellowship Church. Our churches have been developing links over the past few years and jointly support Antrim’s Food Bank.”

Over 2,000 Mothers’ Union inspired to change communities at provincial conference in Kenya

More than 2,000 women are returning home from a Mothers’ Union provincial conference in Kenya inspired to take a lead in their communities.

On Monday, 20 August, they arrived at Kabarak University in the Rift Valley for a week of celebration of each other’s ministry and renewal of their service to the marginalised. They also took time to worship together and minister to each other. The conference ends today.

This conference, which happens every three years, drew its theme from Micah 6:8, “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Over the week, these women have attended Bible studies, workshops, and lecture sessions. They discussed issues

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such as ending gender-based violence, caring for abandoned children, and achieving reconciliation.

The sessions also provided training for entrepreneurship and building savings and credit, allowing women to become self-reliant.

The Mothers' Union President of the Mumias Diocese, Brenda Wandera, explained how the conference addressed the women's own spiritual needs.

"First and foremost, this conference is spiritually uplifting," she shared. "It feels nice to just sit and listen to the Word of God and listen to His voice. I feel spiritually nourished."

Brenda went on to say that the spiritual development of these women was just as important for the Church and

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society overall. “All sessions are centred on the well-being of the family and the Church,” she said.

“We are being equipped to spread Godly influence in my community.”

Bev Jullien, Chief Executive of the Mothers’ Union, explained that the training provided these women with skills to impact their communities.

“The atmosphere is vibrant, and the commitment to members’ faith is action is stunning,” she said. “They are recognising that they themselves are best placed to solve the challenges in their own society and want to move away from a culture of dependency to owning problems and finding solutions themselves.”

The Mothers Union was founded in 1876, with the intention of bringing together woman from all walks of life to support mothers and children.

Today the organisation has branches around the world and more than four million members. In Kenya alone there are 450,000 members. These women meet every three years for their provincial conference to discuss their work and to support each other.

Glastonbury founder named patron of John Wesley's chapel

Michael Eavis, known for creating the Glastonbury music festival, has become the first patron of the New Room in Bristol, otherwise known as John Wesley's Chapel, the oldest Methodist building in the world.

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Built in 1739 by the famous preacher as a place of worship, the New Room also served as a dispensary and schoolroom for the poor people of the area.

It now serves as a museum and hosts community events.

Eavis visited the New Room after a multi-million pound redevelopment last year, one of 36,000 visitors since.

Michael Eavis said: "How can I not be absolutely thrilled to be asked to be Patron of this beautiful building, the cradle of ideas that had such influence on promoting unprecedented social and religious change, contributing so much to our national heritage?"

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"I have been associated with Methodism my whole life and every week I attend a Methodist chapel service in my home village of Pilton. I must admit though that what I enjoy the most is the singing of those marvellous Wesley hymns. But then there's the more serious side of why we all need to reflect on our life's purpose and the strong desire to praise our creator."

New Room director, David Worthington, said: "Michael's affiliation to Methodism and his ongoing commitment to social justice made him an ideal candidate for the newly-created position of patron of the New Room.

"The trustees warmly welcome Michael to his new role and thank him for his commitment to our ongoing work and ministry."

