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Islam is Ireland's third largest religion

There is more than one mosque or prayer centre in each province.

By Joyce Fegan

Irish Examiner (07.06.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2rODq13> - According to Census 2016, the results of which were published last April, 63,400 of our 4,761,865 population declared their religion as Islam.

A total of 3.7m declared themselves as Roman Catholic and 126,400 as Church of Ireland. After these two religions, Islam was the third most popular religion in Ireland.

Last year's Census also marked a rise of 29% in the number of people registering themselves as a Muslim. In Census 2011, 49,200 people declared themselves Muslim.

Islam is now listed by the CSO as being one of the fastest growing religions in Ireland.

This growth has occurred in a very short period of time, considering the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI) was only formed in 1959.

The headquarters of the foundation is at the Dublin Mosque and Islamic Centre on Dublin's South Circular Road. This was the first mosque in Ireland which was established in 1976.

The IFI, which looks after the religious, educational and social needs of Muslims in Ireland, was originally formed by students who had travelled here to study.

"The first trickle of Muslims arrived in Ireland in the early 1950s. Initially, they came for education, especially to study medicine at the famous Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin.

"Perhaps the Muslim students from the Republic of South Africa were the first to arrive in Ireland for this purpose. Students then followed from India, Malaysia, and the Gulf states. In the 1970s a number of trainees in aircraft engineering came to Ireland from Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia," reads a document by the IFI.

It explains that when these students decided to stay on here to live and work, that is when the community was formed.

"When a number of students decided to reside in this country for work, and with the arrival of a number of Muslim businessmen and traders from the UK, the first resident Muslim community in Ireland was formed," states the IFI document.

By the Census 1991, there were 3,873 Muslims living here, however, this is the year when the religious community began to grow.

From 1991 onwards, the number of Muslims increased considerably due to the arrival of Muslim refugees from Bosnia, Somalia, and Kosovo, as well as asylum seekers and professionals and workers from various Islamic countries.

Of the 63,400 Muslims currently living here, it is estimated they represent more than 40 different nationalities.

Muslim leaders here have spoken out against the recent terrorist attacks, carried out in the name of Islam, stating that there is nothing religious about their actions.

Shaykh Dr Umar al-Qadri, head imam at the Islamic Cultural Centre Ireland said his religion has been hijacked by those who are not true Muslims. "This is a holy month for us [the Islamic holy month of fasting Ramadan], true Muslims are fasting and praying not killing people," Dr al-Qadri told the Irish Examiner.

He is also chairman of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council and said that people who carry out atrocities in the name of Islam, do not understand the religion. "These are extremists views that they hold. It's a distorted view of Islam and they use this to justify their attacks.

"They are a minority but it only takes one or two before everyone is affected," he said. Dr al-Qadri said it is up to all Muslim leaders to speak out. He also pointed out that his own community is affected by terrorist atrocities.

"With attacks [such as the one outside a mosque in Afghanistan] it is also Muslims who are being targeted," he stated.

The imam explained the landscape for Muslims in Ireland and where they go to pray around the country.

The largest mosque is in Dublin, the Clonskeagh mosque or the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, which about 5,000 people attend. His mosque, the Al-Mustafa Islamic Centre Ireland or the Islamic Centre in Blanchardstown has approximately 2,000 members and the IFI on the South Circular Road also has the same.

In Cork, there is the Muslim Foundation of Cork and the Cork Islamic Cultural Centre, each with approximately 500 members.

In the Galway Islamic Centre, there are between 500 and 1,000 members.

"Each mosque has its own influence," Dr al-Qadri said.

Aside from the five qualified imams here, there are a number of "congregational leaders" who know parts of the Qur'an by heart who can lead prayer.

There is also an Irish Council of Imams, however, Dr al-Qadri resigned from this last year, "because of the lack of confidence and trust in the council."

One issue he had pointed out to the council, prior to his resignation, was the growing radicalisation of young Muslims in other countries. Dr al-Qadri told the council this could be avoided in Ireland with "pro-active initiatives."

Stephen Fry investigated by Irish police for alleged blasphemy

Interviewed on TV show screened in Ireland, Fry asked 'Why should I respect a mean-minded, stupid god who creates a world so full of injustice and pain?'

By Pádraig Collins

The Guardian (07.05.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2pmLB2h> - Police in Ireland are investigating a complaint of blasphemy regarding comments made by Stephen Fry on a television programme shown on Ireland's state broadcaster, RTÉ.

Gardaí (police) in Dublin have contacted the man who reported the allegation following a broadcast in February 2015, and a full investigation is due to be carried out, the Irish Independent reported.

Under Ireland's Defamation Act 2009 a person who publishes or utters blasphemous material "shall be guilty of an offence". A conviction can lead to a fine of up to €25,000.

While being interviewed on The Meaning of Life TV programme, Fry was asked what he would say to God if he had a chance.

"I'd say 'Bone cancer in children, what's that about?' How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault," Fry replied. "It's not right. It's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid god who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain?"

Fry said if he met the Greek gods he would accept them quicker because, "they didn't present themselves as being all seeing, all wise, all beneficent".

"Because the god who created this universe, if it was created by God, is quite clearly a maniac, an utter maniac, totally selfish. We have to spend our lives on our knees thanking him. What kind of god would do that?"

A clip of the interview on YouTube has been viewed more than seven million times.

A member of the public, who asked not to be identified, said he made the complaint against Fry more than two years ago at Ennis garda station in County Clare.

"I told the garda I wanted to report Fry for uttering blasphemy and RTÉ for publishing/broadcasting it and that I believed these were criminal offences under the Defamation Act 2009.

"The garda then took a formal written statement from me in which I quoted Fry's comments in detail. This written statement mentioned both Fry and RTÉ specifically."

He said he was asked by the garda if he had been personally offended by the programme and if he wished to include this in the written statement.

"I told the garda that I did not want to include this as I had not personally been offended by Fry's comments – I added that I simply believed that the comments made by Fry on RTÉ were criminal blasphemy and that I was doing my civic duty by reporting a crime."

After hearing nothing for 18 months, the complainant wrote to the head of the Irish police, Commissioner Noirín O'Sullivan, "asking if the crime I reported was being followed up. A few weeks later I got a standard 'we have received your letter' from her secretary."

But recently the man was contacted by a detective from Donnybrook garda station in Dublin (the same suburb where RTÉ is headquartered) to say they were looking into the blasphemy claim. "He said he might have to meet me to take a new more detailed statement."

At the time of the initial broadcast, Fry spoke about the matter on BBC Radio 4's Today Show. "I was astonished that it caused so viral an explosion on Twitter and elsewhere. I'm most pleased that it's got people talking," he said.

"I was merely saying things that many finer heads than mine have said for hundreds of years, as far back as the Greeks ... I never wished to offend anybody who is individually devout or pious, and indeed many Christians have been in touch with me to say that they are very glad that things should be talked about."

The host of the The Meaning Of Life programme, Gay Byrne, said "Of course [Fry] hadn't wished to cause offence. But that's what the internet is for, controversy, debate and people's opinions."
